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Colfax Stone Company. 1982

Susan (Fennie) Delle Shaffette

[s.l.]: [s.n.], 1982

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COLFAX SANDSTONE COMPANY

Geography 112
Winter Quarter 1982
Susan Fennie

Colfax Stone Company

Susan Fennie

Winter Quarter, 1982

Geography 112

In the village of Colfax, Wisconsin, there was a thriving business around the turn of the century that now remains only a memory. Colfax is a small town that sits at the mid-point between the equator and the North Pole. The Colfax Stone Company was in operation from 1900 until the 1930's. The only major record of the sandstone quarrying company was written in 1925 in a History of Dunn County (only one-half page).

The following is an excerpt from that book:

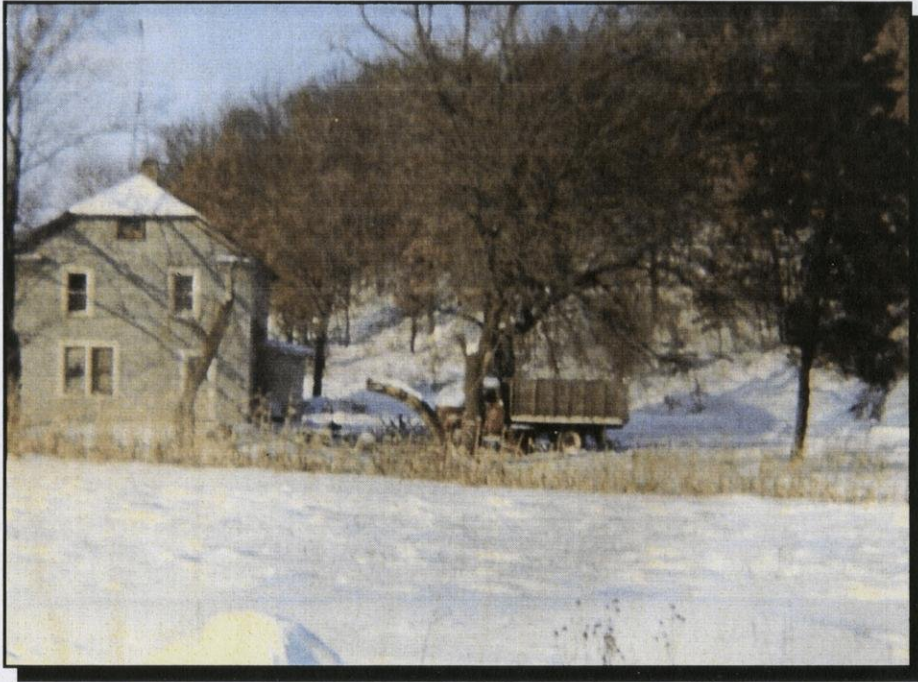
“The enterprise was started by William Lister, who came here from Maiden Rock, Pierce County, Wisconsin, in 1900, accompanied by O.W. Olson, and while prospecting in this vicinity, discovered a deposit of good building stone in a bluff one mile from the village. Securing title to the land, he established a quarry, which he operated alone for about eight years. At the end of that time he took in as partners Sam Conway of Eau Claire and John Peterson of Madison... The business is still conducted on the same basis, about 15 men on an average being employed in the quarries. O.W. Olson, who has been with the local concern since the beginning is manager of the yard and quarries.”

The trail of information seems to end in 1925, but many of the people who were young then, are still in Colfax. Two of these people had many memories to share: Elmer Hill (my grandfather) and John Hammer (Elaine shared also). Most of the information that was learned about the quarries is from the three of them.

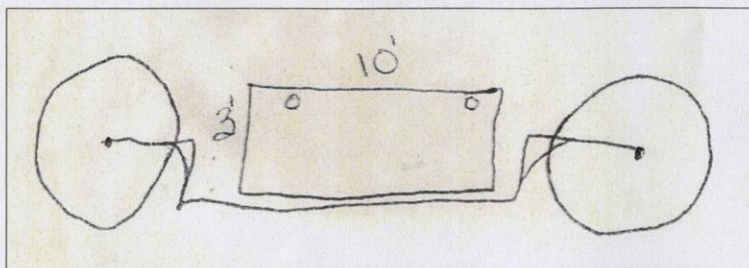
The quarry is rather run down and over grown now, but is still visible from the road. On the next page are photographs of one section of the quarries.



