



# MANITOWISH WATERS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

March 2021

## Looking Back to the Roaring '20s!

In this issue, we look back 100 years and how the 1920s played out in the Northwoods and Manitowish Waters. When the decade started, what we know today as Manitowish Waters was part of Lac du Flambeau, becoming Spider Lake in 1928. We didn't become Manitowish Waters until 1940.

Travel back and enjoy your visit to the Roaring '20s...Automobiles, Prohibition, Radio, Bootlegging, Telephones, Talkies, Dance Pavilions and all that Jazz!

### Commerce in the 1920s

By JoAnn Miller

**Editor's Note:** Finding information on local business in the 1920s is challenging. However, thanks to the archives of The Ironwood Daily Globe, The Iron County Miner, The Rhinelander Daily News and Gogebic Range Directory, it has been possible to develop a fairly good idea of area commerce.

The Manitowish "waters" area gained recognition during the 1920s thanks to tourism growth. Around 20 resorts were drawing people from the larger cities to the south and from Ironwood and Hurley to the north. Resort accommodation choices included tented campsites, lodge rooms, and cabins with or without kitchen facilities.

The 1920s resorts included (but were not limited to) Voss' Birchwood Lodge, Koerner's Spider Lake Resort, Deer Park Lodge, LaFave's Island Lake Resort, Lange's Resort, Mitchell's Resort, The Win-Mar, Schroeder's Resthaven, Virgin Forest Park, Rest Lake Resort, Fern Lodge, Sylvan Resort, Quo Vadis Club, Hoosier Club, Ilg Camp, Red Feather Camp, Camp Swastika, Kamp Khaki and Northern Lights Resort.

The local population was not large enough to accommodate staffing needs, so resorts recruited seasonal workers by placing ads in Chicago, Ironwood and Hurley newspapers for cooks, yard work, house-keeping and general staff. Room and board were often included for the staff.



Marie Mehl, daughter of Abe LaFave and employee of Koerner's Resort

During this decade, an increasing number of Ironwood and Hurley residents built summer cottages on the lakes, also driving demand for local services.

An unofficial listing of Spider Lake residents in 1928 noted the following occupations:

Guides: 11  
Ice Cutters: 4 (all 4 were guides during the summer)  
Caretakers: 4  
Laborers: 2  
Carpenters: 2  
Painter: 1

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# A Word From Our President



**Jim Bokern**

Last night as I penned this letter, the mercury dropped to -27 degrees on Alder Lake where I live, but I am pleased to report that the Manitowish Waters Historical Society continues to make exciting plans for spring and the warm days of summer. You can discover our spring and summer programs at our [Events link](#). MWHS has elected to plan for a full slate of events for 2021 and will only cancel events as health care best practices dictate.

Even during winter, you will find the folks at MWHS working diligently to protect, preserve and share our history. Since our last newsletter in November, the MWHS YouTube channel has added nine videos to include presentations, oral histories and collaborative TV segments with WJFW Channel 12. Our growing digital archives have been boosted by new and insightful articles discovered on Newspapers.com. We have also been recording historic sites with the

State Historic Preservation Office to ensure our historic and cultural resources are protected for generations to come.

Communications chair, **Frank DiLeonardi**, organized the technology and training for our first ZOOM presentation. We have received positive feedback regarding the presentation, Logging Impacts on the Manitowish Waters Area and Land Policies, and using ZOOM. We are considering offering more ZOOM presentations, which, of course, we will announce to our members. If you missed a presentation, you can always catch up by watching a recording on the [MWHS YouTube channel](#). If you are around on March 13th, you can join a MWHS and North Lake-land Discovery Center (NLDC) historic and natural history hike that will reveal some of our newest discoveries and preservation efforts. Sign up at [NLDC Events](#).

We hope you enjoy the March newsletter and plan to make time to join us on several fun and amazing programs offered in 2021.

Highest Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, likely belonging to Frank DiLeonardi.

## MWHS Board of Directors

**Jim Bokern** President - jimkb@aol.com

**John Hanson** Vice President

**Nancy LaPorte** Secretary

**Barbara Bartling** Treasurer

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**John McFarland** Board Member

**JoAnn Miller** Board Member

Any questions or comments on our newsletter can be directed to Jean Bettenhausen at [jmcbett@gmail.com](mailto:jmcbett@gmail.com) or Frank DiLeonardi at [fdileonardi@icloud.com](mailto:fdileonardi@icloud.com).

