

Story of Martin Lynch, First Settler On River Here, Told for First Time

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first in a series of four articles on Martin Lynch, the "forgotten pioneer.")

By JOE BOTSFORD

Fifty-five years ago there died on a homestead beside the Wisconsin River an aged trapper — a man who had "worked" the river for half a century. At his request, he was buried atop a rolling ridge that overlooked the waters he had known so long. Only a boulder, already in place, marked the site of his grave.

One Indian summer afternoon, Mrs. Sig (Grace) Dahl, Rte. 3, and I walked to the top of the ridge to find the boulder — for buried beside it was her grandfather, Martin Lynch, the "forgotten pioneer."

The story of Martin Lynch has never been told, yet he was the first white man to settle on the Wisconsin River between Merrill and Eagle River. He had already lived on the river for at least 10 years before John Curran, the pioneer of Rhinelander, landed at the junction of the Pelican and Wisconsin.

If the history of the development of the Wisconsin River valley has failed to give due credit to Martin Lynch, it is only because he was a simple man.

As a youth, Lynch married into the Chippewa Indian tribe and spent all of his life on the rivers and in the woods. He had little to do with settlements, and John Curran was one of the few white men with whom he had any lasting associations.

The 'Voyageur.'

But recognition of Martin Lynch is long overdue. True, he was not a "pioneer" as we interpret the word: yet he represented an earlier breed of men called "voyageurs" — men who lost themselves in the wilderness to seek the fur-bearing animals, men who became a part of the wilderness and adopted its ways. Such a man was Martin Lynch, and his name deserves a place in the history of the Rhinelander area.

Until now, the name of Martin Lynch has been mentioned rarely and only briefly in historical accounts. An example can be found in Eugene "Gene" Shepard's description of his first visit to Pelican Rapids" back in 1870. Wrote Shepard:

"Martin Lynch lived down the river (from Curran's trading post) a mile or two. He and Mr. Curran were the only white men living on the river between Eagle River and Grandfather Falls at that time."

The story of Martin Lynch came to light as a result of an exchange of letters between Mrs. Dahl and Mrs. Julia Curran O'Reilly of Bal-

white child and daughter of its first settler. In her letter Julia Curran recalled that one of her playmates was Julia Lynch, later Mrs. Louis Colberg, the mother of Mrs. Dahl.

The two little girls were the same age. Julia Lynch, the daughter of Martin, of course, was half Indian. With the two girls was another playmate, Sarah Jackson, a cousin of Julia Lynch. Sarah was said to be full-blooded Indian, but strangely she had red hair and blue eyes. In her letter, Julia Curran remembered the girl "with the flaming red hair."

Upon hearing of the exchange of letters, the writer became interested in the man, Martin Lynch. Like John Curran, Lynch had all but been forgotten in the history of the area. But unlike Curran, Lynch left no written record behind him.

Story Buried By the Past.

Therefore, the full story of Martin Lynch can never be told. But an attempt is made with the bits of information handed down by Martin's descendants.

An exciting find was a tintype of Lynch taken about a year before his death. The only known photograph of the trapper, it was loaned to the writer by Mrs. Celia LaBarge of Lac du Flambeau, a granddaughter. For years the existence of the tintype was not realized until it was found in an attic.

When Martin Lynch died at the age of 78, his only legacy was his large family, and the number of his descendants can not even now be estimated. There are at least 13 grandchildren, five of them in Rhinelander. Many of his descendants retained the ways of his Chippewa wife and reside on the Lac du Flambeau Indian reservation.

The grave of Martin Lynch is about two miles south of the city, atop the hill that looks down upon the scenes of his life and the Wisconsin River. The gentle slope of the hill has been plowed over many times in the past, with no indication left that the site is a large burial ground.

For Martin Lynch does not sleep alone in death. More than 40 members and descendants of the family are buried about him!

(To be continued.)

