

Subscribe | E-Editions | Free E-editions | River News 75¢ | Super Shopper - FREE | About Us | Contact Us | FREE Classified - Items Under \$50



News Community Public Records Obituaries Opinions Education Sports Outdoors

Flanders Realty Group advertisement with contact information: 2 North Brown St, Rhinelanders, WI 54501, www.flandersrealtygroup.com, (715) 420-1100.

Advanced Search search... search button



home : community : community news Facebook More April 23, 2021

6/9/2020 8:28:00 AM Rhinelanders Revisited: Early investments leave lasting impact Stephanie Kuski River News Features Reporter

In previously exploring the link between wealth and documented history, we found these are often two sides of the same coin. While some may argue that cronyism is what fueled many of the financial ventures within the exclusive circle of Rhinelanders's founding fathers, these business tycoons also invested in the livelihoods of those who inhabited our infant town.



Management at the Rhinelanders Refrigeration Co. spared no expense in making their employees feel at home. An on-site clubhouse included a dance hall with a piano, a refreshment bar fitted with cooking ranges, a shower and a restroom. There was even a baseball diamond on the grounds. Archive photo.

"What separates them from some wealthy corporate CEOs of modern times is that instead of sticking their money in offshore accounts, they instead used it to the benefit of the entire community by plugging millions of dollars back into it," Pioneer Park Historical Complex Director Kerry Bloedorn noted. "So they did give back, so to speak, for the wealth they acquired."

Early investors capitalized on the abundant lumber available in the region, processing forestry-related products and utilizing the available infrastructure (such as the dam and railroad) to bring those products to market.

But these business ventures were also based on the fads of the time, coupled with the resources that were available and, of course, the opportunity for money to be made.

When Gene Shepard first surveyed the area, as part of the process of drawing his original plats, the value of land was based on stumpage; the idea being more trees equaled more dollars, as Rhinelanders Historical Society President Bill Vancos explained. By that design, a lake property was considered a misfortune because it hindered the amount of lumber that could be harvested.

Now, if we consider how the definition of that value has changed over time, it becomes clear how the proclivities of the time greatly influenced how history were to unfold.

In Rhinelanders's early years, the Kirk Box Factory was one of the largest box factories in the region, utilizing inferior grade lumber to manufacture packing cases that were shipped via rail enroute to Chicago.

When that company closed shop around the turn of the century, the old box factory was enlarged and business began for the Rhinelanders Manufacturing Co., originally organized to manufacture furniture, explicitly taking advantage of the region's abundant lumber resources.

In 1902, the company began manufacturing refrigerators and quickly recognized a niche market. For that reason, Webster Brown - coming from a long line of opportunists (and with his cronies on speed dial) - called for an open meeting of citizens and fellow businessmen to reorganize the company in the exclusive manufacture of refrigerators, establishing Rhinelanders Refrigeration Co. that same year.

While the word "refrigerator" was used, what they made would today be called an "icebox" - a cooler unit, more or less, that featured a large block of ice to keep food and beverages cold. The company boasted an "Air-Tite" design that would keep cold air in and warm air out, available in woodgrain or enameled finish. At its heyday, the manufacturing facility, then located on the Pelican River at the corner of Ocala and Bruner streets, employed 160 skilled artisans who fabricated over 50,000 iceboxes every year.

Welcome, Stephanie Kuski! logout MANAGE YOUR ACCOUNT

Order photo reprints

Classifieds Advertising Information

Community Connections Submit to Newspaper...

Ced Vig's books for sale Kris Gilbertson's 'I Recall...'



Milwaukee, WI 55° 11:09 am CDT Mostly sunny

In early winter, the ice for the iceboxes was harvested from frozen Boom Lake.

Massive blocks of ice, each weighing upwards of several hundred pounds, were cut by hand and loaded onto horse-drawn wagons for transport to an icehouse for storage. (One icehouse was located in a big red building at the corner of Phillip and Alban streets; the area is currently used as an overflow parking area for Trinity Lutheran Church.)

Because a constant supply of fresh ice was necessary to keep the iceboxes stocked, an iceman was employed to deliver 25-50 lb blocks of ice to individual homes on a weekly basis.

"There were stories that if the children were well-behaved, the iceman would take a chisel and knock a little piece off the ice and give it to the kids," Vancos commented. "It was a big treat for them, like someone giving them a popsicle on a hot summer day."

While this business venture capitalized on the resources available at the time, it was also based on the current fads. Because electricity did not become available to ordinary households until the '30s, those without had to rely on the old method of keeping their food cold. But as electric refrigerators grew in popularity, and as electricity became more widely available, the market for iceboxes steadily declined. For that reason, the Rhinelanders Refrigeration Co. closed in 1937, and soon thereafter the paper mill bought those buildings to be used as warehouses.

Even at the end of this venture, there was an opportunity to capitalize on, and you best bet the cronies took full advantage.

"Now is it true that the Browns had ownership in both businesses? Yes," Vancos commented. "Did that help sway the fact that it was repurposed by another one of the businesses the Browns were involved in? Most likely."

It's no surprise the Rhinelanders Paper Co., originally established in 1903, was founded by Edward Brown, alongside his two eldest sons Anderson and Webster, as well as Dr. Alfred Daniels, Fred Anderle and several other investors.

In this way, the Browns in particular capitalized on the logging industry by investing in multiple companies which utilized the same raw material. The dam, built previously to create a head of water for log driving, was rebuilt for the purpose of utilizing hydroelectric power from the Wisconsin River to power the mill.