This next third picture is of a boarding house about a mile from the quarries that some of the quarry workers live at. It was then owned by a Peterson family.



When the company was at its height, there were three quarry pits, each being about a half of a block long. The stone was drilled into by hand and it was dynamited loose. The sandstone was then cut out in ten foot long blocks, approximately three feet wide and three feet high. The workmen used a steel saw that resembled a crosscut saw to cut the blocks of stone. Notches were drilled in the upper part of the block for hooks to be set into the stone. The sandstone was then lifted onto underslung wagons by a hand-cranked crane. Four horses were needed to haul the stone into town. The drawing below is a tracing of my grandfather's drawing that he made to illustrate what he meant by an "underslung wagon".



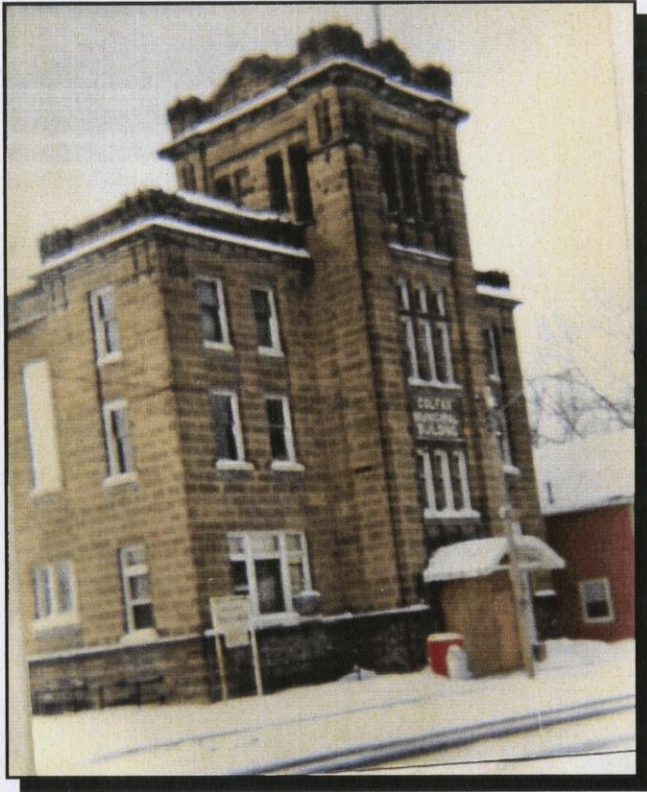
Once the stone was in town, it was pushed onto large carts. The carts were on railroad rails that ran into the finishing shop of the yard. The shop was a shell-type building that had sides that were removed in the summer to help withstand the heat. Inside the shop was a steel saw that operated on a cradle. This saw had six to eight blades (no teeth) that just moved back and forth in a rocking motion. Water spigots were located above the cuts to keep the blade cool. These blades were approximately eight inches wide and quickly worn thin from cutting the stone.

The face of the locally quarried sandstone was finished by hand. A wooden mallet about six inches in diameter and many chisels were used on the face. An air brush was used also. The air brush was in a fan shape with twenty needles that "shaved" the sandstone.