Postcard...From the Past

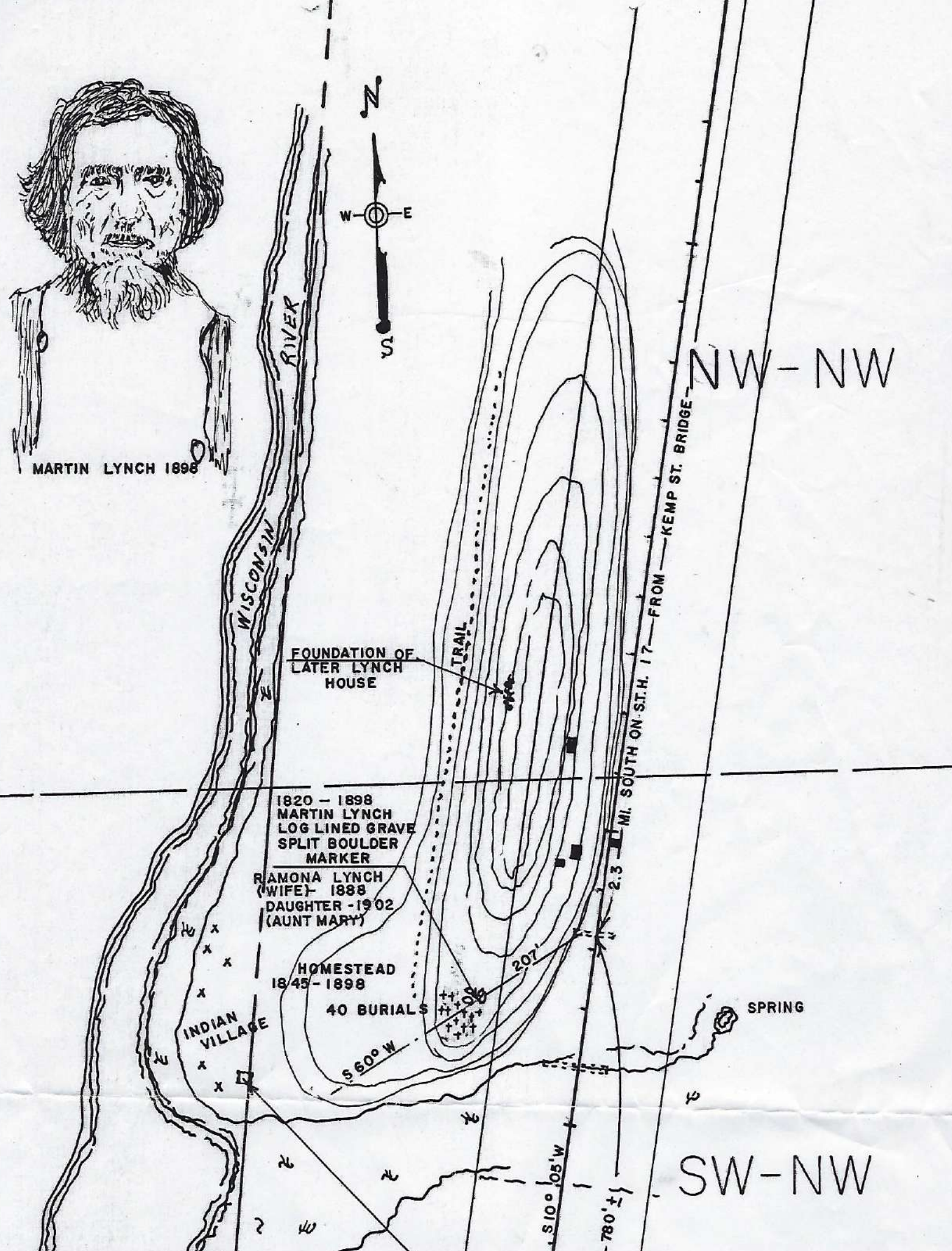
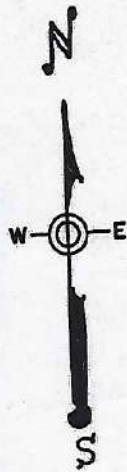


Submitted photo

Faded and yellowing, an old newspaper photo from the 1950s shows the granddaughter of Martin Lynch standing near his burial spot just off Highway 17. The caption reads: "Site of First Settler's Grave -- Mrs. Sig (Grace) Dahl, Rte. 3, granddaughter of Martin Lynch, the 'forgotten pioneer', stands beside the boulder that marks the site of his grave about two miles south of Rhineland near the Wisconsin River. This ridge is actually a family cemetery, with other members of the Lynch family buried here." Approximately 40 burials are reportedly located in the area, including immediate members of the Lynch family and relatives of Lynch's Chippewa wife, Ramona.