At the start, its 150 employees manufactured newsprint, catalog and manila wrapping paper. The mill was enlarged in 1916 when the company turned its attention to manufacturing glassine paper, an air-tight, greaseproof paper, the demand for which rose steadily during World War 1.

For this reason, one of the two iconic smokestacks at the mill today reads "(G)lassine Greaseproof." (But, of note, it's missing the first "G" from when the smokestack was shortened in the early '90s.) Following World War I, demand for glassine declined. In 1928, the company's manager, Folke Becker, undertook a modernizing campaign that ultimately improved the financial condition of the company, altering the appearance of the plant and adding new machines.

As a result, the Rhinelanders Paper Co. became universally regarded as a high-quality paper producer; between 1940-53, production at the mill tripled, employing well over a thousand.

Although the industry has been reorganized multiple times since its establishment, it's still one of the longest-standing industries today. In 1956, the St. Regis Paper Co. purchased the Rhinelanders Paper Co.; in 1978, the Monarch Paper Corp. bought the plant; then in 1979, Wausau Paper Mills acquired the Rhinelanders plant.

Most recently, those mills in Mosinee and Rhinelanders were bought out by Ahlstrom-Munksjö of Helsinki, Finland.

This is just one example, among many, in which a modern conglomerate has roots in the early endeavors of the Browns, Daniels and others among their cadre.

But, as Bloedorn alluded to, the difference had to do with the sentiment in mind.

"Cronyism in the old days (involved) influential people working back and forth," River News sales representative Jay Anderle, the grandson of Fred Anderle, commented. "But back then there was a sense of purpose and a sense of duty... Yes, they made money, but in most situations, it benefitted all of those around them."

"Cronyism nowadays has a more negative attitude because you don't see that citizenship for a community," he continued. "It's more about the money than what you're doing."

(This isn't to say that today's local business leaders aren't concerned with improving the community as a whole. Without question, there are numerous examples of community-minded, and philanthropic, businesses in the Rhinelanders area).

It's also clear that the investment decisions made by Rhinelanders' early business leaders were beneficial to both them and the inhabitants of the infant Rhinelanders.

No doubt, this elite group capitalized on the money to be made but their investments also employed the majority of those who called Rhinelanders home. So too, they were flexible enough to shift their industries as



**DELTA CONNECTION**  
is now booking flights into and out of Rhinelanders...  
**FLY Rhinelanders**  
Operated by SkyWest  
[CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFORMATION](#)



715-369-5270  
4690 South Shore Drive, Rhinelanders  
**East Side Automotive**  
Complete Automotive Repair  
Rust Proofing  
Master Certified Auto Repair  
Quality Used Auto Sales  
[Click here for more information](#)



Click HERE for current Metal Prices!  
715.362.9445 ext. 1  
**OAK LEAF SALVAGE**  
4208 Oak Leaf Road, Rhinelanders  
Buyers of Junk Cars and Recyclable Metals  
Dealers in Used Automobile & Truck Parts  
NEW - Drive-On Scale - We Pick Up Cars!



**WALDMANN Construction, Inc.**  
Design / Build General Contractor  
  
715-479-3132  
St. Germain, WI 54558  
**Your Home is Built on Our Reputation**



**Domino's**  
LARGE 3 TOPPING PIZZA  
MON-THURS \$7.99  
Carry Out Only  
Click here. [DOMINOS.COM](#)  
Rhinelanders 715-362-2525



**D&J** GET READY FOR WINTER DRIVING  
[CLICK HERE FOR DETAILS](#)  
Auto, Truck & Equipment Repair, Inc.  
Stevens Street • Rhinelanders • 715-365-7400



**TAKE NOTICE WISCONSIN!**  
Search State of Wisconsin public notices.

resources and fads came and went. Although history has a tendency to paint a one-sided picture, when we consider all sides of the coin, it becomes clear how these early endeavors continue to have a profound impact on our tiny town today. Stay tuned for the next installment of this continuing series. Visit rivernewsonline.com to read previous installments.

### Article Comment Submission Form

---

Please feel free to submit your comments.

Article comments are not posted immediately to the Web site. Each submission must be approved by the Web site editor, and meet the comment guidelines (see "Comment Guidelines" at right). There may be a delay of 24-48 hours for any submission while the web site editor reviews and approves it.

**Note:** All information on this form is required. Your telephone number and email address is for our use only, and will not be attached to your comment.

#### Submit an Article Comment

**First Name:**   
*Required*

**Last Name:**   
*Required*

**Telephone:**   
*Required*

**Email:**   
*Required*

**Comment:**   
*Required*

**Passcode:**  [Click here to see a new mix of characters.](#)  
*Required*

This is an anti-SPAM device. It is not case sensitive.

---

Life

---

[Facebook](#) | [All Things](#) | [Wisconsin Lottery](#) | [The Lakeland Times - affiliate](#) | [Winter Road Conditions](#) | [Snow/Trail Conditions](#)

The Northwoods River News | Walker Communications, LLC  
232 S. Courtney Street, Rhinelanders, WI 54501 | Office (715) 365-6397 | Fax (715) 365-6361

Corporate billing office: The Lakeland Times / Lakeland Printing Inc. | P.O. Box 790, Minocqua, WI 54548 | (715) 356-5236 | Fax (715) 358-2121  
Members of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association, Wisconsin Community Papers, Rhinelanders Area Chamber of Commerce, Minocqua Area Chamber of Commerce

Site Design and Content | Copyright 2021 1up!  
Software © 1998-2021 1up! Software, All Rights Reserved