

Who's Who In Wisconsin Rapids

The Who's Who column will be run each Saturday in the Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune. It will include a brief sketch of the life of citizens who have helped make history for Wisconsin Rapids.

Eli Taylor



ELI WILLIAM TAYLOR

Eli William Taylor, son of John and Hannah (Stillson) Taylor was born in Binghamton, N. Y., May 15, 1845, and when seven years of age he came with his parents to Marquette county where his father took up a homestead about sixteen miles south of Portage. They began clearing the land for farming purposes, building a small log house for a family residence. About a year and a half after settling on the farm, his father was taken ill and in a short time died.

Shortly after his father's death, Eli came with his widowed mother and his brother, Lorenzo, to Frenchtown, now Port Edwards, where two years later his brother was drowned in the Wisconsin river. Mrs. Taylor then moved to a farm about three miles west of Centralia on the Rudolph road.

Centralia Once An "Island"

At that time Centralia was a small island consisting of about one hundred acres of dry land. It was bounded on the east by the Wisconsin river and on the other three sides by swamp lands. A stretch of land from where the L. M. Nash homestead and the B. R. Goggins home now stand to the mainland was almost impassable, the only way of crossing was by walking over logs. Another stretch of land which was even worse, ran along the west side of Centralia from where the homestead lately occupied by the G. W. Paulus family and extended further beyond the present location of the St. Paul station to the marsh. Cows and hogs would often go down into the mire to such a depth that they would have to be pulled out, as they were unable to help themselves.

When Mr. Taylor first came here the Henry and Peter Jeasy families lived in a small shanty on a point of rock on the east end where the present wagon bridge crosses the Wisconsin river. There were also a few other small residences. The business places consisted of the I. L. Mosher general store, the John Compton store, the J. Homer store and the Neeves Hotel. There were also several saloons on either side of the river.

Mr. Taylor attended the first school in Grand Rapids which was in a small house at the corner of Baker street and Eighth street north. It was taught by a Mr. Griffith. Later, when the number of pupils increased, the school was divided and part of the scholars were taught by Miss Jane Hall in a room in the second story of the Mosher store building. Two years later a school house was built on the premises now owned and occupied by Mrs. Eliza Collier.

Worked 18 Hours A Day

Mr. Taylor did not have many educational advantages, having worked hard from the time he was eight years old. He often worked eighteen hours a day helping to clear land, teaming, logging and cruising for timber.

The following fall after Mr. Taylor located here, Orestes Garrison built a store building and opened up a general store; it was the first and only store in Centralia for several years. The building is now occupied as a store house by the Nash Hardware Co.

Mr. Garrison owned and operated a small water mill located at the east end of the present Consolidated mill buildings. It was run by a perpendicular saw which cut about six thousand feet of logs a day. The logs were hauled from the woods about a half mile distant to the mill. The mill was considered the best in this section of the country. Mr. Garrison next built a gang saw mill which would cut 7,500 feet of lumber a day, and in a short time he added a rotary saw. It eclipsed any mill on the Wisconsin river.

Improvement Made

He began adding booms, piers, and other improvements. He had the boomage of the astural islands which extended from Grand Rapids to within a half mile of the Biron mill. The

islands are now some of the boasted beauty spots of Wisconsin. Several fine cottages are erected on the largest island known as Lond Island. A boarding house was built by Mr. Garrison where the electric light plant now stands.

Mr. Taylor says that when he first arrived here the residence portion of Centralia consisted of four log houses, one owned by J. P. Marquette and located just west of what is now the Northwestern railway station, a log hut owned by Joseph Fortier on the grounds of the present Moore Wagon Shop. Another was owned by Joseph Sanville and his brother which stood on the grounds of the B. R. Goggins residence, and the fourth was the property of Henry Jackson. It was on the site of the present Normington Bros. Laundry office. There were also several old shacks built of waste and refuse lumber. One occupied the grounds on which the home of Judge W. J. Conway now stands. Further down where the home of Mrs. T. E. Nash now is, was another one. All were separated by dense woods.