## The MW History is on the Tube!



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

**We also have started Podcasts  
for your listening enjoyment  
Check them out!**

**Click or go to:**

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

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Gardner: 1  
Mechanics: 2  
Lunchroom proprietors: 4  
Farmer: 1  
Realtors: 2  
Dam Tender: 1

A true grocery store did not exist during this decade, but several resorts included retail facilities with basic supplies available to both housekeeping cottage guests and local residents. "Motoring" to Ironwood and Hurley for food, clothing and other purchases were day-long excursions and often a social event shared by friends.

Resort restaurants were open to the public. Medical facilities were available in Ironwood, Hurley and Rhinelander.

In 1928, **Alvin Koerner** was granted the rights to construct, maintain and operate telephone lines from Mercer to the village of Manitowish, eventually bringing the service to Spider Lake.

The Lake Superior District Power Co. extended electrical lines to the Manitowish lakes region in June 1929. This provided residents with electrical power and replaced the lighting plants utilized by many resorts.

The end of the decade saw major development that launched Spider Lake into greater population growth and increased commerce during the 1930s. A report in December 1928 focused on three large building projects that opened for business in spring 1929:

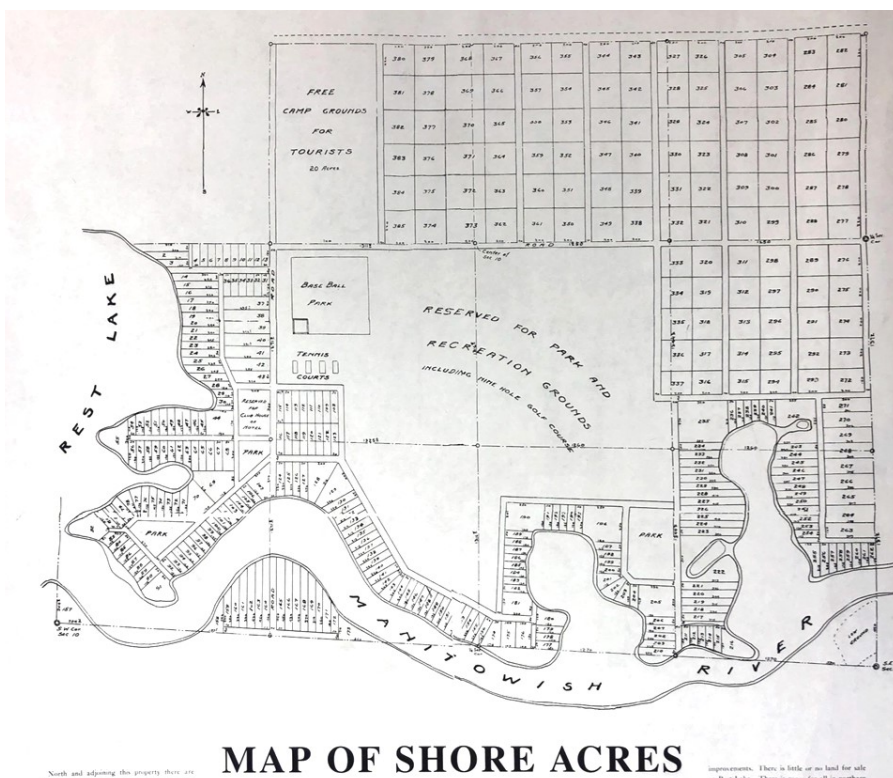


The Win-Mar was one of several local resorts in the '20s. Today that location is Koller Park.

—**The Northern Lights Hotel** owned by **Mr. Oestreich** was constructed on Rest Lake. It had a dining room serving 60-70 people and 10 bedrooms complete with a lavatory with hot and cold running water. In addition, the resort included eight cabins.

—**The Tower Tea Room**, a new two-story building with a tower built above the roof containing a light, built by **Mr. and Mrs. A. Zermuehlen** on land purchased from Frank Laundries. One room had a \$2,000 soda fountain, and they also served lunch.

—Just south of the dam, a **bakery and lunch room** was built and owned by **Walter Schuster** of Milwaukee.



**MAP OF SHORE ACRES**

## What If?

During the '20s, Dr. E.R. Perkins, semi-retired dentist and long-time summer resident of Rest Lake, aggressively pursued the construction of a planned community on the southeast shores of Rest Lake and the outlet of the Manitowish River. Land speculation was common in the US and the Northwoods during the decade. Winchester was also developing a similar planned community. After the stock market crash and Great Depression, planned communities like Shore Acres collapsed into insolvency. If Shore Acres had succeeded, it seems likely other large planned communities would have followed, dramatically altering the identity of the area and the Manitowish Waters chain of lakes.



