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## **Village of Brokaw centennial celebration, 1903-2003 : rising by the river.**

[Brokaw, Wis.]: [publisher not identified], 2003

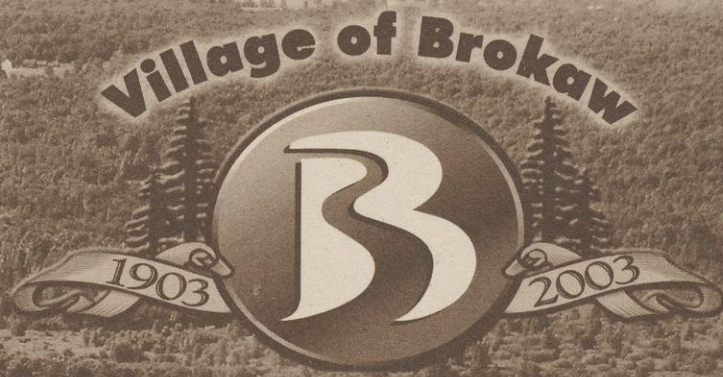
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**Centennial Celebration**  
*Rising by the River*

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1899 1900

1903 1905

1910

1915

1920

1925

1930

1935

1940

1945

1950

1903 Village of Brokaw is incorporated.  
Company builds school and Methodist Church.

1914 Fire damages the mill.

1912 Flood washes away the dam.

1923 Company builds concrete dam.

1938 Flood destroys concrete dam.

1941 Flood severely damages mill.

1945 Work begins on well, water works and sewage system.

1949 New company store/post office opens.

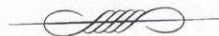
1900 First paper produced at new mill.

1910 Pay reaches fifteen cents an hour for men, nine cents for women.

1899 Wausau Paper Mills Company formed.

Gift of:

**Diane Dettmering**



1948 Company begins to sell homes to employees.  
Company store burns.

# 100 years of memories.

seamlessly entwined with the history of Wausau Papers. As a community, Brokaw often created bonds between families that made the whole town seem as if it were one big family.

In the beginning, and on into the Twenties, Brokaw was a miniature melting pot with immigrants from Norway, Italy, Germany, Poland, Austria, Canada and other countries living

together side by side and working shoulder to shoulder at the mill. History and memories tell us the Brokaw of that era was



Mill workers in an early photo.

Welcome back to Brokaw, a place with one hundred years of colorful memories and a cast of unforgettable characters. As a company town, Brokaw's unique history is



The flood of 1941.



1955

1960

1965

1970

1975

1980

1985

1990

1995

2000

2003

1950's  
Ski jumping flourishes.

1954  
Village opens new fire station.

1951  
Library opens.

1964  
School closes.

1967  
Bridge over Wisconsin River opens.

1969  
Bank opens.

1978  
Company store closes.

1997  
Library closes.  
Village annexes Business Park on west side of river.

1998  
First new commercial business opens in Business Park.

2002  
Village purchases and annexes 52 acres of Lemke farm for residential subdivision on west side of river.  
City sewer and water extended across river to River Ridge subdivision.  
Phases 1 and 2 of subdivision opened for sale of lots - 1st house built and occupied.  
First 8-unit apartment building completed and occupied.

2003  
Village of Brokaw celebrates centennial.  
Three businesses added to Business Park.

### The Methodist Church.



Brokaw as we knew it - both the homes, themselves, and the way of life - will almost certainly disappear. But adjacent to the old Brokaw and "Rising by the River" is a new Village with a business park, a subdivision and a viable future.

Take some time, now, to look back at some memories of a way of life that is vanishing all too soon. This is not a history of Wausau Paper Mills Company. To

be certain, success at the mill was vital because it meant jobs for the people of Brokaw. Likewise, a disaster at the mill was a disaster for the whole Village. But a history of the mill has been done before. We're here instead to share a few memories of what it was like to live here. Welcome back to Brokaw.



Building the road up Brokaw Hill.

a peaceful place with virtually no crime and relatively few feuds. That spirit lasted nearly fifty years until hard feelings over the company's sale of homes ripped some long-standing relationships apart.

But Brokaw survived and looked and acted like a company town well into the 1970s. Sadly,







The boarding house was home for single men working at the mill in the early days. This view is the kitchen side.

At first, there was a boarding house for single men. Then the company built six houses that held two families each. Soon, the company added a few smaller single-family houses on a street that became known as "Honeymoon Avenue". During the peak years, there would eventually be 150 households and a population of 940.

Pay in 1910 was reported to be fifteen cents an hour for men, and nine cents an hour for women. Those wages may seem low, but consider that you could rent a six-room single family home for \$6 and one half of a duplex for \$4.

Life in the homes at the time could get crowded. Families in the three bedroom

Hauling bark from the mill to fuel the potbelly stove.



Photo courtesy of Marathon County Historical Society.

# Memories: The early years.

homes with six or more kids were not uncommon. Yet, many families took in boarders to supplement their incomes. If boarders didn't sleep in your home, they might come for lunch or dinner. Minnie Duranceau at one time cooked for twenty-some boarders, plus a large family of kids. There were no plumbing or other utilities. Sometimes the homes were papered with large sheets of company paper.