MARTIN LYNCH 1898



WISCONSIN RIVER

FOUNDATION OF LATER LYNCH HOUSE

TRAIL

1820 - 1898
MARTIN LYNCH
LOG LINED GRAVE
SPLIT BOULDER
MARKER

RAMONA LYNCH
(WIFE) - 1888
DAUGHTER - 1902
(AUNT MARY)

HOMESTEAD
1845 - 1898

40 BURIALS

INDIAN VILLAGE

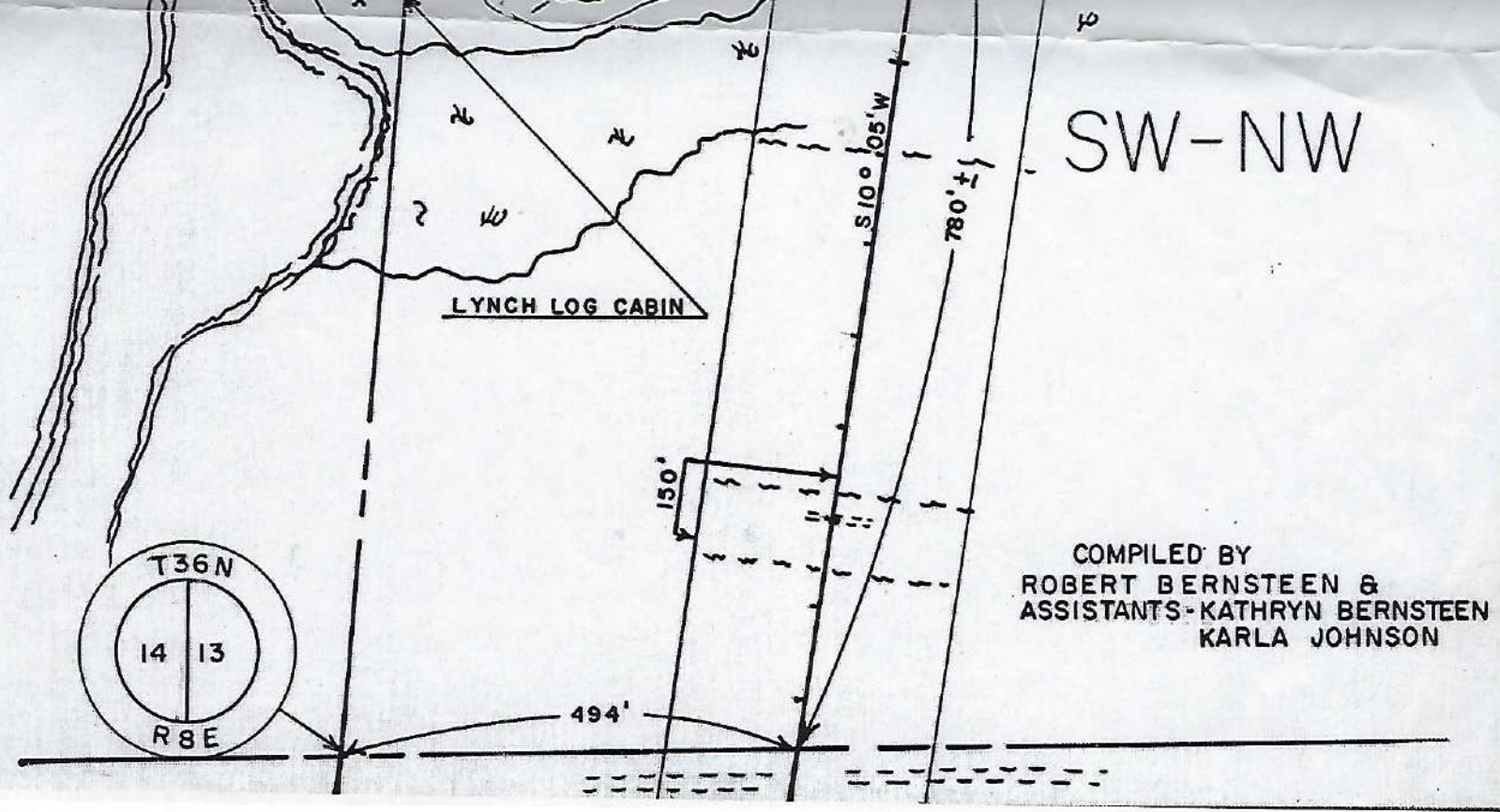
SPRING

MI. SOUTH ON S.T.H. 17 FROM KEMP ST. BRIDGE

NW - NW

SW - NW

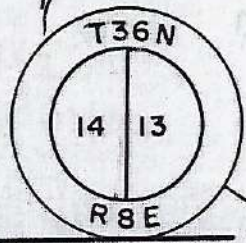
560' W
207'
2.3 MI.
105' W
780' ±



SW-NW

LYNCH LOG CABIN

COMPILED BY
ROBERT BERNSTEEN &
ASSISTANTS-KATHRYN BERNSTEEN
KARLA JOHNSON



494'

150'

S10°05'W

780'±