



MANITOWISH WATERS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

June 2020

Fish Tales!

By Ruth Gardner

With spring upon us and the start of fishing season, we take a glance back at some of our area's fishing lore. Enjoy!



Guide George Bazso helps a client land a big one.

In the early 1900s, the logging industry was waning, and local residents needed to create a new industry for the Northwoods. What could come next to create a thriving economy? The Northwoods had an abundance of natural riches and heading the list was...fishing!

Local men turned their talents for survival into a great attraction for city dwellers. Not only could people enjoy the fresh, clean air and peace, but they could sail on pristine lakes filled to the brim with a variety of fish. Quick to take the lead was the muskellunge, a large, fierce fighting fish. It took knowledge and expertise to land one of these beauties, and the men of the North excelled at the game.

Fishing resorts sprang up in the

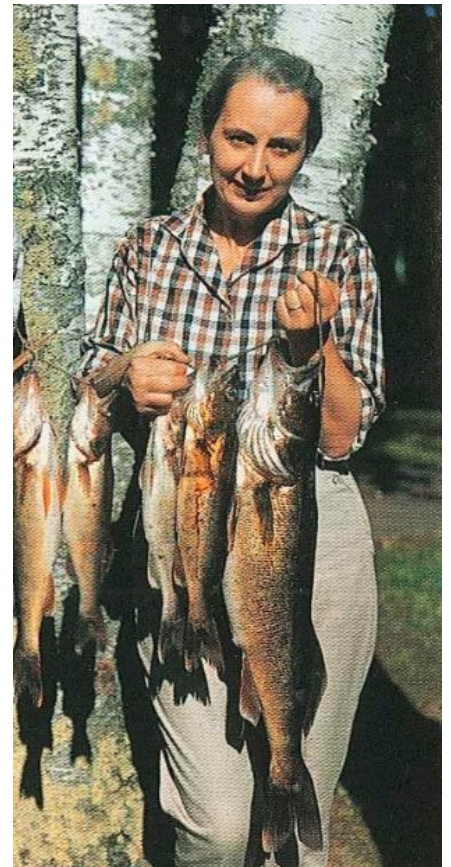
area for tourists flocking to the woods and waters. Fishing guides were at the ready. At Voss's, we had cottages just to house the guides. While guides readied the boats and seined minnows, the kitchen crew busied themselves packing shore lunches filled with cutlery, plates, potatoes, bacon, onions, coffee and

rich chocolate cake for dessert. The guide stored his long-handled fry pan just waiting to fry up the day's catch and some potatoes. Coffee was made over the fire complete with egg shells for clarity and a pinch of salt for taste. The chef might tuck in a few sandwiches just in case, but they usually came back untouched!

They guided **President Eisenhower, Gypsy Rose Lee**, and many of the rich and famous of the day. Much like the loggers before them, these men were rugged and untamed, much as the woods they called home. An epitaph written by **Les Jacobson** is the best introduction to and description of these men, and is well worth reading. You can find it at: <https://www.mwhistory.org/2016/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Les.pdf>

I grew up with these people as a big part of my life, and appreciate the richness and color they gave to my life. I was related to many of them, and the resort was always filled with them.

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The author's mother, Audrey Voss Dickerson, with a nice stringer.

COVID-19 Update

Like just about everything in life these days, the pandemic has and likely will impact MWHs programming. Please always check our website for the latest programming updates at <https://www.mwhistory.org/events/>. Thank you.

A Word From Our President



Jim Bokern

First and foremost, we wish all of you good health and strength during the challenges posed by COVID-19. 2020 is shaping up to be a very different summer. The Manitowish Waters Historical Society has built a robust calendar of events that we have already

modified. Public safety and best practices will guide us in delivering traditional historical society events that you have come to enjoy.

Clearly, the summer of 2020 will be dynamic, and many Northwoods traditions will be subject to change. In regard to the events and programs offered by the MWHS, please check our "Events" link (<https://www.mwhistory.org/events/>) on our website to determine the status of events. We will make decisions on specific events at least two weeks in advance.

This past winter, we conducted focus groups with the community to determine what people enjoyed about the MWHS and its programming, and what they wanted to learn more about and how. One of the feedback items was to embrace technology and new media. In response, the MWHS has taken the initiative to create new means for folks to access MW history.

First of all, we are creating podcasts of historic journals from the late 19th and early 20th century. We are working with Lakeland Union High School, using their state-of-the-art equipment to deliver the quality sound that podcast enthusiasts demand. Currently, we are saving these digital files to our website, but

hope to publish our podcasts on more traditional platforms like iTunes by the end of summer.

We also have created a YouTube channel that features videos regarding MW history for you to enjoy. Check out the podcasts and videos at: <http://www.mwhistory.org/manitowish-waters-historical-society-podcasts/>

Please subscribe and like our videos.

