

# CASS COUNTY CLIPPINGS

January 1, 2007

CASS COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

P.O. BOX 505  
201 MINNESOTA AVENUE W., WALKER, MN. 56484

## Reviewing Two Items From the Native American Collection

In the Cass County Museum is a canoe made of living fibre. Because it was made entirely of woods of the forest instead of an amalgam of chemical compounds as are found in fibre glass, aluminum or plastics, it has a personality of its own.

It was donated to the Cass County Historical Society by Warren Huffman of Bungo Township. Warren Huffman came with his family to Cass County in 1894 by covered wagon and team. Two Indians made the canoe years ago. The handcrafting is a thing rarely seen any more. It is estimated that it takes a week to gather materials and build one of these birch bark canoes.

The Indians told Warren Huffman how the canoe was made. First, the birch bark must be stripped from a felled tree in pieces as large as possible. It is submerged in water to keep it pliable. Stakes are driven into the ground in the form of the canoe to establish the shape. The pieces of bark are joined together for the desirable length. Then birch bark lengths are set in the frame and pinched together at the ends.

Cedar strips are laid inside, using rocks to hold them in place. The cedar ribs are softened, either by placing them in a hole filled with water heated with hot stones, or by using wet moss and covering the ribs, steaming them over hot stones. On becoming pliable, they were forced into a semi-circle and sprung into the inside of the canoe, holding it by tension. The gunnels were carved from cedar. A hole was bored under the gunnels at each end and sewed on with lacings made of spruce roots.



The lacing is obtained by wetting down the spruce roots and splitting them by starting at the little end, leaving one side flat. Holes for the lacing were made with a wooden punch. The canoe is then treated with pitch to close any openings. The pitch was obtained by blazing spruce trees or by collecting the pitch that leaked from the trunk of trees naturally. Pitch from the tree was mixed with ground charcoal and brought to a boil until it became workable.

The canoe in the museum was used mainly for wild ricing, and with the ricing poles, has attracted much attention over the years. (Information from Clem Plattner's column, *The Weekly Scratch Pad*, Feb 19, 1970)

In 1960, the Historical Society received a notable donation from Jim Mix of Longville. Jim brought in a

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## Cass County Has New Board Member

Dan Eikenberry has been appointed to fill one of the board positions for the Cass County Historical Society. Dan and Sue Eikenberry are substitute teachers who live on Ten Mile Lake. The family is very interested in history and historical preservation and wants to assist the Society in its efforts in these areas. We are very happy to have Dan join the Board.

The Cass County Historical Society meets on the second Tuesday of each month at 6:30 at the Museum. We still have one vacancy on the board. If you are interested in serving as a director, please contact us at 218-547-7251 and leave a message. A board member will contact you.



Items from the Native American collection.



### Cass County Historical Society Board of Directors

Eric Myhra  
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### Cass County Research Center

The research center is staffed by the Cass County Historical Society at the Cass County Museum in Waker. Someone is available to assist you in your research Tuesday-Friday from 10:00 - 5:00 from May 15-Sept 15. Research is also available by appointment through the winter. The research library, obit indexes, newspaper microfilm, and other archival materials are accessible for a \$10 research fee for non-members.

One of our immediate goals is to expand the microfilm collection of newspapers and census records as we have the only microfilm reader/printer available for public use in the county.

## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

As of January 1st, Bev Sheldon had entered nearly 12,000 obituaries into the Obit Excel file. Volunteers will be meeting again on a regular basis at the museum to read newspapers and abstract the pertinent information and put it on 3x5 index cards. More volunteers are needed as we have 50 years of newspapers to read to make our files current. Please call for information on dates and time. The Index to the obituaries has been added to our website, [www.casscountymuseum.org](http://www.casscountymuseum.org).

