



The Gogebic Roots Quarterly Newsletter

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The Gogebic Roots Quarterly Newsletter is a publication of the Gogebic Range Genealogy Society, Inc. The Newsletter is published quarterly in January, April, July and September. We are located in Ironwood, Michigan, USA. Our mailing address is P.O. Box 23, Ironwood, MI 49938.

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Membership dues are based on a calendar year starting with the date of enrollment. The expiration date of your membership is shown on your membership card. If renewal of the dues is not received by the expiration date a reminder is sent.

The reason for this is twofold. First and foremost we value your membership and hope you continue to support us. Secondly, our Bylaws state that a member in arrears 30 days after the anniversary date shall be removed from the rolls.

Please keep in mind that one reminder only is required in this same section of the Bylaws and is sent in hopes that your membership continues without a lapse. If any member has a question regarding this please feel free to contact us.

Thanks for your continued support.

Norrie Location: The Beginning

A couple of billion years ago, during the Pre-Cambrian Era, the highest mountain chain in the world covered the western half of the Upper Peninsula. Volcanic eruptions formed the Gogebic Range lava outcroppings. The group of volcanoes erupted, spewing lava and pouring magma in the western half of the Upper Peninsula forming huge lava fields. Later, as the earth cooled the weight of the lava and continuous volcanic eruptions caused the land to sink, forming the basin of Lake Superior. When the land sunk, the area surrounding the newly formed lake buckled and tilted to expose iron-bearing rock deep beneath the lava. Some examples of this lava outcropping can be seen around Tank Hill at the summit of Norrie location and the bluffs in Newport, Bessemer and Hurley.

Then, about 20,000 years ago, the last glacier receded from Gogebic County forming glacial Lake Ontonagon. Its outlet was through present Lake Gogebic, probably escaping to the west via Bigham Creek. A huge river flowed through the sites of the present range cities of Wakefield, Bessemer and Ironwood, finally forming glacial Lake Ashland in the northwestern part of Iron County, Wisconsin. The glacial river flowed northward and filled the Lake Superior basin. However, the glacier and its huge river left rock and silt in its path toward Lake Ashland, covering the exposed iron ore. If you drive west toward Ashland from Ironwood, the bed of Lake Ashland can be seen as you get to Birch Hill.

The area was untouched by humans with the exception, perhaps, of small hunting parties of Native Americans until the early 17th century when Father René Menard explored the area around Lac Vieux Desert near

Watersmeet. The War Department sent Captain Thomas Jefferson Cram to map the area between Lac Vieux Desert and the Montreal River, the present boundary between Wisconsin and Michigan. The Chippewa band of Native Americans signed a treaty relinquishing their claims to the western part of the U.P. in 1842. It was now possible for the federal government to issue mining leases and sell the land.

Up until this time, people were not very interested in the western U.P. It was too cold and desolate they claimed. But all of that was to change. The great iron ore boom along with the dream of growing richer would bring wealthy industrialists from the east. One of these magnates was



a New Yorker, A. Lanfear Norrie. Norrie employed a man named James Wood. Later on, the city of Ironwood would be named for Captain “Iron” Wood and Norrie Location would be

named in honor of A.L. Norrie

Norrie and Wood operated from a tent at first along the Ironwood side of the Montreal River (between the Poplar Street Bridge and the Silver Street Bridge) and later built log buildings at the site of the Ashland exploratory mine pit. Over the next few years, the immediate area (Ashland Mine, Townsite Mine and Norrie Mine) was explored, but they did not believe that much ore would be produced so they abandoned the area and concentrated their efforts in Wakefield and Bessemer instead.

In March 1902, Mrs. Jacob Astor, the acknowledged leader of New York society, selected A. Lanfear Norrie as one of New York City's top 100 people. Meanwhile, Norrie went on to do other great things and did not return .

The Early Years (1880-1910)

In 1886, the Hayes brothers from Ashland, accepting the advice of their clairvoyant mother, obtained a lease to the abandoned Norrie/Wood explorations. They dug deeper through the silt and rocks which had been deposited by the melting glacier and discovered what later would prove to be the greatest iron ore producer the world would ever know: the Norrie mine. They sold their claim, however, against their mother's better judgement, to the Norrie Iron Mining Company, a subsidiary of the Metropolitan Land and Iron Company of Milwaukee.¹ The Norrie location was becoming a reality, and the Norrie mine was beginning to produce a lot of ore, which meant that more workers were needed.