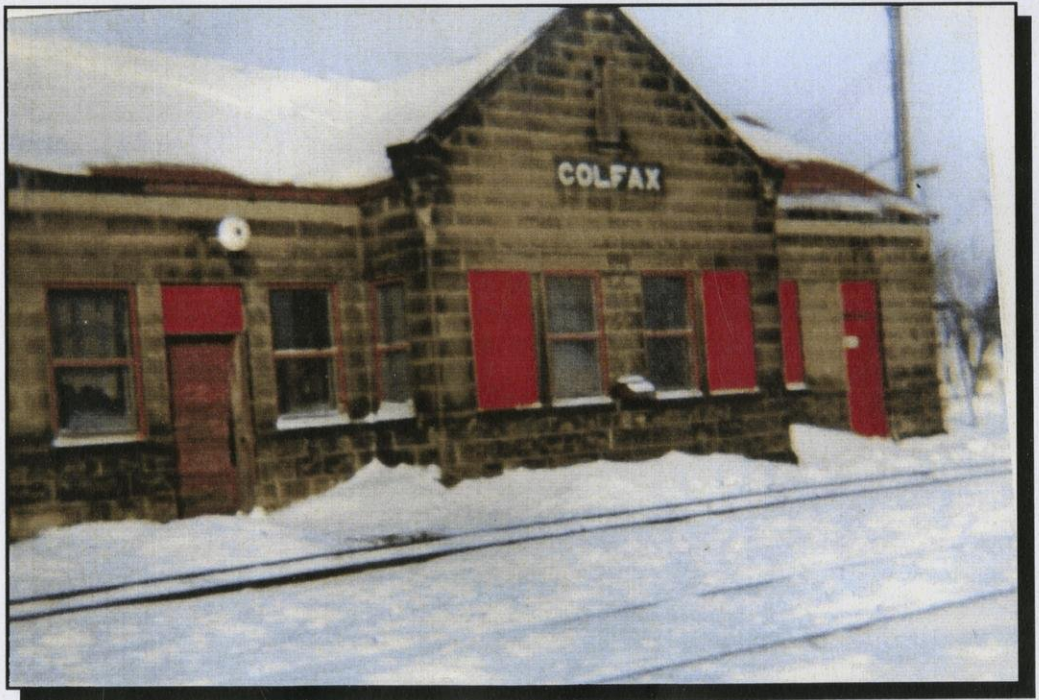
Many people claim that the rock from the Colfax Stone Company was one of the finest grades of sandstone in the United States. The stone is very evident in many buildings in Colfax, but was also shipped all over the United States. The Luther Memorial Church in Madison was completely built of Colfax sandstone, taking over thirty railroad carloads to ship it all there.

There was a statue carved from the quarry near its ending of the quarry's business life. The stone had to be very hard to be cut, blocked and shaved. The sandstone was becoming scarce and softer. The final large project, a statue of Jesus Christ, was over seven feet high and was carved by Klaus Karlson after the shop had closed almost all operations. It was then shipped to a cathedral in either St. Paul or Chicago (Elaine and John Hammer were not sure which city was the final destination).

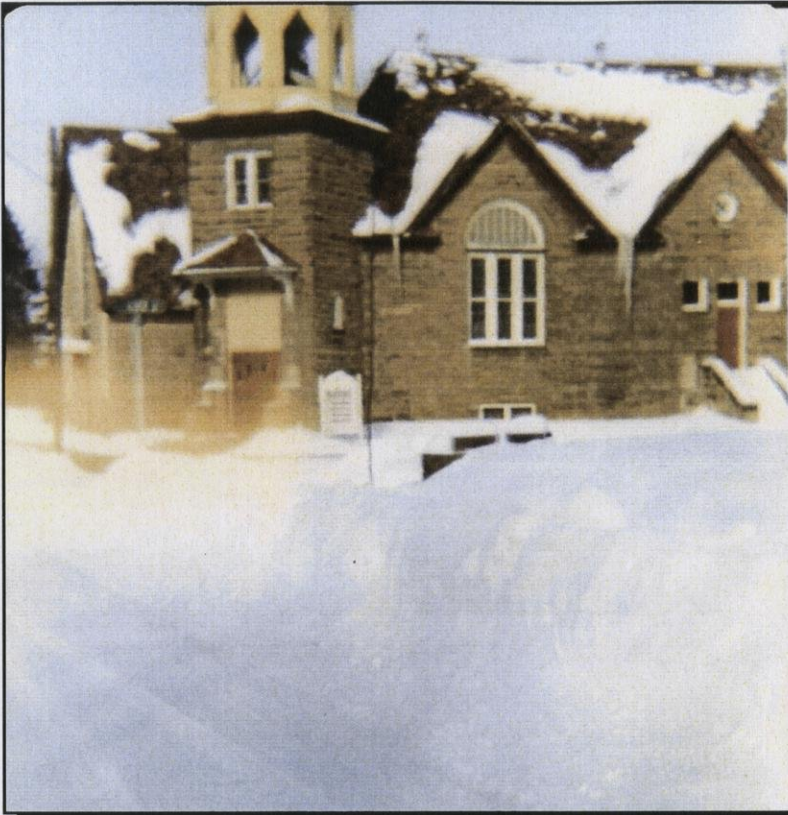
The following next photographs are of business places and homes in the village of Colfax that were built with sandstone from the Colfax Stone Company. They were all built within the lifetime of the company, estimated to be 1900 to 1930.