Volunteers are also needed to file material into our archival collection. This involves completing a collection information form and determining which file to enter the information into.

stone tool weighing 6 ¼ pounds which was found on the east shore of Lake Minnewaska, near Glenwood, by Osmund Sogge, a farmer who found it while he was cultivating his farm. Jim, who is Sogge's brother-in-law, came in possession of the stone about 1959. Jim was offered \$100 for this remarkable Indian artifact, but preferred to have it placed in the county museum.

The stone tool, which Indian Pete King stated was definitely not of Chippewa origin, is shaped like a ball peen hammer. The circular groove on which a handle was fastened with buckskin was perfectly done. The groove was made by patiently using the tough root of a Sumac bush, wetting it and dipping it in rock dust and probably silica sand and drawing it back and forth over the rock's surface until the groove indentation was deep enough. It must have taken weeks of patient and careful hand-fashioning to complete the cut. A green ash bough was then split and fitted in the groove, then buckskin fastened the split tip and the section next to the rock to hold it firmly and securely in place. The stone tool was probably the work of Indians in the 1600's. The stone tool may have been used to drive stakes to tether horses, to grind corn or pound tough venison or buffalo; no doubt it was handy for making pemmican out of blueberries and venison. (Clem Plattner, The Weekly Scratch Pad, Walker Pilot, Sept 23, 1960)

## **Remembering the Prisoner of War Camp at Remer, 1944-1945**

January of 1944 saw the relocation of about 200 German POW's in a compound of the former F-48 CCC Camp north of Remer. This was a closely watched Army experiment to determine if it would be better to allow German prisoners to do some remunerative work instead of staying behind barbwire fences. The German prisoners were all volunteers, because by international agreement, no prisoner could be made to work against his will.

The prisoners were part of a group that had been captured by American troops in Tunisia, and had served as members of Rommel's once-vaunted African Corps. The average age of the German men at the Remer camp was 23 years. Some were attached to the Luftwaffe in North Africa, some in the Panzer tank divisions, and some in the artillery and infantry.

The first contingent of prisoners arrived on Feb 7, 1944, most of them

passing through Duluth on the Soo Line Railroad. The main group arrived from the prison camp at Concordia, Kansas, in a special train. They got off the train under supervision of the US guards into sub-zero weather. Some of the prisoners were as jovial as school boys; others reserved and quiet. They were marched in single file to army trucks waiting to take them to their new quarters two miles north of Remer. Their wearing apparel was warm but it varied from overcoats and caps to overalls and blue wool jackets. Some wore the white caps of the Africa Corps, while others wore American-issue wool caps. A few carried homemade wooden boxes with their possessions, others sacks and bags; a few had suitcases. Some had their water canteens. As they walked by the station on the way to the army trucks, it was apparent that they amused themselves much as Americans do, as evidence by variety of checkerboards, musical instruments, and backgammon boards. One prisoner walked by, tightly clutching a replica of a Stuka Dive Bomber beautifully carved out of wood and painted with the German colors.

When the full complement of the German prisoners had arrived at the Remer camp, Captain Harding assembled them in the compound, announcing the pulpwood program and told them: "The basis upon which we will get along is that you will accord me and my staff the respect due to officers of the U.S. Army and in turn, I will respect you as soldiers protecting your rights as prisoners of war and guarding your welfare under the convention agreed upon by my government and yours." Interpreters slowly repeated the greeting.

The pine to be cut, in spite of being second growth, was a magnificent stand and sometimes referred to as the "Lost Forest." To the Germans working there, it must have brought nostalgic memories of the forests of Bavaria or of the Harz. This timber tract embraced 69 forties, mostly in Trelipe township, southeast of Longville and south of Remer. Ownership of this timber was picked up by Jerry Hall of Walker by acquiring titles from various owners including some of the old lumber companies that formerly worked the

area. Mr. Hall then concluded a deal with Corcoran & Sells, contractors for Wisconsin Paper Mills, to cut this tract for pulpwood. The contractors in turn made the deal to use the Germany prisoners for part of the labor needed in this huge project. About 20,000 cords of pine pulp were expected to come from this project over 18 months. The contractors hired Ralph Robideau as one of the saw filers. His father Bena Robideau was an expert saw filer during the early years when the virgin timber was being cut. The prisoners also worked for Herman Delin, Andrew T. Giffen, Walt Andrews, and for Klement Farms.