Most residents remember that Italian families lived on the south east side of town. In a 1972 interview, longtime resident Frank Scholl reminisced about his Italian neighbors playing bocci, or lawn bowling. Apparently the Italians drank a lot of wine. To supplement the supply they cultivated themselves, carloads of grapes,

Scholl reported, came into town every summer. The grapes were converted to wine - lots of wine - by the Italian families. Every house had "at least three or four barrels," he said.

On Sundays the mill closed for repairs, Scholl's article reported, and most people headed for church. In 1903, the company built a Methodist Church. Lutherans worshiped in the Village Hall.

But many of Brokaw's inhabitants were Catholic. In the early years, a priest came from Wausau once a month to hold services.

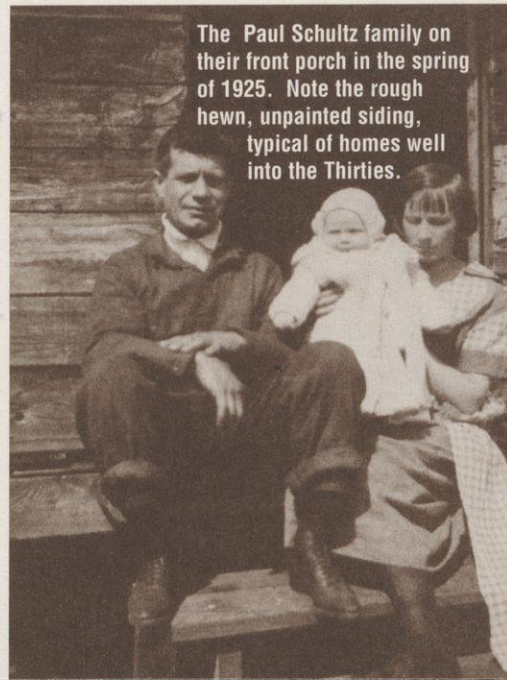
The party apparently started after church on Sunday afternoon. The men would gather at the saloon or at a home for a "buyah."

"We'd cook up a big Mulligan and everybody would come - kids, women, everybody," Scholl recalled in the article.

"We'd go up by the saloon and cook up there, eat up there, drink up there."

That spirit of community went on seven days a week. "There was a lot of sharing in those days," Mary Ann Wimmer remembers. "You would feed your own first and then share with anybody that needed it."

And for at least the first fifty years, Brokaw residents went to great lengths to supplement the food they bought at the company store. Most homes had extensive gardens that stretched from the house to



The Paul Schultz family on their front porch in the spring of 1925. Note the rough hewn, unpainted siding, typical of homes well into the Thirties.





**Left: The Methodist Church as it appeared when it had a congregation. It was later converted to a storage facility and then, torn down.**

**Right: Abe Lique, proprietor of Abe's Place, a saloon on the west side of the river.**

the cinder road. Enterprising residents sometimes raised rabbits for sale or for their family's own consumption. Of course, hunters added rabbits from the wild, plus deer and game birds to the menu, while the nearby river yielded fish and turtles.

Heat came from wood and coal fired potbelly stoves. Some people bought wood, but Dewey Cumberland remembers

burning peeled-off spruce bark in his parents' home.

"The mill would give us the bark," he said. "We'd go up there with wheelbarrows and haul it home." Coal at his home either came from the mill or "we'd go look for it on the railroad tracks."

"The stoves worked pretty good," he remembers. "You cut a hole in the ceiling and added a grate so the heat would get up to the second floor."

At first, the town's entire water supply came from a single community pump. Later the company put in pumps between houses. "The families shared the pump to get their drinking water," Cumberland said.

Over the years, the town has had its share of colorful characters. There was a marshall named Parker who wore two guns on his belt, but couldn't shoot straight. A 1972 *Wausau Daily Record-Herald* article reports that on one occasion two residents got the marshall drunk, threw his guns away, locked him in a cell in the Brokaw jail and threw the keys away.

**The original company store served as the social center of the village. Residents bought their groceries here with company script. Plays, programs and events were held in the large room over the store.**

"When the marshall woke up the next morning he could not remember what had happened," the article says, "Children playing nearby finally heard him yelling and someone came and sawed him out."

Another well-known resident went by several names but was sometimes known as "Little John." A Polish immigrant, Little John's real name was John Reczkowski. Some said he could forecast the weather and future events.

Loretta Scholl remembers Little John with affection. "He was like a grandfather to me," she says today. "He lived in a cabin across the tracks."

In 1964, Loretta's father, Frank Scholl, found Little John dead, frozen in the snow. He apparently was on his way home to his cabin when he died. Little John was 84 years old when he passed into Brokaw history.



**"Little John" was one of many colorful characters in Brokaw.**





# Jumping into history.

No one remembers who was the first. But some time in the Thirties, a Brokaw resident strapped on a pair of conventional down hill skis, took a deep breath, whipped down a ski slide at death-defying speed and then shot into the air for a jump of 100 feet or more. It was the beginning of a sporting event that would put the little company town on the map as the premier ski jumping site in the midwest.

Jack Toivonen, a jumper in the Forties and early Fifties, remembers Brokaw residents and other competitors jumping off a 45-foot angle-iron slide as early as 1939.

Originally, the ski jumping team, comprised of jumpers from Brokaw and the greater Wausau area, were a unit in the Wausau Ski Club. That organization included down hill skiers and the main event

for the club was a down hill racing and ski jumping tournament as part of the Wausau Winter Frolics. The club operated ski slides at several locations, including Wausau, Rothschild and Parcherville.

