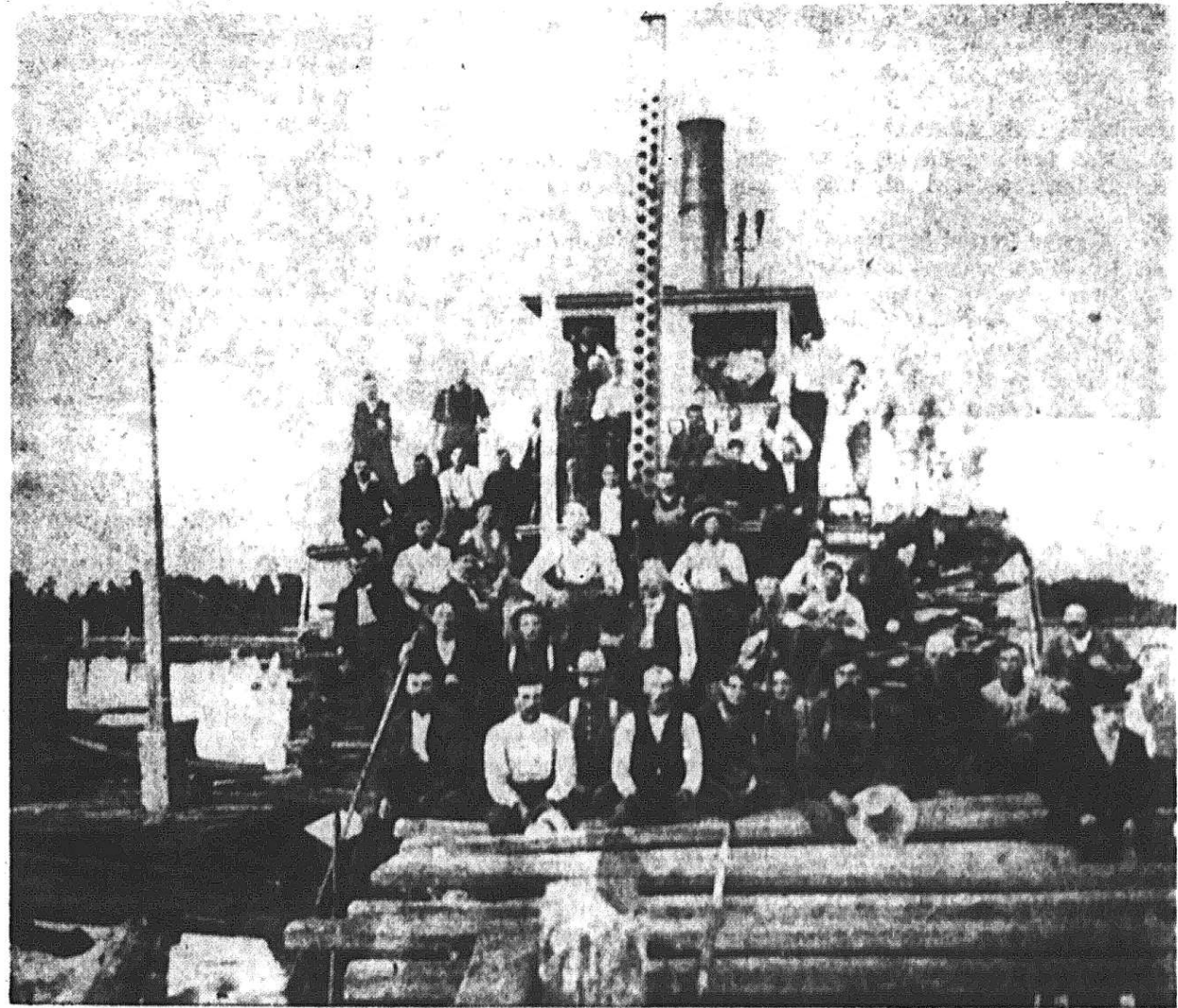


From Sechsagottfried to Bachschneider

# *Days of the Highholders*

By MARY ANN HANSETTER



## **"WE WERE A ROUGH BUNCH"**

Walter Rhyner, 828 Bay Shore Dr., Oshkosh, dug this picture out of his trunk to show the atmosphere of the old logging days from Bay Boom down the Wolf River to Oshkosh lumber mills. These loggers, who posed for the picture in 1902, have just arrived at Bay Boom on their specially-designed steamboat. After tying the logs (note wood in water) together in rafts, and attaching these by tow lines to the boat, they will be ready for the trip down river.

By **MARY ANN HANSETER**  
of the **Northwestern staff**

Sechsagottfried and Schleimans, Bachschneider, and Bekerssep — these were some of the colorful characters who made the early days of Oshkosh's southside entertaining to live in and entertaining to remember.

The Bohemian immigrants who settled around the 8-13th Street area of the southside had nicknames for everyone. These might have a relationship to the person, but just as likely they would not.

Sechsgottfried, for example, got his name from the "old country" where he lived in the sixth house on the block. Many people were called by their house number with their given name attached. Other examples of this were Ninahanzel, Tri-Wenzel, and Sechsahans, or literally, Nine John, Three Wenzel, and Six John.

Some names developed because a person lived in a certain area. There was Baagfranzl, or Frank who lived near the park. And Weezhans, or John next to the pasture, Schoesdauerkoil, or Karl from the village of Schoesdauer, and Blannerhans, or John from the upper plains. Muelhans was John who lived next to a flour mill.