We certainly want to get your feedback regarding these new media, so please pass your comments and suggestions to mwhistoricalsociety@gmail.com.

We wish you a great 2020 summer, and please be safe and patient as we all look forward to our time in the Northwoods.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, likely belonging to Jim Bokern, the president.

P.S., to review the full report of our focus group findings, please go to <https://www.mwhistory.org/2016/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/MWHS-focus-group-report.pdf>



Louis (Louie) LaPorte is the guide in the back of the first boat. The rest of the men are tourists/fishermen. Note the old Evinrude motor with the piston and spark plug towards the operator. Good source of shocks!

MWHS Board

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Any questions or comments on our newsletter can be directed to Jean Bettenhausen at jmcbett@gmail.com or Frank DiLeonardi at fdileonardi@icloud.com.

Fish Tales Continued from page 1

I could watch the day of fishing play out from beginning to end. The memories and stories stay with me. To mention a few:

Jens Larsen—He tamed muskies and fed them out of his hand.

The Sleight Family—Four generations of this family have filled books and movies with great fish stories. I watched Dick Sleight catch a wall-eye and twirl it in the air as an eagle took it from his hand!

Chief Basil DeCoteau—He trained horses for the U.S. Cavalry and was one of the first to attend Haskell Indian Nations University. He and my uncle Lloyd LaPorte, upon the approach of a thunderstorm, would grab their gear and jump in the boat to troll suckers for musky. Chief never motor-trolled; he always rowed.

Abe LaFave—Abe was a giant of a man, legendary for many things, fishing being only one of

those things. His Island Lake resort was one of the first in the Northwoods and had the first bath tub up here.


Porter Dean—Porter was one of the most famous guides, known for never wearing shoes. At my Uncle Lloyd LaPorte's funeral, Porter hid in the woods to watch.

Mike Sullivan—He called himself the "Old Mick," and he told of shooting a hole in the bottom of the boat while attempting to shoot a musky. I'm sure he wasn't the only one to do that as most guides wore holsters with six-shooters to dispatch muskies.

Wally Pollus—A large man in a Stetson hat who would play his guitar and sing old classics like "Barnacle Bill the Sailor" and "Seven Beers with the Wrong Woman." At break time, he would "ride" his guitar around the bar, saying "Old Silver needs a drink," the Stetson hat open for donations.



To the left, guides Lloyd LaPorte (left) and Dick Sleight Sr. Above, guide George Bazso (right) and client.

FISH			
from			
Voss' Birchwood Lodge			
On A Chain Of Fourteen Lakes - The Ideal Vacation Spot			
Manitowish, Iron County, Wisconsin			
To _____		_____	
Shipped by _____		_____	
Res. License No. _____		Non-Res. License No. _____	
Musky - _____ Lbs.	Pike - _____ Lbs.		
Bass - _____ Lbs.	Pickrel - _____ Lbs.		
Total - - - - - Lbs.			
Shipping Point _____ Wis. _____ 19 _____			
AMERICAN RAILWAY EXPRESS CO.			
This is to certify that I am the shipper of one box of fish consigned to _____			
_____ containing			
Musky - _____ Lbs.	Pike - _____ Lbs.		
Bass - _____ Lbs.	Pickrel - _____ Lbs.		
Signed _____			
Address _____			
Res. License No. _____		Non-Res. License No. _____	

Fun Stuff to Read on the MW History Website

The Junction Newsletter



Bob McClellan was a prolific fishing guide who owned Junction Tackle with his wife Carol. Son Ricky still guides today. They also published a series of newsletters in the early '90s that we have added to our website for your reading enjoyment: <https://www.mwhistory.org/junction-newsletter-by-bob-mcclellan/>



Bob McClellan

Felix The Muskie

A pet fish? There have been a few on the chain, lore suggests. Our historian Michael Dunn recalls one named Felix. Follow the link below.

<https://www.mwhistory.org/felix-the-muskie-by-michael-dunn/>



Early Education in the Northwoods



Spider Lake School, circa 1917

Students locally as well as those throughout the world have experienced unprecedented challenges due to COVID-19. It may make you think about the obstacles faced by local students 100 years earlier.

Kay Krans of the Northland Lakeland Discovery Center recently investigated those early years of formal education in the area. Here is an excerpt from her article:

"Students traveled to school by walking through the woods and maybe across lakes in the winter, on skis, or if lucky, by horseback. Some communities might have different family members transport the children by wagon and later by car. The students brought their own lunches that they carried in small lard, coffee, or even old paint cans and syrup pails."