The old angle-iron slide was destroyed in a wind storm in the mid-Forties, Toivonen recalls.

In 1949, the Wausau Ski Club moved its tournament to Brokaw after the old 45-footer was replaced with a wooden slide.

"The Wausau Ski Club welcomes you to our 4th annual tournament," the club's program announced," which is

being held this year on the new Brokaw Ski Slide. The hill was built the past summer by the Wausau skiers, with the help and support of the Wausau Paper Mills Company."



**Above: Brokaw residents grooming the slide.**

**Right: The big slide dominated Brokaw Hill**

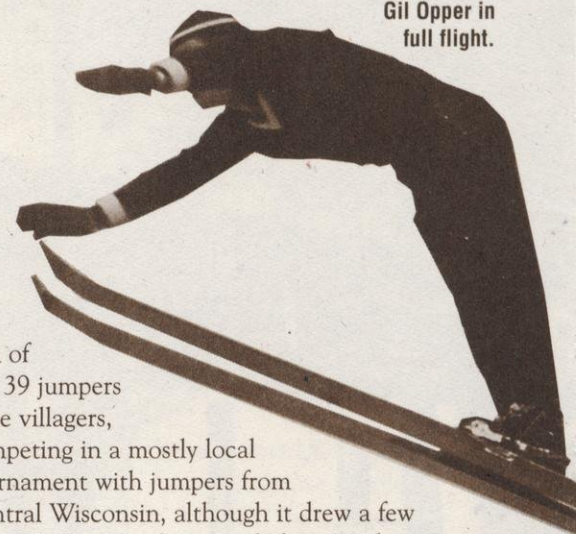


Ten of the 39 jumpers were villagers, competing in a mostly local tournament with jumpers from Central Wisconsin, although it drew a few from Madison, and one each from Michigan and Minnesota. "The jumpers will do their utmost to put on a good show for you, so that you will become a fan of the Wausau Ski Club," the program continued.

The jumpers from Brokaw were largely self-taught and used whatever equipment they could get their hands on. "I started off jumping with army infantry skis I got from army surplus," Toivonen said. "When I was 15, I got a pair of Northland Red Tips and they were heavy skis. They weighed 19 pounds."

The annual tournament became a project for the entire community. The jumpers' families and neighbors pitched in at the concession stand, served as scorers, starters and markers and helped with the parking traffic jams. On low snow years, Brokaw residents unloaded tons of snow from railroad cars shipped in from Upper Michigan. The Brokaw Fire Auxiliary provided a banquet for the jumpers. The Brokaw Ambulance stood by to rush the injured to medical treatment, although, except for a few minor concussions, Toivonen remembers few injuries.

In 1950, jumpers were plunging off a



**Gil Opper in full flight.**

**The first tournament jump off the 85-foot slide in 1950.**



new 85-foot slide at Brokaw Hill as the facility was becoming known. The following year the ski jumpers struck out on their own, leaving the Wausau Ski Club and forming their own organization, the Valley Winter Sports Club.

The club now maintained five slides, inventoried in the tournament program for that year. "We have a beginners slide at Brokaw, an intermediate slide at Hammond



Four members of the Wausau Ski Club competed in the National Junior Jumping Championships at Steamboat Springs, Colorado. Left to right: Dave Stork, Jim Pagel, Jack Toivonen and Joe Bloom.

Park in Wausau, a junior slide in Parcherville and Brokaw and our senior slide in Brokaw."

About this time, the tournament at Brokaw Hill took

off as a premier sports event, drawing top jumpers from all over the midwest and beyond. In 1951, a hill record was set by a jumper from Sweden. (Club member Dave Stork from Rothschild broke it in 1955 with

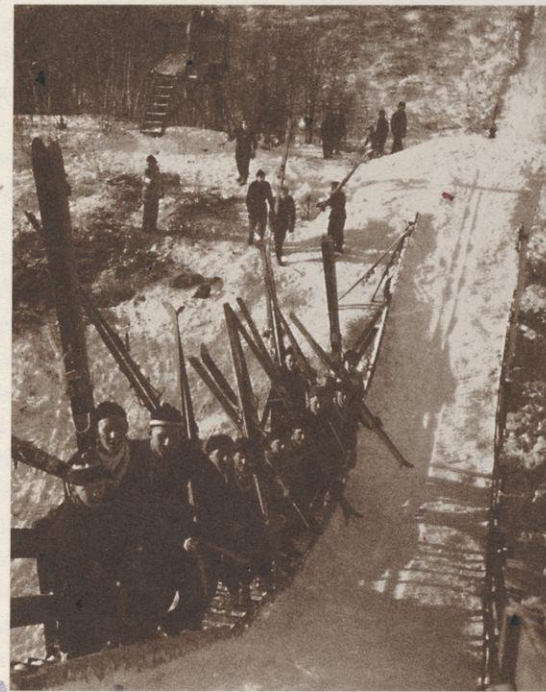
a 147-foot jump.)

The tournaments were wildly popular with spectators as well and they drew thousands to the village every year. "The last tournament I remember was 1953," Toivonen said.

"Every available space in Brokaw was plowed to park as many cars as possible. When they could park no more, cars lined up back to Restlawn Cemetery and were turned away."

The 1957 tournament drew over 80 jumpers and a sea of spectators. But then things started sliding down hill. Some say the advent of the more death-defying ski flying with bigger hills and thrills robbed jumping of its popularity. By the early sixties, the slides were in disrepair and eventually the mill tore them down.