The Colfax Municipal Building



The Colfax
Train Depot



Colfax Lutheran Church

Originally the
Colfax Meat Market





Originally the
Farmer's Store - a
department-style
store and grocery
store

(Both photos)

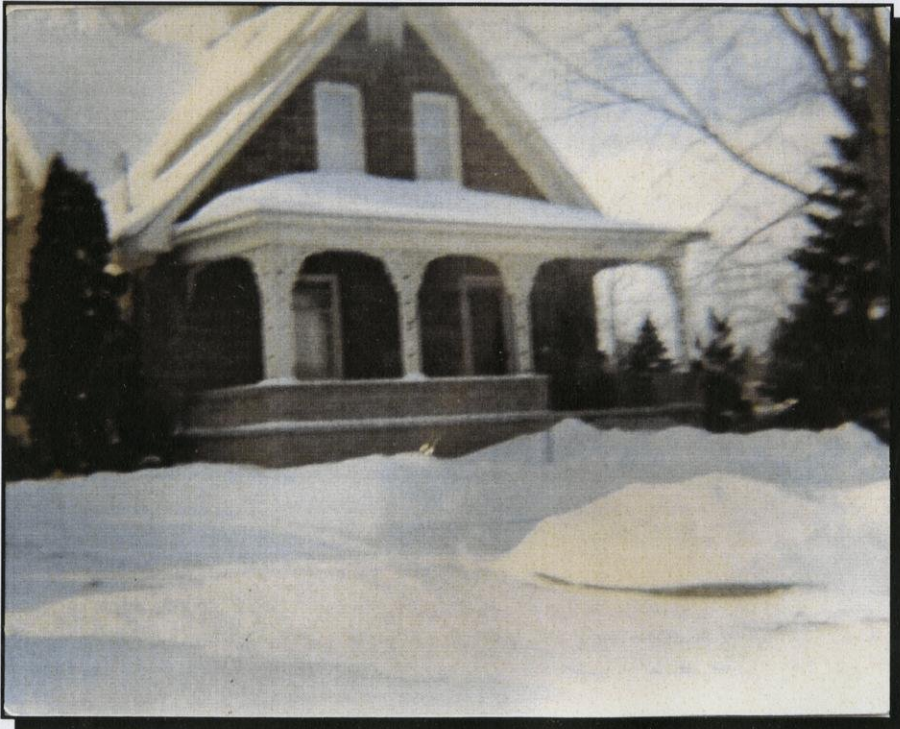
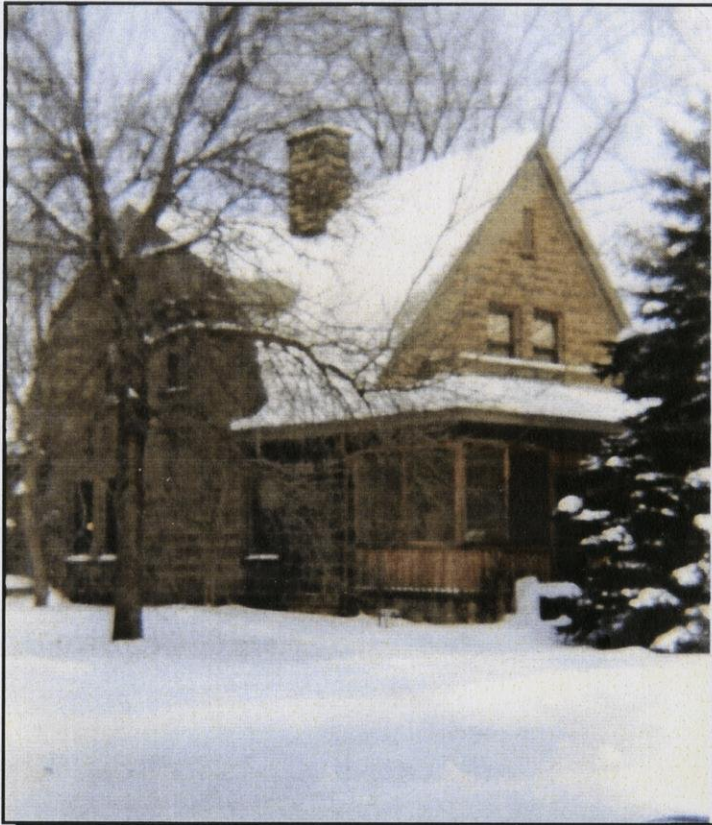