# Robert Loveless: The Northwoods Jack of All Trades

By Kay Krans

**Editor's Note:** This is an excerpt from an article Kay has written on the life of Robert Loveless. For the full article, please go to [Loveless](#).



Robert Loveless and his daughters, L to R, Ella Loveless Kassein, Dolly Loveless Tirpe, and Robert in 1928

After the grim period of World War I, The Jazz Age of the 1920s became a time when people wanted to forget the horrors of war and sacrifice, and enjoy life. **(Robert) Loveless** provided a great venue for enjoying nature as well as "cutting up the rug." He was proud of his virgin pine studded land and made sure that the big pines remained.

He and **his wife Hulda** built a complex, including a saw mill, mill pond, two houses, six tourist cabins, a dance hall, picnic grounds and a tent camping area. The resort had a generator that supplied electricity for the operation. He named his resort "Virgin Forest Park" and made the resort ready for his customers to relax in the fresh northern air and to have fun on Alder Lake.

Live music and new dances became the rage. But, there was also a counter movement to protect



people from the "evils of alcohol." The Volstead Act became law in 1919, and the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment brought on Prohibition. This caused many resort owners to look to illegal

alcohol to serve their patrons.

By 1923, Loveless, with the help of **Palmer Hanson**, had constructed one of the best dance pavilions in Northern Wisconsin. It was called Park Hall, or Virgin Forest Pavilion, and included a long boardwalk and small bridge to guide customers to the dance hall. The pavilion was a 116' x 52' building that could hold as many as 500 people. The dance floor measured 40' x 80', which was room for plenty of couples to perform dances like the Charleston, the Lindy Hop (Jitterbug), the Shimmy and the Fox Trot.

There was a \$1.10 admission to the pavilion with 10 cents going to the government, according to Loveless. If you wanted to impress your girlfriend, you bought tickets for the dance floor. These tickets were known as the "Jitney" (slang for a bus ticket), and you had to pay an extra 10 cents per ticket for "Jitney Dancing." The more Jitney Dance tickets you had, the more impressive you were to the girls because those tickets signaled you had cash and were a good dancer.

There was a stage for live bands, with an 11-man orchestra player piano for times when no band was available. Bands and orchestras with up to 15 members were hired to play at the pavilion.

**Dolly Loveless Tirpe** believed that the first band that played there came from New York, but most of the bands came from Chicago, Milwaukee and Minneapolis. Another Loveless relative, **Bob Kassein**, told stories years later of Wayne King and His Orchestra, performing in 1923. King became very famous in the 1930s and recorded famous songs like *The Waltz You Saved For Me*.

Loveless booked African American orchestras as well as all-women orchestras like the Riley's Sunkist Queens. (Kassein remembered the all-women bands, and as a young boy, he thought of them as all being very beautiful.) Native American musicians and Pow Wow dance groups were also booked, and these were very popular shows.



Loveless' Virgin Forest Park Pavilion

# Let's Go on Vacation!

By Frank DiLeonardi



The Barber-Greene cottage on Stone Lake in 1924

The 1920s also saw another phenomenon that would forever change the Northwoods and Manitowish Waters...the vacation home. While there may have been second homes before the '20s, the decade saw a significant proliferation of vacation homes and cottages post-World War I.

One of those first vacation homes on the chain was the **Barber-Greene Lodge**. If you've ever been on the chain, you've been by it. It's the last home on the right as you hit the buoy at the end of Stone Lake, heading for the channel leading to Rest Lake.

That house is very important to me. **My wife Kelley's** great grandfather built the family's summer home in 1924, claiming to be one of Manitowish Waters' first vacationers.

The two cabins were and are called the Barber-Greene Lodge because **Harry Barber** was the president of the Barber-Greene Company, based in Aurora, IL. Initially, employees were welcomed to spend time at B-G but the company's growth soon made

that impractical, leaving it as the family's summer cottage.

Family lore states that the logs to build the home were floated to the site, and that the road out was built after the fact. Roads were important to the family as Barber and **his son Ashley** hold 57 patents for inventions related to the asphalt road business, an industry they helped create, and was key to the growing number of automobiles in the '20s.