Area ski jumpers in 1949. front to back: Dave Stork, Ken Prellwitz, Ed (Rosmenoski) Ross, Joe Lenard, Allan Opper, Roman Sherfinski, Breck LeMere, Ken Wahl, Ken Jensen, Darrell Holubetz, Howard Holubetz, Karl Holubetz. In background: Bob Michkowski, Joe Bloom, Gil Opper, "Rhiny" Stork.



The Wausau Ski Club members. Back row: Gil Opper, Bob Michkowski, Dave Halkowski, Al Opper, Ken Opper, Don Utecht, Dave Stork Front Row: Ken Jensen, Ed Rosmenoski, Stan Lenard, Joe Lenard, Loyal LaMere, Breck LaMere





# Good sports.

Since a river runs around it, it's not surprising that the Village of Brokaw would spawn a number of fishermen that reached legendary status.

Apparently fishing was popular throughout the mill. The company publication *Sidelites* regularly reported lunger catches by anglers working at the Wausau Paper Mills. In 1948, one issue reports 17 of the 20 prizes offered by the Wausau YMCA's Industrial Fishing Contest were captured by mill employees.

One legend, who became a renowned guide on the Wisconsin River, was Arnold "Greasy" Barttelt.

An issue of

*Sidelites* recorded Barttelt's catch of a 9 pound, 4 oz. walleye.

"Curiosity prompted the \$64 question," *Sidelites* said. "Where did you get him?" Arnold replied, 'Practically in our own back yard. It's no

The results of the 1951 deer hunting contest as seen in *Sidelites*.

secret. Why should Brokaw fishermen travel way Up North when you can get lunkers right out in front of the mill?"

Greasy fished throughout his entire career at Wausau Paper Mills. He retired as a blacksmith in 1975 and began a second career as a full-time guide.

"Two years later - in 1978 - he landed 69 muskies on the river," the *Wausau Daily Herald* recalled in a 1989 article. "Since that time he averages about 50 muskies a year, not including the fish caught by his clients."

In the article, Barttelt explained how he could produce such phenomenal results. "I'm out there every day. That's the secret of getting musky. You have to be there every day. If you miss a day, you can be sure that's the day they are biting."

But Greasy Barttelt was not alone in his obsession with the Wisconsin River. Barttelt and his buddy, Harold Duranceau, formed a legendary fishing duo. They both fished the Wisconsin River between Brokaw and Merrill for over 60 years - from grade school days until they could no longer fish.



Legendary fisherman and guide Harold Duranceau with one of the fifty or so muskies he caught every year.

Duranceau retired in 1975 from his job as a millwright in the maintenance department in the mill, and for years after, they both spent every single day they could on the river between ice-out and freeze-up. Duranceau also became a sought-after guide.

The same 1989 *Wausau Daily Herald* article said that Duranceau caught 65 legal musky the first year he retired and then averaged 40 to 65 muskies per year for several years after that. "His largest musky was 49 -1/2 inches long and weighed 30 pounds," the article said.

Harold Duranceau died in 1999, some years after his fishing partner, friend and neighbor Greasy Barttelt. Among fishermen, the legend of Harold and Greasy will never die.

Harold and Greasy were expert sportsmen off the water and in the woods, like many other Brokaw residents. Deer hunting was embedded in Brokaw culture, as it was, and still is, in towns throughout Wisconsin. During the depression - when times were tough - deer hunting

DEER HUNTING OFFICIAL ENTRIES - PLANT CONTEST		
NAME	WGT.	KIND
SPARKY BAUMANN	170	DOE
JOE CASE	185	BUCK
JEROME LOSS	162	DOE
LES HAMMOND (WINNER)	175	BUCK
HAROLD DURANCEAU	180	DOE
D. HOLZEM (WINNER)	186	BUCK
CHAS PIERCE	152	DOE
RAY JOHNSTON	178	BUCK
A. BARTTELT	182	BUCK

The Brokaw Papers team about 1950.

Top row-left to right: Jerome Loss, Melvin Utecht, Leonard Brown, Jack Wysocki, Harold Duranceau, Ray Miller, Niles Gappa, Wally Rousseau. Bottom row-left to right: George Heinz, Pete Heinz, Arnold "Greasy" Barttelt, Calvin Baumann, Elroy Timm, Eugene Baumann, Erwin "Putchie" Baumann, Paul Schultz.

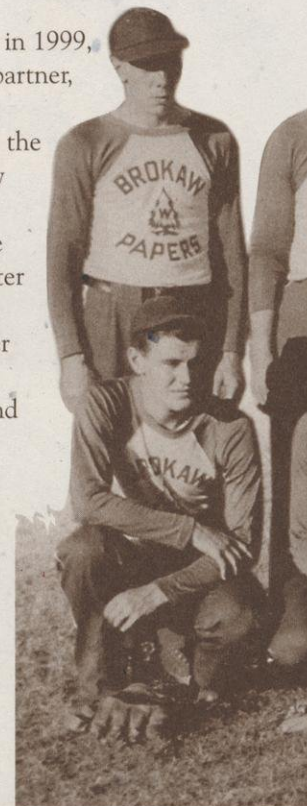




Photo courtesy of Marathon County Historical Society.



Above: The Brokaw Papers softball team in action at Marathon Park.