To read the complete article, please visit the MWS website at: <https://www.mwhistory.org/community/schools/>

Cain's Fishing Journal

You can find guide Marty Cain's written notes and maps of good fishing spots in our archive at :

<https://mwhistory.pastperfectonline.com/archive/5EBC8706-2F04-45AC-9CB6-282139725995>



Remembering a Special Guide

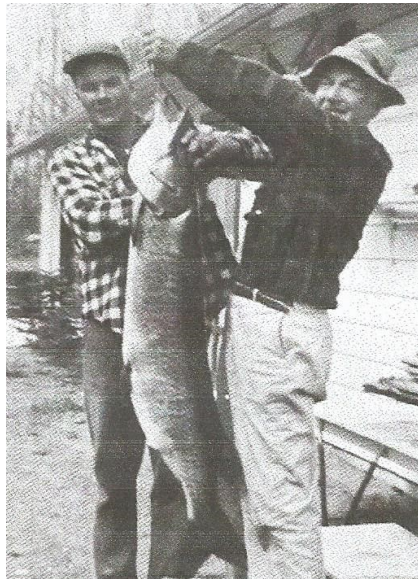
By JoAnn Brunner Miller

Guides have appeared in history books and journals since the early days of Northwoods exploration. Fishing and hunting as a way of life became a source of income for many and helped to build a tourist industry in Manitowish Waters.

Experienced or a first-time fisherman could hire a guide through bait shops or resorts, or obtain a recommendation from a patron in a local bar. Guides developed repeat clientele who often booked their dates a year in advance. A few of the "old time" guides include **Jens Larsen, Dick Sleight, George Bazso, Chief DeCoteau, Marty Cain, Chuck Johnson and my dad, John Brunner.** All were characters and knew how to provide their customers with a memorable, entertaining day on the water. In those days, the idea of catch and release didn't exist as fish were still plentiful.

My dad was a guide most of his life. He was born on Long Lake in Mercer and started guiding in his teens. After serving in WWII and then living in Chicago for a short time, he married a Manitowish Waters girl, **Ann Startz**, settled here and fished lakes in both Vilas and Iron counties.

Dad developed a reputation for knowing where the fish were located and how to catch them. He usually managed to fulfill a day's quota for musky or walleye even if it required fishing more than one lake on the same day. If clients wanted to fish for bass, a float plane carried them to a secret landlocked lake that was loaded with bass. A shore lunch of fresh caught walleye and diced potatoes cooked in huge cast iron skillets over an open fire was a favorite part of the day. My dad's secret ingredient was Golden Fluffo shortening, which turned out tender but crispy fish without using a batter. After lunch, the pans were



cooled, cleaned with sand in the lake, and dried with an old, soft tee shirt.

His largest musky was 41 pounds, 10 ounces, 53 inches, caught in Rest Lake with **Art Lawson** on June 18, 1953 (picture to the left). My brother **Art (Mr. Lawson's namesake)** tried to better that record but only managed to match it in 1980 with a Clear Lake musky weighing 41 pounds, 10 ounces.

Sturgeon season was the month of September, and trying to catch that fish required hours of sitting very still with bait laying on the bottom of the lake. On September 27, 1955, dad and his client landed a whopping 75-pound sturgeon on Dam Lake (later renamed Vance Lake).

Opening day of musky season was the most important date on my dad's calendar. Unfortunately, in 1970, opening day happened to fall on the weekend I was getting married in Chicago. My dad was there to give me away on Saturday but drove home later and managed to fish on Sunday. I don't think he ever really forgave me!

A few of the celebrities he guided included **President Eisenhower, Bart Starr and Dean Martin.**

Many of his clients became lifelong friends, and after dad's passing they fished for several years with my brother. Today, the family legacy is carried on by **Matt (Zeke) Thompson** who has inherited his grandfather's ability to "talk to the fish" and has developed his own reputation in Minnesota.

Dad loved teaching children how to fish and would patiently show them

how to cast, how to reel in a fish while entertaining with tall tales that they believed every word of. The fishing pier in Koller Park that allows easy access for children was built and donated by our family as a memorial.



CINCINNATIAN HOOKS BIG ONE
Alvin A. Gould, left, of Indian Hill, hooked and landed this 75-pound sturgeon in the Manitowish waters of Wisconsin. The big battler—a table delicacy—fell for a gob of night crawlers. Center is Alvin Gould Jr; to the right, John Brunner, guide.

Then and Now



The Tackle Box as it appears in circa 1950 (left). The former Musky Country\Sportsman's Outpost (right), currently closed.



Voss' Palm Garden Bar and Dance Hall as it appeared in circa 1943 and today.



Hanson's Hardware in 1942 and the current Lakeland True Value Hardware. That's a young John Hanson to the left of the bike with Bob Dalle Ave to his right.