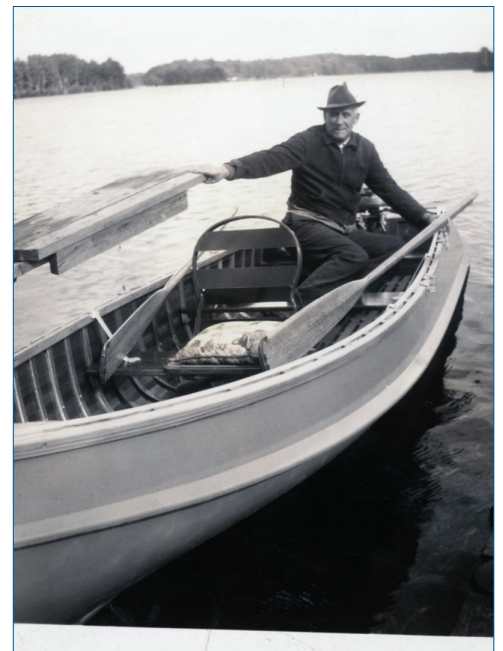
**Barber's wife Blanche** had asthma, and the selection of the Northwoods for a summer home was a health retreat for Blanche, not uncommon at the time.

The home has been passed down to family members over the years and today is owned by cousins from the fourth generation, another tradition of family vacation homes, multiple owners. But the lure of Manitowish Waters keeps relatives visiting from Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Montana, Nevada, Texas and Washington still today.

Oh, and besides me, **Jean Bettenhausen**, the graphic designer of this newsletter and my wife's cousin, visited the B-G Lodge as a

child, cementing her love of Manitowish Waters at an early age.

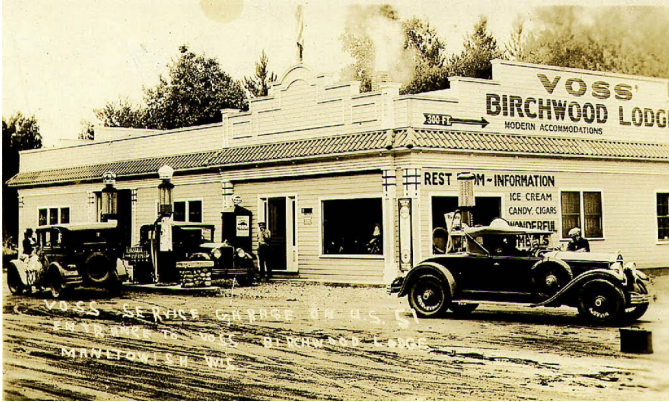
**Does your family have a similar story? The MWHs is interested in capturing family stories. Please contact us at: [mwhistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:mwhistoricalsociety@gmail.com), and we will be in touch.**



Harry Barber at the dock



# Then and Now



Thanks in large part to Henry Ford and his manufacturing advancements that helped decrease costs, automobiles started to dot the country's roadways during the '20s. In 1920, there were eight million automobile registrations. By the end of the decade, there were more than 23 million registrations.

During the decade, it was not uncommon to see gas pumps added to other businesses like those above at Voss' Birchwood Lodge as more and more visitors started to forego taking the train and hit the road.

The dance craze of the '20s also saw another addition to the Birchwood Lodge. Voss' Palm Garden became one more hot spot in town!



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## LaPorte's Grocery



As mentioned in the article "Commerce in the '20s," Manitowish Waters did not have a grocery store at the time. That changed on May 27, 1937 when **LaPorte's Grocery** opened (the photo to the left is from early in the store's existence). We are mentioning this fact here because we are very excited that MWSH Treasurer **Barbara LaPorte Bartling** has written a wonderful account on the history of LaPorte's Grocery for all of our enjoyment. It's now on our website, and you can read it at [LaPorte](#).



# Saloons to Soda Parlors

By Kay Krans

During the current pandemic, we have all felt some restrictions when considering where to go for a social drink. During Prohibition, residents and visitors alike faced the same challenge when many of the local saloons converted to soda fountains and ice cream parlors.

This trend originated with the breweries converting their brewing process to soda production and creating creameries to produce cheese and ice cream. Examples of Wisconsin breweries that survived by producing such products were Schlitz and Miller.

Prohibition set off a cultural trend of people socializing while consuming legitimate soda parlor fare. Between 1916 and 1925, ice cream consumption increased by 55%. In 1920, the I-Scream-Bar was invented and later became known as the Eskimo Pie. By 1923, Americans could treat themselves to the Good Humor Bar. By 1928, the Drumstick was added to the selection.

While some saloons became legitimate soda parlors, others

were simply legal fronts for a place to buy bootleg gin and whiskey. For example, the nearby community of Hurley, WI had as many as 200 drinking establishments that were called "soda parlors" during Prohibition.