Below: Kids of many mill employees played in the Wausau area Pony League. Here, Manager Dick Platta, Pitcher Tom Polzer and Catcher Tom Weinkauff confer at home plate at Oak Island Park in 1957.



Photo courtesy of Marathon County Historical Society.

became more than a sport. It was an important source of meat and not just during deer hunting season.

As times returned to normal, deer hunting made a comeback as a competitive sport, during legal hunting season. Don Holzem won the 1951 mill deer hunting contest with a 186 pound buck. "Where'd I get him?" Holzem asked himself in a *SideLites* article. "Right in my back yard!"

A 1952 issue featured Harold Duranceau's brother, Norman, and his son, Roger, on the cover with a 167 pound buck, 10-point buck. "Tell 'em how we nailed him, son," urged Norman.

"Aw shucks, they wouldn't believe me anyway," grinned Roger. "Just lucky."

"Gil Opper almost got one," *SideLites* said in another article. "He had a buck all lined up in his scope when bang! another hunter unseen by Gil, and a little closer, beat him to the draw. Gil was a good sport about it all. He helped the fellow dress it out and drag it."

Apparently, just about every edible or marketable animal wound up in the sights of Brokaw residents. Issues of *SideLites* abound with reports of hunts for bear, duck, fox, geese - all types of game.

The Case family had a good trapping year in 1952,

*SideLites*

reported.

"Frank Case, Wood Department, came up with 91 muskrats and, must I whisper the awful tidings, 8 mink. Brother Freddie, Machine Room, with the aid of son Billy, put the clamps on 219 muskrats and 2 mink."

Besides hunting and fishing, organized sports flourished in the village as well. *SideLites* regularly covered the ups and downs of company-sponsored bowling teams in both men's and women's leagues.

For many years the Brokaw softball team was a force in the City League. "If you haven't seen this scrappy softball outfit during Tuesday night workouts, you're missing some fun," *SideLites* told fans in 1955.

"Brokaw is one of the few all-industrial teams in the schedule - as a matter of fact, they are last year's Independent League champs. Also, it is known that our sharp downtown competitors mean to chase these papermakers to the showers - if they can!"







This Brokaw kitchen band entertained at many Village functions during the Thirties.

In 1940, Brokaw made news. The Village voted to remain the driest spot in Marathon County and policies of Wausau Papers Mill Company had nothing to do with the decision.

The *Wausau Record Herald* quoted Melvin Hammond, Village clerk. "We had a referendum in the Village last spring to learn if the people wanted a tavern. The voters turned the referendum down by an overwhelming majority. I guess the people just don't want a tavern in the town."

"When Brokawites want to parch their thirst with a schooner of suds, they must travel a mile and a half to the nearest oasis - Brokaw Corners

on County trunk Highway W," the article pointed out.

Brokaw once had a tavern within the

Students from the Brokaw School plant trees in 1945 as part of an Arbor Day celebration under the direction of D.C. Everest

# Old gathering places.

Village limits, but prohibition closed it down in the 1920's, along with Abe Lique's Saloon on the other side of the river. In those early days, there was no bridge and residents had to walk across the dam to get to Abe's for a Saturday night dance or a Sunday "buyah".

By some accounts, Abe's was not the classiest of establishments. Mary Ann Wimmer remembers a visit to Abe's. "We saw a cat running around among the candy bars. After that, we always wiped the beer bottles with our handkerchiefs," she said.

Abe's was certainly not the only entertainment in town. During the Forties, the Wausau YMCA had a program that brought Hollywood to Brokaw every Monday night in the summer time. Bringing their own popcorn, residents gathered outside the company store to watch movies projected on the side of the store building. "There were cartoons,

cowboy movies, Flash Gordon, you name it," Mary Ann said. "We hated it when it rained on Monday because there were no movies."

Kids in Brokaw spent a lot of time outside. "The woods and the town. That was our playground," according to Mary Ann.

Kids would gather at special places in the woods with names like "Pine Park" and "The Divide." Swimming in the river was banned by many parents, but kids often dove in anyway. To be certain, there were rules in Brokaw. At 8:45 pm, the whistle blew at the mill and you had better start heading for home. At 9 pm, the whistle blew again and all kids were required to be home for curfew.

Dewey Cumberland remembers playing in a spot called the "Pine Cone Tunnel." "It was a place on the hill where the trees grew around the rocks. You could sit on a piece



Miss Brokaw of 1971, Tammy Dettmering, receives her crown from outgoing Miss Brokaw, Jorene Kufahl.







Grade School kids perform a formal mock wedding known as a "Tom Thumb Wedding" at the Community Hall above the old Brokaw store in 1931.

visited every single home," according to Mary Ann Wimmer.

Weddings and showers were also events that brought the whole community together. The ladies - every lady in town - gathered at the Boarding House or the Village Hall for showers, according to Loretta Schroll. "The whole town was invited to the wedding, too and after the wedding there was always a shivaree." The shivarees were noisy affairs, accompanied by the sounds of gunfire (guns fired in the air) and fire crackers. Shivarees usually followed silver and golden wedding anniversary celebrations as well.

Wedding receptions were sometimes celebrated out of town. Dewey Cumberland talks about traveling to the Colonial Ballroom, east of Wausau for a number of local weddings. "We'd all pile into cars. Eight people to a car. At the time, there was no running water at the Colonial, but we sure had a good time for a buck and a half."

