

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.

Mrs. Ludwena Billmeyer



Mrs. Ludwena Lambach Billmeyer

Among the innumerable persons who left their native shores early in life to seek a new home in the far famed America is Mrs. Ludwena Lambach Billmeyer who was born August 15, 1834, in Kongreich, Wittenberg, Germany.

On February 1st, 1864, she married Anton Billmeyer of the same place, where the couple remained for four years, leaving there with their two daughters, Mary and Rosa. March 19, 1868, aboard the steamer Saxonian, one of the first steamships that sailed the seas.

Still Has Passport

The passport which Mrs. Billmeyer still has in her possession allowed them a six years' visit in America, during which time if they failed to return, they forfeited all birthrights in the fatherland, and were aliens in their own country.

At Hamburg the big trunk which held their possessions was broken open and relieved of the greater part of its contents, the thieves helping themselves to the best of everything, leaving the family with little clothing.

Ride Cost \$15

After a long and tiresome journey across the waters the little family reached New York City, and from there continued their journey to the small town of Chicago, they proceeded farther on to New Lisbon toward their final destination, and finally reached Wisconsin Rapids, paying \$15 for the tedious and rough ride.

The entire fare for the journey from New York City, cost the sum of \$91. On reaching here they travelled on farther to the stone quarry one and a half miles east of this city, owned by Joseph Wood where Mrs. Billmeyer's sister and family resided, her husband being in the employ of, Mr. Wood. The two families lived there together for a year, when Mr. Billmeyer bought a small house and lot on which is now Eleventh street north, and moved the family into the new home. The property is at present owned by Mrs. Billmeyer's son, Anton Jr. Mr. Billmeyer who was a mason could find no work here in his line, and went to Stevens Point where he succeeded in finding employment. He returned every Saturday night to his home here, making the journey on foot, there being no public conveyance carrying passengers between the two towns. He often carried a sack of flour home on his shoulders for the family needs.

Few Dwellings Here

When the Billmeyer family came here the town contained a very few dwellings and only two or three business places. No school houses and only one church, the Catholic Church which was erected on the site of the present church of that denomination. Mrs. Billmeyer is of that faith, and it was shortly after her coming here that the new church was built, and means and ways were provided to make money to pay for it. Among other things was a fair which was held in the music hall situated on the premises, now occupied by the J. C. Penney Company store. The faithful members worked hard for the Fair which lasted for two days and two evenings and their efforts were rewarded with a sum of \$1700.00 which was quite a help in financing the new venture.

Stumps in Streets

In those days the streets were filled with stumps, and the small town was surrounded with dense forests. Indians were numerous and would go from house to house begging food and often when refused would threaten the lives of the women and children, who stood in deadly fear of them.

The following spring after Mrs. Billmeyer arrived here, there was a big snow storm on May 5th, which tied up traffic, but roads were soon cleared and horses and mules again resumed their work.

The last house on the street leading northeast from the Public Library was the Joseph Wood homestead on Washington Avenue, on which is now erected one of the most beautiful homes in the city, owned and occupied by Mr. Wood's son, F. J. Wood and his wife.

Ancient History Recollections

All entertainments were held in Music Hall, the music for dancing parties was furnished by Spafford & Martini who had won fame as being the very best fiddlers in this section of the country.

Mrs. Billmeyer recollects how Joseph Wood and John Wagner owned and conducted a furniture and undertaking store on what is now the E. P. Arpin lot, and which was then a field, Mr. Wagner manufactured the furniture they sold.

Mrs. Billmeyer is the mother of six children, three daughters and three sons, four of whom are still living: Mrs. Joseph Fisher, Frank Billmeyer, and Anton Billmeyer, the well known architect, all of this city, and Mrs. Louis Wipfl of Lewiston, Mont.

Mr. Billmeyer passed away at his home in this city, November 18, 1894.

Fine Christian Woman

Mrs. Billmeyer is a home body, and a good Christian. She is a member of the SS. Peter & Paul's Catholic church of this city, and also of the altar society. She has proven a genuine help meet to her husband, being a prudent and careful housewife, and working hard in many ways to help earn the money to educate and bring up her family who by her honest and worthy examples have grown up to be honorable American citizens. For the past eight years she has lived with her daughter, Mrs. Joseph Fisher, and family in their comfortable home on Eleventh street north, where she is kindly and lovingly cared for.

She has been confined to her home the greater part of the time since January 12th, when she fell off the porch in the rear of the house to the icy ground and sustained injuries from which she has never fully recovered.

It is just such God fearing and honorable persons as Mrs. Billmeyer who help in many ways to make a better world, and who are a great credit to the community in which they reside.