As the '20s concluded, one such soda parlor in our community gained a measure of fame. **Oscar Hanke** operated the soda parlor at Rest Lake Dam. As he was leaving his establishment around 11 p.m. on July 27, 1930, two men came out of the darkness, opened fire and shot him three times. He was unable to recognize the men who fled by car. Hanke managed to walk to the **Matt Plunkett** home up the road from Rest Lake Dam and was taken to the hospital in Ironwood, MI, and he fully recovered.

The motive for the shooting was uncertain to the authorities, and questions remain today. Was it a robbery or was someone settling a score with Hanke? Was this an actual soda parlor or was it a front for bootleg alcohol?

*If anyone remembers **Oscar Hanke** or his business, please contact the Manitowish Waters Historical Society.*



How did some beat Prohibition on the chain?  
Simple, float the saloon!



From left to right, Andrew Johnson, Emil Wanatka Sr., Louie LaPorte, Lloyd Voss and Lloyd LaPorte at moonshine camp

Ironwood Daily Globe, February 2, 1922

## 2 MANITOWISH MEN ARE FINED \$100 AND COSTS

Louis LaPorte and Andrew Johnson, both of Manitowish, were arraigned before Judge Griff Thomas in Hurley municipal court last night on charges of possession of liquor. They were expected to pay fines of \$100 and costs each today, said the court, as they were given an opportunity to attempt to obtain the fines and court costs to avoid going to jail. LaPorte and Johnson were arrested by Ray Coates and C. Wing, state prohibition officers.

# MW Historical Society 2021 Calendar

## APRIL

**Plum Lake Hike**  
4/26, 10:30 am to 5 pm  
Discovery Center

## MAY

**Historic Preservation  
Leader Event**  
5/25, 5 to 7 pm

## JUNE

**MW Hike and Pub Crawl**  
6/9, 3 to 7 pm  
Location TBD

**Exploring Rest Lake Pontoon Tour**  
6/11, 9 to 11am, 11:30 to 1:30 pm  
or 2 to 4 pm  
Discovery Center

**Dillinger Pontoon Tour  
Including Lunch at noon**  
6/12 9:30 am to noon or  
1:15 to 3:45 pm  
Little Bohemia Lodge

**Jeopardy Fun Night**  
6/24, 5 to 7:30 pm  
MW Community Center

## JUNE

**Southgate Canal Presentation**  
6/26, 9:30 to 11am  
Koller Library

**Alder and Wild Rice Lakes Mysteries**  
6/29, 9 am to 4 pm  
Discovery Center

**Manitowish River Canoe/Kayak**  
6/29, 10:00 am to 2:30 pm  
Discovery Center

## JULY

**Fourth of July Parade**

**Historic Cemetery Walk**  
7/5, 5 to 7 pm  
Pine Lawn Cemetery

**Mysteries of Stone, Fawn and  
Clear Lakes**  
7/7, 9 am to 4 pm  
Clear Lake Boat Landing

**Dillinger Pontoon Tour  
Including Lunch at noon**  
7/9, 9:30 am to noon or  
1:15 to 3:45 pm  
Little Bohemia Lodge

## JULY

**Railroads and Commerce Talk**  
7/10, 9:30 to 11:00 am  
Koller Library

**Turtle Flambeau Flowage**  
7/20, 10:30 am to 3:30 pm or  
5 to 8:30 pm (sunset cruise)  
Discovery Center

**Spider and Island Lakes Pontoon**  
7/23, 9 to 11 am or 11:30 to 1:30 pm  
or 2 to 4 pm  
Discovery Center

**Exploring CCC and Camp Mercer**  
7/31, 9:30 to 11 am  
Koller Library

## AUGUST

**Big Lake Investigation Pontoon**  
8/19, 9 to 1:30 pm  
Discovery Center

**Dillinger Pontoon Tour  
Including Lunch at noon**  
8/25, 9:30 am to noon  
1:15 to 3:45 pm  
Little Bohemia Lodge

## SEPTEMBER

**Statehouse YCC Driving Tour**  
9/11, 1 to 4:30 pm  
Discovery Center

## OCTOBER

**Amazing Forestry Legacy  
Driving tour and short hikes**  
10/1, 9 am to 4 pm  
Discovery Center

**Partridge Creek and Lake Hike**  
10/9, 9 am to 4 pm  
Discovery Center

## NOVEMBER

**Plum Lake Hike**  
11/6, 10:30 to 5 pm  
Discovery Center

**For more information  
go to: [https://  
www.mwhistory.org/  
events/](https://www.mwhistory.org/events/)**



Ironwood Daily Globe, May 3, 1928

## Don't Forget to RENEW your 2021 dues! Membership & Donations

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: \_\_\_\_\_

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Email: \_\_\_\_\_

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