Villagers looked elsewhere for entertainment, too. For those who wanted to dance on a Saturday night, Dewey recalls, there were many trips to the "Bloody Sixth Ward" in Merrill.



Winter Frolic Queen candidates Violet (Opper) LaMere, Rosie (Halkowski) Platta, and Rosella (Toivenen) Aldrich

of cardboard and slide on the pine needles. It was just like shooting rapids. You could hit a rock or a tree."

In the winter, "The Hill" was ideal for toboggan rides as well. Down by the river there was a back water and summer swimming hole known as "The Pond" that was often cleared for ice skating in the winter.

Christmas was a time that drew the Village together into one big family. On Christmas Eve, Santa Claus would make the rounds, paying a visit to all of the kids.

Before prohibition, many adults had a Christmas Eve visitor, too. The owner of the corner bar made house calls, treating his customers to their favorite beverages.

On Christmas Day, villagers invited everyone into their homes to see the family Christmas tree and other decorations. Christmas cheer was passed around, too. "You kept going until you



Miss Brokaw of 1950, LouAnn Opper



The Brokaw Fire Department operated an ambulance service in the 1950s.

## Improving with age.

In 1948, fire dealt a double blow to the people of Brokaw. The fire leveled the old wood frame company store, long the central meeting place for residents who wanted to socialize and gossip. And along with the store, what served as the town's library, also went up in flames.



The Brokaw Fire Department gathers for a photo in the 1950s.

For a time the store reopened in a temporary facility, a former Village school building. Then in 1949, the company built a new store in a presumably more fireproof

brick structure. The new store featured a then newfangled frozen foods department and gas pumps outside the front door. It opened with much fanfare, giving away free ice cream bars during the grand opening.

Robert Taylor was the manager of the new 95 X 30 foot store. He was also the Brokaw postmaster, so residents could shop and mail their letters at the post office located in the store itself. The new store operated until 1978 and was later converted to mill offices.

It took a little longer to get the library back in operation. The original library was small, consisting of a few books in metal lockers in a room above the old company store. In 1951, Brokaw opened a new library in a building that had seen previous service as a doctor's office, a school for first and second grades, and a Lutheran church. The library was eventually absorbed by the Marathon County Library system and operated as a branch for many years.

Often the library did much more than check out books and created several much-loved programs for kids. "In the summer,



we participate with the summer reading theme of that year," one Brokaw library report reads, "have several nights where we have a contest such as chewing gum contest, sidewalk art, or softball throw."

The library was popular in winter, too. "During the fall and winter months we have 3 or 4 movie nights where two films are shown," the report continues. "Because there is no entertainment in the village, this is quite a happening and most of the children come."

The Brokaw branch library operated until 1997, when the Marathon County Library system encountered budget cuts. The cost of \$2.39 every time a book was checked out was too high and promised to go higher with Brokaw's dwindling population; plus fewer and fewer readers would be served. "It was a bad day in Brokaw," lamented the *Wausau Daily Herald*. "The same day the Marathon County Library Board ordered its branch library closed, a fire

Mamie Cizek shopping in the new company store.

Photo courtesy of Marathon County Historical Society.





destroyed one Brokaw family's house and damaged a neighbor's."

Fire protection has been a concern for both the mill and the town for their entire history. Given the isolation and inaccessibility of the village until the bridge was completed over the Wisconsin River, residents recognized the importance of a volunteer fire department. An early fire squad, organized by the mill, battled the devastating mill fire of 1912, until help arrived from Wausau.

The volunteer fire department grew steadily over the next forty years and in 1954 the village decided to build a new fire station. An issue of *SideLites* that year reported that construction was under way for a new 40 x 90 foot structure.

"Brokaw facilities for equipment storage has been somewhat limited for the past several years," *SideLites* said. "Meanwhile the Village has purchased new fire fighting equipment, including a truck, a utility truck, snow removal equipment, etc."

The article also mentioned that the Village planned to add ambulance service in the near future and was shopping for a used ambulance. The building was also being developed to serve as a "cornerstone" that could someday - with additions - be developed into a "large well-equipped community hall, second to none."



Photo courtesy of Marathon County Historical Society.

**Generations of Brokaw residents attended Village schools. This is the original built in 1903. The last school building closed in 1964.**



**The 1st and 2nd grade classes in 1945 at the Brokaw school.**

The building would also add much-needed facilities for community or mill meetings and events. "In addition, meeting accommodations were somewhat at a premium ever since the store and community hall burned a number of years ago," *SideLites* said. "Word is that with proper request, the accommodations will also be made available for various mill meetings."

In the early 90's, the dwindling population caused by the paper mill buying houses as they came on the market, limited the number of people available for fire protection services. The Village had discontinued ambulance service in the late 50's because of the new

requirements for emergency technicians. It was now faced with the possibility of having to discontinue the volunteer fire department because of increased training requirements and the lack of volunteers. Officials were also faced with replacing the Village fire truck which was cost prohibitive. A referendum was held and the vote favored discontinuing the Volunteer Fire Department and contracting for services with the Town of Maine Fire Department; which has continued to today. Some of the Village residents now serve as volunteers with the Town of Maine Volunteer Fire Department, and as First Responders.

Banking came to Brokaw in 1969, when First American National Bank broke ground for its Brokaw branch. Complete with a drive-up window and 24-hour envelope depository, the Brokaw branch had three teller windows.