The year 1887 showed a 100% increase in production of Norrie ore under the direction of mine boss "Captain" Jefferson Day. Under his management, the output of the Norrie grew from 15,419 tons in 1885 to

124,844 tons in 1886 to 237,254 tons in 1887. The summer of '87 was tinder dry, and a disaster was just waiting to happen. On September 17, a fire began next to the Alhambra Theatre, and within an hour and a half most of the downtown area of Ironwood was destroyed. The fire was extinguished just before it reached Norrie Hill, however. The process of rebuilding the city took place immediately.

Ironwood was rebuilt for expansion, and it needed people to flourish. Immigrants were flowing to the United States by this time. Groups of Europeans, especially Irish and English from Cornwall had been coming to the Upper Peninsula since the Civil War days, but they came to work in the mines around Marquette and Ishpeming. The big immigration to Ironwood and Norrie would not happen for another year or two.

Over the next year, only a few miners and their families settled in Norrie location. A scan of the city directory for 1888 shows no listings for homes in Norrie location, but the directory does not indicate the streets where people lived. Everyone seemed to be concentrated in the downtown area or in Aurora location. The population was 7,000.

The Federal census for 1890 lists 7,750 individuals, only a minor increase in population. But the influence of the growth of Ironwood was beginning to show, nonetheless. It became apparent that new sources of labor would be required, and provisions for living would be needed if the mine owners would succeed in their quest for additional wealth. (to be continued)

¹ Solomon S. Curry was its president; RC Hannah, vice-president; HS Haselton, secretary; the general office was in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; the mine office was in Ironwood. Its legal description was w ½ of sw ¼ sec 23 and s ½ of se ¼ sec 22, t 47 r 47; Michigan.

Old Stuff, But Not Too Old
Do you remember?

Cars came equipped with cranks because they had to be started by hand.

There were no heaters in cars and frost shields were used to keep a spot clear on the windows

Everyone had a jack, tire pump, tire irons, and a patching kit to fix a flat tire.

The gang pitched in to buy a dollar's worth of gas-at the gas station you very seldom heard," fill er up". It was more like a couple dollars worth or maybe three dollars worth, and the attendant did the pumping, checked the oil and cleaned the windshield.

You could buy new heels and soles to repair your own shoes at home, and then of course boys had to have cleats on the heels of their shoes.

10 cent bus rides from Bessemer to Ironwood.

There was a police booth in Bessemer on the corner of Sophie St and Lead St.

Candles were used for lights on Christmas trees, and LIT on Christmas eve. I guess the government didn't tell us it was dangerous

In school you were given a brown paper bag with filled and unfilled Christmas candy, peanuts in the shell, peanut brittle, and a tangerine.

The popcorn wagon in Bessemer? How about the popcorn wagon next to Ironwood's Rex theater?

Then there was the mimeograph machine in school, did you ever turn the handle to make it work?

Haircuts with clippers and scissors only, at the barbers or maybe a neighbor cut it.

Shaving with a Gillette double edge razor, and using a shaving brush and soap, no Gillette Foam in an aerosol can.

Then for the younger people, do you remember when carbon paper was used to make copies?

Walking through the "caves"?

Swimming at Norrie Park? Do you remember the old changing house?

Climbing up the stockpiles and getting your clothes, hands and face covered with red, iron ore? Then riding your bikes to wash off at that "boy's only" swimming hole just south of Norrie Park? We called it "Bare A—Beach".

When there were raised, wooden sidewalks on Silver Street in Hurley and men sitting on benches outside of the taverns.

Spruce Haven on U.S. 51 south of Hurley? The Club Fiesta? The Band Box?

The Curry House Hotel?

The C&NW passenger train, the "400" Pulling in at the Ironwood depot two times a day?

FRED DRIER

Black River Harbor 1915-1920

It is not known if any other family was living at Black River Harbor in the period 1915 to 1920 when Fred, his wife Edna, and their baby boy moved from Planters, Michigan, to a cabin on the far side of the river the summer of 1915. However the names Drolson, Morrison, and Christensen are recalled by Fred's son Ben.

