

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.

Otto John Leu



It takes courage, pluck, pride and ambition to attain the success pictured in the golden dreams of youth, and it is more especially essential to one handicapped physically and financially to aid him in the success for which he has planned.

To this latter class belongs Otto John Leu, son of Mr. and Mrs. John Leu, who came to America from Stettin, Germany, in the spring of 1872, landing in Milwaukee, where they resided for a short time. Later they moved to a farm near Seneca Corners, seven miles west of this city, where Otto Leu was born September 19, 1872.

School At Seneca

When five years old, Otto entered the country school at Seneca Corners where he continued his studies for nine years. While picking butternuts on his father's farm he fell from a tree to the ground, fracturing his right arm and also injuring his left leg with a compound fracture. He was confined to his bed for eighteen months and in the spring of 1890 it was found necessary to amputate the injured leg.

Despite it all, he determined to gain an education, and entered the public school at the city of Pittsville where he continued his studies through the spring term, and the following fall came to Wisconsin Rapids where he was a pupil at the Howe High School for six months.

Taught School

He taught his first school during the spring term of 1896 at the Eight Corners country school in the town of Sigel. He taught the Altdorf country school during the fall term of 1891.

Desirous of furthering his own education, he next went to River Falls where he attended the state normal for one term. In the fall of 1892 Mr. Leu accepted the position as principal of the school at Sherry with C. E. Boles as primary teacher. Among his pupils were included A. B. Bever, who has served as clerk of circuit court of Wood county for several years.

At the close of his principalship of the Sherry school, Mr. Leu went to Stevens Point, attending the state normal there for a year and finishing the elementary course. In the fall of 1895, he went to Alma Center where he taught for three years, and during that time he transformed the school from a graded school to a high school.

Elected Supt. of Schools

In the fall of 1898 Mr. Leu reentered Stevens Point Normal for the purpose of finishing the complete course, and while there, was elected the county superintendent of schools of Wood county on the Democratic ticket. He was reelected in 1900 without opposition. During his time in office, both the cities of Centralia and Marshfield were under jurisdiction of the county superintendent. Although his duties as county superintendent were many and arduous, he found time to continue his studies at home, and before the close of the term of 1902, went to Stevens Point to take the final examinations and was graduated from the Stevens Point Normal in both the German and English courses.

Recommended Training School

In his annual report of 1902 to the board of supervisors, Mr. Leu recommended the establishing of a Teachers Training School for Wood County which met with approval and the following year was established and which today is one of the best training schools in the state.

At the end of his second term as county superintendent he was immediately called to Merrillan to become principal of the High School to finish the term of principal Carl F. Ogden, who retired on account of illness.

The following fall he accepted a position as principal of the Nekoosa school to fill the vacancy of N. B. Wagner who had resigned. He finished the term and was principal of the school the year following. During his school work in Nekoosa, examinations were taken for a high school which was established the following year. Directly following the close of his service in the Nekoosa school, Mr. Leu returned to his farm at Altdorf.

Secretary of Agricultural Ass'n

In the year 1913, Mr. Leu was conductor of the Teachers County Institute. Mr. Leu served for several years both as town assessor and school clerk of the town of Seneca. He was one of the farmers who founded the Wood County Agricultural Association and during its existence of six years, was its secretary.

He also helped to establish the Central Wisconsin Holstein Breeders Association, and is at the present time its president. Nearly all the time since its organization, he has been either its president or secretary.

Was Winning Exhibitor

Mr. Leu was town chairman of the town of Seneca and a member of the Board of Supervisors for eleven years. While a member of the county board he had charge of the Wood County Agricultural Exhibit at the annual state fairs held in Milwaukee. These exhibits were always in the lead, having secured several banners and badges for best exhibits. His exhibits of his farm products at the Corn and Grain show held at Milwaukee in 1912 won second prize.

Although his first election to office was won on the democratic ticket, Mr. Leu has always been a staunch republican, and he did not seek the nomination of the opposing party. He has been chairman of the Income Tax Board of Review for many years.

He is a member of the orders of Beavers, Mystic Workers and also of the Modern Brotherhood of America. He is a firm believer of the gospel and is a member and clerk of the Methodist Episcopal church.

Has Three Children

On June 28, 1899, Mr. Leu was united in marriage to Miss Luella M. Lewis who died at their home in Altdorf, May 27, 1913. The following year, June 24, 1911, Mr. Leu married again and took for his second wife Mrs. Edith J. Bradshaw. He is the father of three children, a son and two daughters, the eldest Earle, the son of his first wife, is 20 years old and a student at the Sweeney Automobile school in Kansas City, Mo. The other two are both daughters of his present wife. The eldest, Miss Zona Leu is a member of the Junior class of the Lincoln High School and is the class president. She is a very accomplished musician and has often appeared in local entertainments. The youngest daughter, Madeline, is a pupil of the local kindergarten school.

Moved Back Here

During the time of his office as county superintendent of schools, Mr. Leu and his family resided in Wisconsin Rapids and at the expiration of his second term moved back to their farm at Seneca where they lived until 1919 when he decided to retire from active life and removed to Wisconsin Rapids early in September.

Retired life did not appeal to his tastes and in a short time after his return here he engaged in the real estate and insurance business which he still continues.

He is a quiet and retiring person, a lover of home, and has proven his worth through what he has accomplished.