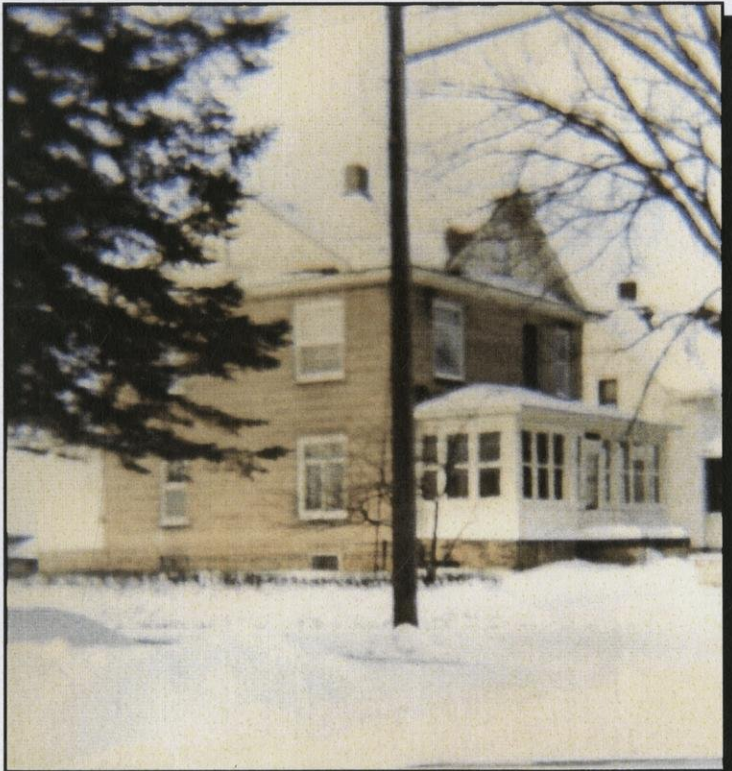


Originally the Colfax
Post Office

Homes in Colfax







Bibliography

1. Curtis-Wdge, Ph.D., F. , Geo. O. Jones and others. History of Dunn County. 1925, H.C. Cooper, Jr. & Co. Minneapolis, Minnesota. Page 175.

...e tried to write a policy

Bjurquist said the school's

Marion Loew,

board

over.

A change made during the
continued page 16

Stone mill was lost in 1905 flood

Information regarding an old stone mill on the outskirts of Colfax has been trickling into the Colfax Messenger since photos of the mill were published in a recent issue.

Approximately two months ago, Audrey Weaver, Colfax, brought the picture postcards of the mill into the Messenger office, in hopes that some information about the mill could be found.

Trips to the Colfax Public Library, the Colfax High

School library and the UW-Stout archives yielded nothing. No reference to a stone mill could be found in Dunn County history books and the location of the mill was variously identified by local residents as being in the middle of downtown to several locations outside of the village.

What has been discovered is probably the main reason so little information could be found. Nearly everyone who saw the postcards, especially those with keen

eyes, determined that the railroad bridge in the background of the hilltop view, was the bridge that washed out in the flood of 1905.

According to Adrian Smith, who lives along that portion of the Red Cedar river, not only did the bridge wash out but so did the entire mill.

Smith also determined that, based on a plat map of Colfax, made in 1888, the mill was not yet in existence at that time. That only

leaves a few years that the mill could have been operating, hence the difficulty in learning anything of it.

Smith's mother, Mabel, said that, to her recollection, the mill was one of several mills that worked the stone taken from the quarry located on Hwy. 170.

This particular mill was located about halfway between Felland Park and Smith's residence on River Road. A hotel that housed the men who worked at the mill is still standing on the opposite side of River Road.

Weaver

In the picture showing a crew posing in front of some cut rock, there is one person identified. The post card was sent to a Willie and Berten in Wheeler by Riley Weaver, who is the person fourth from the right.

Prior to learning the approximate date of the pictures, it was learned that Riley Weaver was living at the Colfax Area Nursing Home.