Up to the time the prisoners were moved on location in the woods, they lived in a compound of the former CCC camp. The officer in charge, Captain Harding had inspected various sites for this project, but the Remer location was finally chosen by the investigating officers.

The workday at camp began at 6:30 a.m., when the men arose. They had 30 minutes to make their beds and personal toilets. Breakfast was served from 7 to 7:15 a.m. At 7:30 the truck drivers (also prisoners) warmed up their engines. The prisoners assembled before the truck convoy of 8 to 10 trucks, with the convoy moving into the woods at 8 a.m. The men were paid 90 cents per day for every day in the woods. The government furnished their lodging and food and necessary maintenance. The camp at Remer had 247 prisoners quartered there in February of 1944. Eighteen guards were also stationed at the camp. German prisoners did all the cooking. According to Irving Anderson, a rural industries supervisor, the morale of the prisoners seemed to be

exceptionally high. There were three German officers in this camp – two lieutenants and one captain. One of the lieutenants had been appointed as the Transportation officer. Mr. Anderson noted the absence of guards with rifles. Either they were concealed at strategic points in the distance, or the prisoners of war were given full privileges of the honor system. To the casual observer, they were working much the same as any other lumber camp employing free labor.

Stuart Reasoner of Remer recalled, “I hauled garbage out of the prison camp to feed to my hogs. They had an exceptional number of good singers.... When they would get ready to walk back to the camp for dinner, they would sing, and boy, could those fellows sing.”

One smaller building within the compound was designated as a prisoner’s assembly hall. Both Catholic and Protestant services were said at the altar built by the prisoners themselves. Father Larkin of Remer celebrated the Catholic mass at 7:45 a.m. every Sunday. Reverend Hauser of Hill City conducted the Protestant service at 7:00 p.m. each Sunday.

An interesting sidelight was the camp dispensary presided over by a 30-year-old German physician in the German army. He was also captured in Tunisia. He was very popular and treated not only the prisoners but also the American soldiers.

About half of the young men were married. Many married after their arrival in the United States, said Captain Harding. The weddings were performed by proxy through the Swiss offices of the International Red Cross.

As prisoners completed contract work in logging and agriculture, the camps were gradually closed. The last prisoners of war left Minnesota in late December of 1945.

The Forest Supervisor of the Chippewa National forest announced the sale of 87 buildings, two water tanks and towers and miscellaneous outside wiring and poles at the former camps located at Pike Bay, Bena, Day Lake and Remer. The sale of the Remer camp occurred on January 7, 1946. Camps and buildings were open for inspection by prospective bidders on December 27-28, 1945. Successful bidders were allowed the period up to June 30, 1946 to remove the buildings.

Information drawn from:

“Prisoner of War Employment in Minnesota During World War II,” Minnesota History, Winter, 1975.

Walker Pilot, Dec 2, 1943

Walker Pilot, Dec 24, 1943

Walker Pilot, Feb. 11, 1944.

Walker Pilot, April 7, 1970.

Cass Lake Times, Dec 20, 1945.

McKeig, History of Remer, Minnesota, 1997.

Prisoner of War Camps folder, Cass County Museum, Walker, MN.

**Our website:**

[www.casscountymuseum.org](http://www.casscountymuseum.org)

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## 2007 Membership Drive

My/Our Pledge for 2007 membership in the Cass County Historical Society \$ \_\_\_\_\_

<u>Category</u>	<u>Pledge</u>
Single	\$10
Family	\$15
Friend	\$20
Patron	\$50
Business	\$50
Donation or Memorial	\$

Please renew your membership and return with check to the Cass County Museum,  
PO Box 505, Walker, Minnesota 56484

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Staff: Renee Geving, Director  
Asst: Jolene Safranek

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