The Brokaw Credit Union and the U.S. Post Office still operate downtown in old Brokaw.

Governor Warren P. Knowles, flanked by a host of local dignitaries, dedicated a 580-foot bridge spanning the Wisconsin River and linking Brokaw with Highway 51. The year was 1967 and the event may well have been the biggest moment in Village history since the mill opened.

Finally, the Village had a direct access to a major highway. Residents could get to shopping districts in Wausau and Merrill faster and easier. The mill would benefit,



The Northside Business Park, operating in the new addition to Brokaw.

# Bridge to the future.

too. As the *Wausau Daily Record-Herald* noted, "An audience of several hundred viewed the event on the four-span structure, where several truckloads of pulpwood and several paper trucks were parked to symbolize major uses of the new bridge."

With all the good that the bridge brought to the community came changes that would erode the Village's decades-old traditions that made it a unique company town. The changes were gradual, but profound. For instance, villagers were no longer as dependent on the company store for food and the store - the epicenter of Village social life - would close forever in a few short years. It was now easier for mill workers to commute to work from other communities and, conversely, for Brokaw residents to work in communities other than Brokaw.

But, today the bridge that changed everything in Brokaw is literally the bridge to the Village's future. In fact it's the bridge to its very survival.

The population of Brokaw had been dropping for years. By 1990, only 224 people were living in the Village. By 2002 the population had dropped to 102. If there had been any further

erosion, Brokaw ran a serious risk of losing its status as a Village. And there was no point in trying to attract new residents. Wausau-Mosinee Paper Corp. had begun to exercise its first refusal rights whenever a home came up for sale. The company plans to reclaim the original land for future mill expansions. So, the company has been buying the homes back and, one by one, tearing them down.

By the mid-Nineties, Village officials reluctantly began thinking seriously about disincorporation.



The new water tower under construction.

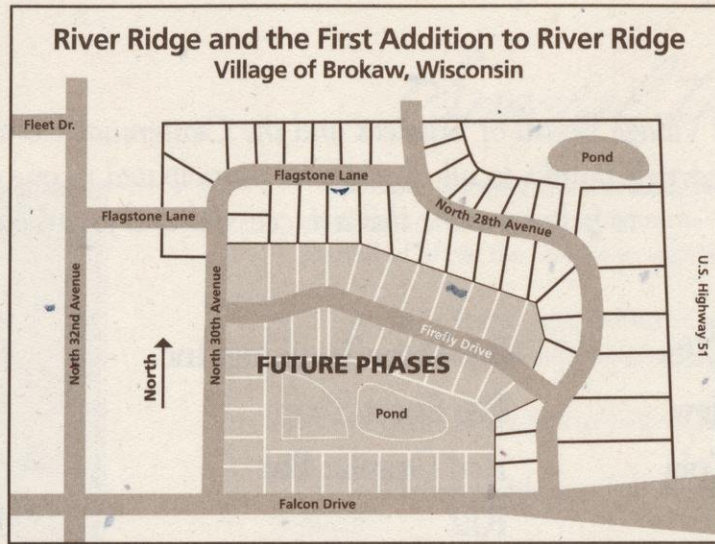
Life in Brokaw was becoming more difficult. "So few people were flushing toilets, for example," an article in the *Wausau Daily Herald* stated in 2002, "the Village's wastewater treatment plant couldn't operate properly." Many remaining residents were of retirement age and faced



ballooning sewer and water rates as the population shrank.

The solution was expansion, but the Wisconsin River and the virtually undevelopable granite bluffs seemed to have the Village impossibly landlocked against any possible annexation to the Village.

But there was a solution and that's how Brokaw's bridge became the Village's bridge to a future. Village officials looked west, across the Wisconsin River for expansion. In 1997, a landowner in the Town of Maine wanted to develop what had previously been a clay barrow site. The developer knew water and sewer services would be necessary and approached the Village regarding annexation and began developing a business park. The petition for annexation of 52 acres was approved by the Village and the State of Wisconsin and zoned for commercial and light industrial facilities. A Tax Incremental Finance District (TIF) was created to serve as a funding mechanism to allow the extension



of city sewer and water to the site, which was completed in 2002. Several businesses have already opened their doors in the Northside Business Park.

Next, the Village purchased fifty acres adjacent to the business park and subdivided it into 86 residential lots with spectacular views of the valley and the bluffs surrounding old Brokaw. Single family homes and apartment buildings have been going up in the new site as old homes continue to be torn down in old Brokaw.

Village president, Judy Rose expects the new River Ridge Subdivision to push Brokaw's population to between 300 and 500 people within a few years.

Getting sewer and water to the new area was a daunting task involving a complex river crossing and tough excavations in granite formations in portions of the annexed property. The project required a municipal water booster pump station and a new elevated water

tower due to higher elevations on the west side of the river. The bridge, once again, was vital to the success of the project. Sewer and water lines were slung under the bridge to achieve the river crossing.

Money was another problem. The TIF District was expanded and a Community Development Authority (CDA) was created to increase funding. The project did not become a reality, however, until a \$1,000,000 federal grant was awarded to the Village in 2002, through the efforts of U.S. Representative David R. Obey, representing Wisconsin's 7th Congressional District.



New homes "Rising by the River".