Riley took one look at the picture and said, "That's not me, that's my father." Although Weaver was unsure of who owned the mill, he did offer some insights on what the work was like in those days.

Weaver said that large slabs of stone were cut from the quarry and then dragged by a team of horses to the various mills. In the hilltop view picture, you can see a team of horses with a wagon full of supplies.

Once the stone was cut to size and shape, it was loaded in railroad cars.

In analyzing the hilltop picture, Smith said that the building to the far right was
continued page 12

can be
goes
ishing

Day sponsored by Colfax Lutheran Church. For more on the event turn to page 8 and 9.



From page 1

Stone mill

most likely the mill's power plant and that a spur line to the main railroad tracks went through that building.

Stones were lifted onto the flatbed cars with a derrick, which can also be seen in the picture.

According to Smith, the derrick was powered by steam. "They didn't have too many gasoline engines yet in those days," Smith said.

Flood

How prosperous the mill may or may not have been is unknown, but it was Mother Nature that ended its days.

"That whole area was under water when the flood hit," Smith said, "and that's when they quit."

Smith said that normally a person can tell where an old stone mill was because of all of the stone chips and pieces left lying about.

In this case, however, Smith said that the course of the river has changed since those days and the site of the mill is probably completely under water now.

In the June 9, 1905 issue of the Colfax Messenger, it was reported that heavy rains had caused some residents near the Red Cedar to move to higher ground. Some cattle had to be rescued and it was feared that the high water was undermining the structure of the bridge.

That fear was well founded.

After the flooding, trains were ordered to slow down considerably when crossing the bridge. Fortunately, one cautious conductor probably prevented a major disaster from occurring.

When the number two train approached the bridge, the engineer ordered the train to stop so the bridge could be inspected. The conductor then ordered all passengers

off the train before it crossed.

Half way across, the bridge collapsed, sending mail and baggage cars into the river. The engineer and the fireman aboard were lost in the accident but had it not been for the conductor's caution, many more lives could have been lost.

1905

BRIDGE COLLAPSED

And Let Passenger Train Into the River

On account of the high water, the railroad bridge across the Red Cedar river two miles west of town became unsafe Wednesday, and it was ordered that all trains "slow up" before crossing, and when train No. 2 from the west approached, it stopped and conductor Hayes examined the bridge, but to be more certain, all passengers were allowed to get out while an attempt was made to get the train across the bridge, but when about the center it gave way letting the engine, mail and baggage coaches into the river. Engineer Chas. Phipps and Fireman Will Severance went down with the wreck and as we go to press have not yet been recovered. Two "bums" also went in, but succeeded in making their escape. All through traffic is cut off and likely will be so for some time. A reward of \$25 is offered for the recovery of each body.

1905

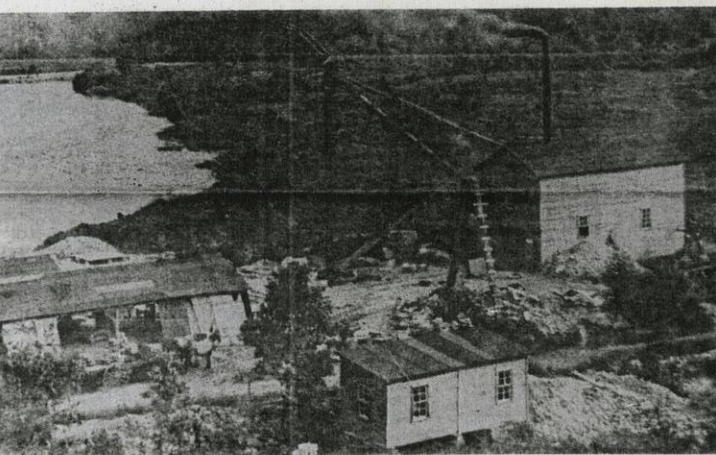
STORM AND FLOOD Cause Much Excitement And Do