Fred Drier, born 1892 in Lake View, Michigan, began learning the Blacksmith trade as a youth of 12 years and plied the trade with expertise all his life. As a young man he was working in a logging camp north of Grand Rapids through 1907 or 1908. In January of 1914 he married Edna Dell, also born in 1892, near Lake View, Michigan. He was working for the Valley Lumber Company near Munising when that company sought new opportunities in the virgin forests of western Gogebic County. Its owners bought two or three sections in what became Wakefield Township and in the summer of 1914 Fred and his bride were part of the group the Company loaded on the train heading west. The party included the saw-mill, lumbering equipment, teams of horses, men and families. The train came to a stop in the dense forests at what became known as Planter, near Thomaston and Wakefield. However, before they could get the teams off the train, including Fred's fine old team of horses; it was necessary to have the lumberjacks cut a clearing along the railroad tracks through the timber as there was nothing there but forest. Not even a railroad siding existed. The sawmill remained on the train car but among the stumps, tents were erected for the families. In July, son Elmer was born in the Fred and Edna Drier tent.

Fred seems to have used his many skills to provide for his family as circumstances arose.

He brought Edna and baby Elmer to Black River Harbor in the summer of 1915 thinking he'd like to be a fisherman for a while and provide an income when lumbering and trapping were non-productive. He had bought equipment and an 18' (some say 22') boat from an unknown person who was giving up that occupation. These was to be a pattern in Fred's life, to fish a while, trap a while, and return to blacksmithing and lumbering, and then get into fishing again. Although they spent parts of 5 winters at Black River, they would return to Planter for periods where he plied his trade and did extensive trapping.

His ingenuity saved him on one of his first trips out on the lake. Unfortunately he knew little about boats at that time, and so he was not aware his boat's propeller was improperly secured. It nearly fell off. Having few tools with him, he tightened the set screws with a monkey wrench and a buoy-pole without having to get into the water.

In those early days the river channel was quite clogged with sand and it was necessary to anchor the boat 'out' in the river and to travel to it via a row boat. Row boats were also the only way to cross the river until the suspension bridge was built a couple of decades later.

Sometime during his 1st fishing period, Fred decided to lengthen the boat by cutting it in 2 parts, a front half and a back half. He added 9 feet to the middle making it a 27 (31) footer. For the longer boat it was necessary to have a larger propeller so Fred built a wooden pattern for one of his own design and then had it cast in bronze by a foundry in Hurley that did a lot of work for the mines. Fred thought his boat was the "best on the river", he was so pleased with it.

The name of the single cylinder boat is not known. Gas for the engine was

bought at Little Girl's Point as a road serviced that harbor and gas could be brought out that far. It was an open boat and in spite of the laminated cypress 'collar' around the top edge, it would take on water in rough seas. For that purpose he used a home-made bilge pump made out of wood. His brother-in-law accompanied him over to get gas one day and asked how the pump worked. Heavy seas required him to use it all the way back, so he learned quite well how it worked. Son Ben is quite sure the boat was sold to Vic Leppanon when Fred was finished with it and at that time he said Vic lived 'up Black River road'. Fred at times complained that he did not get his money out of the deal.

Fishing by nets was the typical manner of catching the large runs of herring and other fish. Nets were stored in net houses and dried on net reels, all are seen in the photos. Unclean nets would tend to get 'slimy' and needed to be cleaned with Blue Vitrol, (copper sulfate), an excellent antimicrobial agent. A great deal of work was involved with washing the nets and maintaining all the equipment as well as in the actual fishing.

A fish dealer, Victor Saorkoski, from Bessemer made regular trips to the Harbor to buy fish from Fred but was inclined to haggle relentlessly about the price per pound. Known as Finlander Sheeny, he would customarily pay a penny or two less per pound than Fred thought appropriate. Unable to convince the man any other way, Fred invited him to come out and spend the day on the water for an enjoyable day of fishing, free of charge. Saorkoski came "one Sunday early to go out on the lake with dad and before he got back to shore, he said if he had to work that hard, the fish would be at least \$1.00 a pound", reports son Ben.

Fred also dealt in Smoked Fish, something highly prized by the Finnish

people who used to like smoked fish while putting up hay and working in the hot sun. One day a man bought some and went off to have it for lunch. Shortly he was back and took all the money he had out of his pockets and asked how much fish he could buy.