MWHS 2020 Calendar

MAY

Leaders of Historic Preservation and History of the YCC
May 18th 5:00 to 7:00 pm
 Discovery Center
 Drinks and Appetizers

JUNE

Railroads and Early Commerce
June 13th 9:30 to 11:00 am
 Koller Library

Dillinger Pontoon Tour
June 19th 9:30 am to 12:00 pm
 or 1:15 to 3:45 pm
 Little Bohemia
 Lunch Included

Jeopardy Fun Night
June 25th 5:00 to 7:30 pm
 White Oak or Chippewa Retreat
 Drinks and Appetizers

JULY

Fourth of July Parade Float
 Parade 1:00 to 3:00 pm
 Downtown MW

Cemetery Walk
July 5th 5:00 to 7:00 pm
 Pine Lawn Cemetery

Rest Lake's Amazing History by Pontoon

July 10th 9:00 to 11:00 am
 or 11:30 am to 1:30 pm
 or 2:00 to 4:00 pm
 Rest Lake Park

Dillinger Pontoon Tour

July 11th 9:30 am to 12:00 pm
 or 1:15 to 3:45 pm
 Little Bohemia
 Lunch Included

Earliest Pioneers

July 11th 9:30 to 11:00 am
 Koller Library

Histories of Spider and Island Lakes by Pontoon

July 16th 9:00 to 11:00 am
 or 11:30 am to 1:30 pm
 or 2:00 to 4:00 pm
 Discovery Center

Turtle Flambeau Flowage Pontoon Tour

July 18th 10:00 am to 3:00 pm
 Springstead Landing
 Bring lunch and drink

Mysteries of Alder and Wild Rice by Water

July 24th 9:00 to 11:00 am
 or 11:30 am to 1:30 pm
 or 2:00 to 4:00 pm
 Discovery Center

AUGUST

Northwoods Canals Between MW and Lac Du Flambeau

August 1st 9:30 to 11:00 am
 Koller Library

Early Forest Rangers

August 8 9:30 to 11:30 am
 Koller Library

Dillinger Pontoon Tour

August 22nd 9:30 am to 12:00 pm
 or 1:15 to 3:45 pm
 Little Bohemia
 Lunch Included

Big Lake by Canoe

August 29th 9:00 am to 1:30 pm
 Discovery Center

SEPTEMBER

MW Mysteries Chamber After 5

September 16th 5:00 to 7:00 pm
 Ye Olde Shillelagh

YCC Driving Tour

September 19th 1:00 to 4:30 pm
 Discovery Center

OCTOBER

Plum Lake

Historical and Naturalist Hike
October 3rd 10:30 am to 5:00 pm
 Discovery Center

Nibbles 'n Knowledge

CCC and Camp Mercer
October 8th 5:00 to 7:00 pm
 Discovery Center

Forest Legacy:

Driving tour and short hikes
October 24th 9:00 am to 4:00 pm
 Discovery Center

NOVEMBER

Van Tour and Hikes of Logging Camps and local CCC Camp
November 7th 12:30 to 4:30 pm
 Discovery Center

Who, What, When and Where ?



Did you know about this photo from our last issue?

That's Joe Ilg Sr. loading clients on boats in Rest Lake to support his resort which he began in 1917.



Who can determine the location of this famous site in our community? What do you think they were doing and when?

Please submit your thoughts to: jmcbett@gmail.com.. We will follow up in our next newsletter with feedback from MWHS newsletter readers.



George LaPorte toting two fistfuls of fish.

The MW History is on the Tube!



**Check out the new
MWHS YouTube Channel
for video presentations**

**We also have started Podcasts
for your listening enjoyment**

Check them out!

<https://www.mwhistory.org/manitowish-waters-historical-society-pod-casts/>

Membership & Donations

FISHING CONTEST

Manitowish Waters
MUSKY MARATHON

MUSKY MARATHON
MANITOWISH WATERS HISTORICAL SOCIETY
(Division of Vilas County)

Join the many successful Musky Fishermen who have become a Manitowish Waters MUSKETEEER by registering a legal musky caught in our area. Register your musky and receive a MUSKETEEER CARD and a colorful shoulder patch — No fee.

Complete information and registration at all sports shops.
BE SURE TO ASK YOUR HOSTS.
Vilas County Musky Marathon Season Duration

Those interested in joining the MWHS should complete the form below and send in your form with \$20 to:

**Manitowish Waters Historical Society
P.O. Box 100
Manitowish Waters WI 54545**

*Those considering joining the Manitowish Waters Historical Society are encouraged to explore our web page, attend MWHS events and reach out to board members. **Student Memberships are available for \$2, renewing each May.***

Donations

Donations can be sent to:
**Manitowish Waters Historical Society
P.O. Box 100
Manitowish Waters WI 54545**

MW Historical Society is an approved 501c3 charitable organization, and contributions may be tax deductible. Please contact us for additional information.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: ____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Email: _____

**Thank you for supporting the Manitowish Waters Historical Society.
Memberships renew each January.**