Considerable Damage

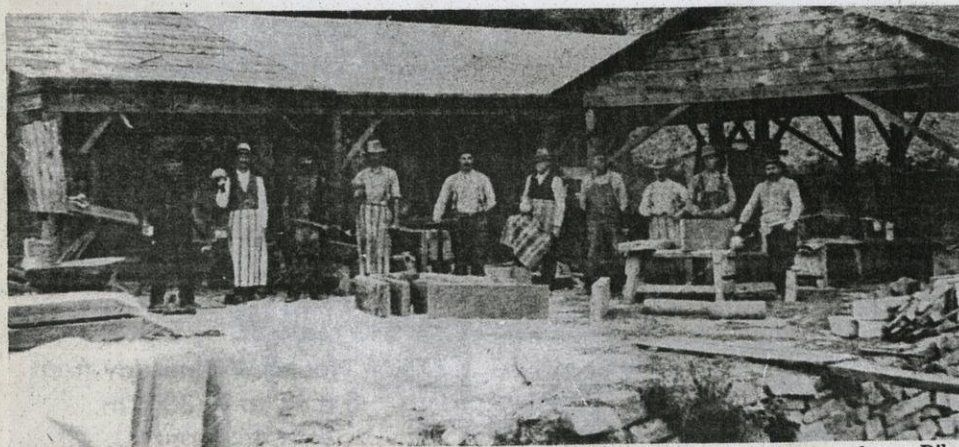
The continued electrical storms and the immense downpour of rain the fore part of the week seems to have been quite general throughout the northwest and considerable damage

from lightning and flood is reported from various sources. Fed by the streams above, the Red Cedar River at this place became a raging torrent and it was thought at one time, might sweep away the heavy iron bridge from its foundation. Several families along the low lands were endangered and some sought higher land for safety. A.C. Hayner, whose farm home is near the river just north of town, had a close call, the water reaching nearly to the door, while at the Thomas Anderson home just across the bridge, they had to get out to save drowning. Farther down at the W.A. Mathews farm, cattle had to be rescued from a low land pasture. It is thought by many of the old residents that the water never was higher at this place than it has been this week. Reports from other localities show similar circumstances, and in many cases worse than ours has been.

IN THE DAYS when the stone mill was at work along the banks of the Red Cedar River this house at the old Albertson place on River Rd., was said to have served as a hotel.



LOCATED ON RIVER Rd., this turn of the century stone mill was likely washed out in the flood of 1905. The railroad bridge behind it was also washed out.



STONES FROM LOCAL quarries were dragged by horses to mills such as this one, cut to size, shape and loaded onto railroad cars. This mill was likely located along the Red Cedar River,

somewhere near the old Albertson farm. Riley Weaver, Sr. is fourth from the right. The other gentlemen are unidentified.

the snow begins to fly.

Hodgson also said that he wanted a clear directive from the board on whether they wanted the ordinance enforced every single night from Nov. 1 to May 1 or if it should only be enforced when there is snow falling.

Before being revised last December, the ordinance stated that between Nov. 1 and May 1 and the hours of 2 a.m. and 7 a.m., parking would only be allowed on the even numbered side of the street on even numbered days and on the odd numbered side on odd numbered days.

It also stated that the ordinance would be strictly enforced from the beginning of a snowfall until the time that the streets had been cleared.

When the ordinance was

on.

Common Sense

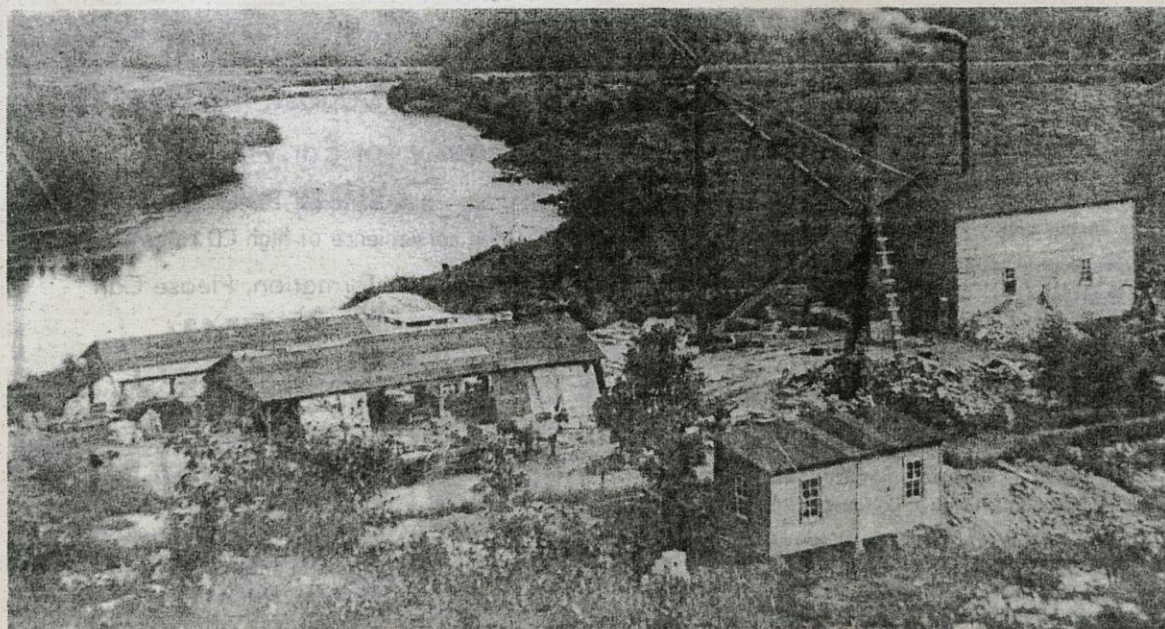
Lyle Christianson, resident, asked the board if tickets would be given when it was below zero out and it hadn't snowed for several days.