### **Names Clung**

Many times a man would be given a nickname referring to his occupation or that of a relative. This gave rise to Bachschneider, the tailor who lived next to a creek and ran a tavern; Bekersep, (Joe the baker) and Wangahans, the wagonmaker. Gropfschmietjogel was a blacksmith and according to his descendants, "A mean one. He even had an ear cut off once in a fight."

Other names connected with the blacksmith were Schmiedjordan and Schmiedjogel Hedwig, a daughter of a man with that trade.

Then there were the unexplainable ones. Who could tell why someone was called Schleimahans? (literally slimy John) or Grump Anna? or Mohanslari or Schmirkei or Geirg?

There were Maryfranzel and Grossmary (big Mary) and Kloibalouisi (literally lame Louise) and Schlagerlari and Schiechlgottfried. Also living in the area were Mosbanmari, Wenzifranz, Stutznatzel, and Beihofmichel.

Today when asked what national roots his parents had, a child will answer "French," or "German," or "Swedish." Fifty years ago, that was not specific enough.

### **Many Dialects**

German immigrants were common on Oshkosh's south side but there were many distinctions among them, a wide

variety of dialects, and friction too. Those who came from Bohemia considered themselves Germanic, although in their native land they were ruled by the emperor of Austria.

This group had lived in the highlands of the Bohmerwald forests and for this reason they called the Germans of the lowlands and valleys the "Plattdeutchers." This meant "low dutch" and signified a lower social class.

The Plattdeutchers also had ~~representatives~~ on the south side. They settled around the 6-18 Street area while the Bohemians chose the lands south of what was then marshland, in the 4-13 Street vicinity, west of what is now Michigan Street.

The Bohemian women had the custom of going with wheelbarrows over to the pasture land in the South Park Avenue - 14th Street area, to collect hay. The switch engine operator of the Wisconsin Central Railroad (now Soo Line) who operated his train through this portion, observed the women and asked them, "Where are you going?" "Hoi holden," they replied in German — "collecting hay."

— "collecting hay."

### Highholders

The name has clung to the present day, in the term "highholders."

These groups were closely knit and friction was noticeable between them. "We kids used to have a huge fight every fall on what is now Oregon Street," said one old-timer, referring to the highholders and Platt-deutchers.

Even the road was blocked off for the fight, which was a sort of annual event. Since one side was primarily of the Lutheran faith and the other Catholic, this added fuel to the situation; if this was not sufficient cause for a battle, one could always stir up the Democrat-Republican issue!

It was natural for many of the immigrants to have settled in the lumber town of Oshkosh around the latter part of the last century. The Bohemians had come from a forested area in Europe. They were used to hauling logs in an even more primitive fashion than here.



## Switchman Lord

"The switchman of those days was a lord. His life was considered exciting because he traveled," commented Walter Rhyner, 81, of 828 Bay Shore Dr., a former logger who switched for the Chicago and North Western over 40 years.

Another occupation of those early south-siders was stone quarrying. Skill and strength were an essential combination for that job. The men had to be able to cut the stone according to its grain and they also needed the strength to handle the heavy tools used.

Unlike today, with cranes and other machines to haul the stone to the top of the quarry, those men carried them up by hand or pulling wagons.

Then there was the "Black Mariah." Famed in the area,

this vehicle was the essential paddy-wagon. Similar to a truck, it was open to the sky so the prisoners often had rain falling on them on the way to the jail. The Black Mariah took the prisoners to the Knapp Street compound also, where they pounded stone during the day.

Swimming was not as sanitary then as today. Children would go to the "Death quarry," west of the present Lutz quarry past Knapp Street. This hole received its name because it had ~~been abandoned by those who~~ tried to get stone from it, and it had filled with water. Then people would throw dead dogs, cats and pigs in the hole as a good burying place.

The southside of the late 1800's had one main street, Brooklyn, now called South Main, and the "Stringham Creek" which ran from South Park north to the river, at a distance of about 200 yards from the present Ohio Street. It also supported the No. 6 fire station at what is now the corner of 10th and Ohio Streets, with a cupola at its peak. This was necessary because the firemen, with no telephone service, had to keep watch for fires in the area.

Every family had its pump. When taking a long walk, a boy did not stop for a "coke" but for a drink at someone's pump on his way.

The lagoons of South Park came into being during the "gay 90's" also. Water from the unused stone quarries was pumped into the area and a drainage system provided through the creek. (This is now a sewer covered with cement.)

When someone says, "The

this vehicle was the essential paddy-wagon. Similar to a truck, it was open to the sky so the prisoners often had rain falling on them on the way to the jail. The Black Mariah took the prisoners to the Knapp Street compound also, where they pounded stone during the day.

Swimming was not as sanitary then as today. Children would go to the "Death quarry," west of the present Lutz quarry past Knapp Street. This hole received its name because it had ~~been abandoned by those who~~ tried to get stone from it, and it had filled with water. Then people would throw dead dogs, cats and pigs in the hole as a good burying place.

The southside of the late 1800's had one main street, Brooklyn, now called South Main, and the "Stringham Creek" which ran from South Park north to the river, at a distance of about 200 yards from the present Ohio Street. It also supported the No. 6 fire station at what is now the corner of 10th and Ohio Streets, with a cupola at its peak. This was necessary because the firemen, with no telephone service, had to keep watch for fires in the area.

Every family had its pump. When taking a long walk, a boy did not stop for a "coke" but for a drink at someone's pump on his way.

The lagoons of South Park came into being during the "gay 90's" also. Water from the unused stone quarries was pumped into the area and a drainage system provided through the creek. (This is now a sewer covered with cement.)

When someone says, "The

---

good old days are gone forever," he may not be far from wrong — at least when it comes to the nicknames and customs which kept these hardworking people carefree.