Dutton First Blacksmith

Plyn Dutton was the first blacksmith to locate here. He built and owned the home and premises now owned by Mrs. Julia Denis. The Denis barn was originally his blacksmith shop. Billy Bowman was among the early settlers here. He built and managed a hotel on River street on the present L. M. Nash property. Other early settlers were the LeFevres and Fontains who lived in little shacks built from the refuse lumber and staves from the Garrison mill.

A second shack was built on the Nash premises by Asa Chaney, who ran the first ferry boat across the Wisconsin river. The ferry was owned by Ensebe LaVigne, father of our present County Treasurer James LaVigne.

The Taylors owned the first horses here using them for teaming. They often went as far as Janesville with four horses and two wagons loaded with cranberries which were very plentiful and grew wild. Thousands of bushels rotted on the ground each year. They also conveyed articles to New Lisbon and Gill's Landing, often sleeping out of doors under a blanket of snow, which Mr. Taylor claims is a warm covering.

Has Tussle With Bear

When about twenty-two years of age, Mr. Taylor, while in the woods, came into contact with a black bear. After a hard tussle, during which the bear planted its teeth in Mr. Taylor's right shoulder, he was finally captured and taken to the Taylor home where he grew very tame. He would eat out of Mr. Taylor's hand, but would allow no one else to come near him. After a time, a neighbor loosened his chain and the bear escaped to the woods and was never seen again.

Another encounter was with a big buck deer. Mr. Taylor had gone to the pasture for the cows, and while listening for them, heard a noise behind him, but before he could turn around, a big deer had torn his coat off his back. The small house dog which had accompanied Mr. Taylor began barking furiously, and biting the deer's legs, which attracted its attention for a time. Mr. Taylor had loaned his gun to a neighbor who had given him his gun in return. But upon cocking it, Mr. Taylor found it would not discharge. By this time the deer had the advantage of him, having planted his horns in his breast and left arm. The barking of the dog and the cries of Mr. Taylor brought the watch dog to the scene. The dog jumped at the deer and held him by the nose, so that the animal was unable to stir.

In the meantime Mr. Taylor managed to loosen himself from the animal and found a big stick with which he knocked the deer in the head. John Arpin had been searching for his logs and was on horseback and drew up just as the fight was finished. The deer was loaded on the horse's back and carried to the Taylor home nearly three-quarters of a mile distant. They weighed the animal and it tipped the scales at 180 pounds. Mr. Taylor was very lame for some time after and says he would not care to repeat the thrilling experience.

Married in 1865

Eli Taylor was united in marriage February 14, 1865 to Miss Rachael Sheler of Grand Rapids. To their union was born six children, four boys and two girls, five of whom are now living. They are Mrs. Elizabeth Ryan, Frank A. Taylor and Elmer Taylor all of Minot, South Dakota, Emery Taylor who lives in Bend, Oregon, and Mrs. Casper Youngchild of Nekosia. Mrs. Taylor died fifteen years ago.

Mr. Taylor enlisted in the U. S. Army, December 1864 in the 52d Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry, and

shortly after his marriage left for the south to engage in the Civil War. He remained in service until after Lee's surrender and upon his discharge from the army, returned to his home.

Mr. Taylor at this time erected a hotel, a furniture and hardware store and butcher shop in Nekosia. These ventures did not prove to be a financial success and he disposed of it all. He has ever since been engaged in the carpenter trade, and being a natural genius, has become master of the trade.

Excellent Chef

Mr. Taylor is an excellent cook often preparing a meal for twenty-five or more children and inviting them to his home for the feast. He has a large number of children and many friends with children through his many kindesses to them.

He is not a member of any church, but bases his religion on the Golden Rule.

He is a member of the G. A. R. Post of this city and has been its color bearer for the past eight years. He is a life long republican in politics and is one of the pioneer citizens who make the history of Wisconsin up to date.

thro:
year
not
"V
I ha
adva
lina.
Anot
strie
stole
out
and
was
those
to at
need
be o
sing
Ha
runn
lins,
the C
base
shar
said:
"W
chan
or p
ling
the r
The
facts