"It seems kind of foolish," Christianson said, "when it's 20 below to move your car... there should be some common sense in that."

Christianson said that, after all, the ordinance was titled "snow removal" and if there wasn't snow to be removed, why should cars be ticketed.

Fehr responded that the village could change it to read "street maintenance" and have the parking rules enforced all year long.

Christianson replied that it sounded like Fehr was trying to penalize anyone



SIGNIFICANT ENOUGH TO grace a couple of vintage postcards, a stone mill near Colfax provided work for at least 10 people. However, its history and location remain a mystery. Efforts of the Messenger to find out information about the two photos have proved mostly fruitless. Anyone with information on the mill is asked to contact the Messenger, either by stopping in at the office or by phoning 962-3535.



This striking aerial view of picturesque Colfax shows part of the principal business district and some of the beautiful rolling countryside.

WELCOME TO
Colfax, Wisconsin

Colfax boasts good schools and fine churches. Outstanding recreational activities in the area include fine fishing, hunting, skiing and snowmobiling.



Lovely lakeshore setting shows a part of one of the many Safe-Buy listings in the scenic Colfax area.



Natural wilderness & game preservation areas provide the hunter with a variety of both species and locations.



REAL ESTATE AGENCY INC.
HILDRED MERT
Representative
Box 427
Colfax, Wisconsin 54730
(Office located at 605B Main St.)
Phones: Off. 715-962-3169,
Res. 715-568-1340
FARMS - RANCHES - RETIREMENTS
RECREATIONAL & BUSINESS PROPERTIES



POSTHOLE



INVITES
YOU TO Colfax, Wisconsin

BULK RATE
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
COLFAX, WI. 54730
PERMIT NO. 24

Facts About

Colfax, Wisconsin

DUNN COUNTY

Colfax, a scenic little city on State Highway 40, is nestled among tree-covered hills and gently rolling countryside, boasts a history of some 112 years. However, the nearby prairie land was settled and cleared by hardy pioneers a few years earlier. Although it is a growing town in the center of farming and dairy operations, there is a program underway to attract future business enterprises through the efforts of an Industrial Development Corporation. Progress along this line includes available building sites in an industrial park. Corn has long been a staple crop in the fertile soil of the Red Cedar River valley, along with an abundance of small grains. Among other crops are tame hay, wheat, buckwheat, oats, barley, rye and sugar beets. Many beans are also being raised now for canning factories in surrounding areas. The Colfax area boasts a recreational paradise since the town is located on scenic Red Cedar River with other trout streams and fishing lakes nearby. A down hill ski slope (Deepwood is only 10 minutes away and snowmobile trails are abundant. Famed Tainter Lake is about 8 miles west. Consisting of 1,752 acres and up to 37 feet deep, it has bass, trout, walleye, muskie, northern pike and panfish. Hiking and bike riding are popular in this area. Two state universities and a technical institute are located within a 27 mile radius. In Colfax and the surrounding area you can find fertile land, outstanding recreation or just loll at ease. We are eager to aid you in finding just what you want and need in real estate!