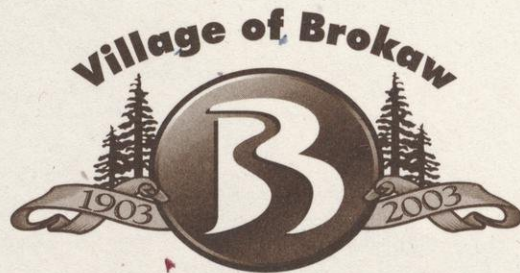
Without the determination and inspired thinking of a dedicated group of village officials and the timely grant, Brokaw would have ceased to exist early in this new century. Now Brokaw is Rising by the River.



The new River Ridge Apartments complex.







**Centennial Celebration**

*The Village Board of Trustees and the Centennial Committee extend our heartfelt thanks to all of you who participated in one way or another to help us make this a successful and joyful event.*

Anderson Engineering, Inc.  
 Brian's IDK  
 Brickner Motors, Inc.  
 Brokaw Credit Union  
 Chico's Restaurant  
 County Market - Wausau  
 C T L Company, Inc.  
 Dairy Queen -  
 Grand Avenue  
 Donut Junction - Wausau  
 Foth & Van Dyke  
 Grebe's Ace Hardware  
 & Appliance  
 Gulliver's Landing  
 Homestead Inn  
 K-Mart  
 Kiwanis Club  
 of Greater Wausau

Krueger Floral-N-Gifts  
 Kwik Trip - Riverview  
 Lake Shore Coca Cola  
 Bottling  
 Lemke Cheese Co., Inc  
 Loading Zone Eatery  
 & Lounge  
 Marcis Signs  
 Dave Marcis Racing  
 Mega Pick-N-Save -  
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 M&I Bank  
 Menards  
 Nick's Outdoor  
 Unlimited, LLC  
 Northside Citgo - Brokaw  
 People's State Bank

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 Riverview Café & Bakery  
 Rosemurgy International  
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 Schmidt's Ballroom & Grill  
 Shawn's Bases Loaded  
 Stainless Steel  
 Comfort Galleries

Stark GM Auto  
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 Services  
 Trappe River Golf Course  
 Town of Maine Fire Dept.  
 Town of Maine First  
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 Town of Maine Lions Club  
 Valley Evergreen  
 Valley Scale Service, Inc.  
 Walmart - Wausau  
 WAOW-TV 9  
 Wausau Daily Herald  
 Wausau-Mosinee Paper  
 Corp.  
 Wisconsin Feed Mill  
 Builders, Inc.



## *Special thanks to:*

Duane (Dewey) Cumberland, Loretta Scholl, Mary Ann Wimmer and Jack Toivonen for sharing their memories of life in the Village. And to Vivian (Brown) Radtke, who lent us her journal of life in the Village as experienced by her family.

Ruthelle Frank, who helped us with identifying families who lived here and in gathering sources of historical information.

Rochelle Frank for her help in planning the Kids games and finding a source for prizes.

The many people who lent us pictures of historical value and other family heirlooms for display.

Don Hildebrandt, Postmaster of the Brokaw Post Office, for arranging for the Commemorative cancellation stamp and scheduling special hours for our centennial celebration.

Dan Green, Graphic Specialist with Foth and Van Dyke for designing the special Centennial logo and commemorative postal cancellation stamp, as well as the flyers we mailed.

Bob Lieving, who researched and wrote our Centennial Book, putting his heart into the many stories relating to the history, events and people who formed the culture of this Village through the years. Curt Stenz, who brought the spirit of the Village to life with his captivating page designs.

And, last but not least, Marge Josiger and Brenda Weisenberger, who were the mainstay of the Centennial Committee, taking care of the many details that made everything come together for this event. And to Jenny Josiger for stepping in to help midway through our planning; Jim Sonnentag, Gary Roeder and Charlie Blarek for taking the time from their other duties for the Village to help the Committee.

On behalf of the Village Board of Trustees, Thanks to All of You!

Judy Rose, President  
Village of Brokaw



The Brokaw Centennial  
Celebration and this  
book are dedicated to  
the memory of the  
generations of  
hardworking Brokaw  
residents who made this  
Village a community  
with shared traditions,  
solid American values  
and 100 years of  
wonderful memories.





## *It takes a village.*

Just recently, the entire nation was reintroduced to a long-forgotten proverb. "It takes a whole village to raise a child." When you reflect upon those words of wisdom, you begin to realize that it's something that the residents of Brokaw put into practice 100 years ago and built it into a tradition that lasted for decades. Growing up in Brokaw, you had an extended family caring for you that stretched house by house, block by block throughout the entire community.

Indeed, we were a community in the very best definition of the word. When times were good, we knew how to party. When times were tough, we knew how to share. When disasters struck, we stuck together and rebuilt.

Since we lived and worked together in a company town that was, for many years of its history partially isolated, our friendships were closer than most. Sure, everybody knew your business, but that's not always a bad thing when it comes to caring for your neighbors.

It is our extreme pleasure to welcome you to our Centennial Celebration, a momentous milestone for Brokaw at a momentous time in Village history.

The unique culture of a company town faded away over the last few years and the town, as we knew it, is likely to disappear soon.

But now we all have strong hopes that a newer and different Brokaw will survive to see its bicentennial.

So, we invite you to share the memories with your family, friends and neighbors. Perhaps, for a time, we can bring back the sense of community we all loved. And we also invite you to share our hopes for the new Brokaw, "Rising by the River".

Judy Rose  
President, Village of Brokaw

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