"Another time," continues Ben, "two fellas (sic) went out with dad and the lake got ruff; one fella got sick and fed the fish till he was empty and still went through the motions. The other fella set on the bow of the boat, hands clinched to the railings. Everytime a wave hit the boat water would hit him in the face and dad said he didn't think the fella even blinked. He turned around when they were close to shore and said, 'maybe my partner soon die'." When they got on shore they said "Finland fishing O.K., here Lake too big!"

Over the 5 years that Fred and his family lived at Black River, fishing provided just one income for the family. In season, hunting and trapping on his set lines between Planter, Black River, Presque Isle, Jackson Creek and many unnamed creeks in between brought in good income. He was a fast walker and could care for his traps and get to his little overnight camps quite quickly. Ben Drier says, "Claude Grayson was one fella that trapped with dad for a while and the first day they started out, the lunch happened to be in dad's pack. About 11 o'clock Claude asked "When do we eat?" Dad told him he had been trying to get far enough away so he could eat the lunch alone and Claude said you don't have a bit of trouble getting away from me. I can't keep up with you!"

"One beaver trapping trip," Ben continues, "for 7 days they didn't have their boots off. Where they were when night came is where they spent it. An old shack they looked at one night was too

poor to spend the night in. Then it snowed several inches of wet snow; it hung on all the brush so they got wet right away. There was no stove pipe and they stacked up tin cans to take the smoke out. The smoke came down to almost the floor and *that* was covered with porkeypine (sic) droppings. They called it the Porkeypine Shack."

Ben recalled another trapping story his dad had told him. "On their way out of the woods and home, Claude was hitching his shoulders to move his pack and (finally) he threw his pack on the ground and jumped on it. Dad thought maybe it was too much for him but it was a trap digging in his back that had bothered. They were so tired," Bed's dad said, "they would stub their toe on a Chalk Mark!"

Trapping was especially important during the depression when jobs in black-smithing and logging were unavailable. Then he skinned and sold a large variety of animals such as wolf, coyote and fox as well as beaver, minks, weasels, skunk and wild cats. His skill in setting beaver traps involved knowledge of how beavers run to water when trapped, and how to set the trap to provide a good kill. He could skin a skunk on the trail and quickly have its hide in his pocket without a trace of odor. He knew all the tricks trappers need to know.

Walking was something he did a great deal of. He found it necessary to walk the wagon road in to Bessemer from the Harbor in winter for supplies, wearing snow shoes and pulling a toboggan, each of which he had crafted by hand. In fact, another source of income was the making and selling of snow shoes which he made using cow hide or deer skin for lacing. Whatever had provided meat for the family table was the source of rawhide. One year Fred took his boat to Ontonagon for some reason, perhaps for winter storage as is done today. At any rate, having more time than cash he elected to walk all the way home on the

beach. According to grandson Ken, The next night almost 50 miles of beach to walk, requiring an over-night stay under a driftwood plant. It rained, of course.

Another time Fred was using a small axe to cut some wood, when the wood split differently than expected causing Fred to cut his big toe severely. His knowledge of the woods led him to treat the injury with pitch from the Balsam Fir, a common woodsman's remedy. (Balsam secretes and deposits resin in the bark of the tree in little blister-like structures.) Wrapping it completely with resin he scraped from the bark allowed him to walk the next day to Bessemer and back without any pain.

Fred was a crack shot as a hunter, says his son Ben. One year Fred's brother came up for deer hunting before there was a road out here. A 10-point buck sprang up unexpectedly and Fred fired 4 shots with his 30-30 Winchester. The shots were so close together, he said, that you could have covered all of them with a teacup. Once his gun didn't 'go' to suit him, so with tools at hand, the wood cook stove for heat, Edna's flat iron, a carpenter's hammer, and using beach sand for welding compound, he fashioned a new spring and the gun was restored. Fred's hallmark was to cope well, improvise, and to do it with skill. Fred told Ben that wolves were clever hunters, too. He said he had seen a pack of 7 wolves out on an ice bank on Lake Superior. Another time he watched them drive a herd of deer through a 'hog-back' in order to make a kill.

At one point during the Depression, the Connors Lumber Company was paying lumberjacks only \$1.35 a day, or 13½ cents an hour. They offered Fred 40 cents

to shoe a horse, but he refused saying he'd rather starve in some other way than that. He was reluctant to work for Connors after that but Ben says he knows he made a special Auger for them to drill oak wheel hubs. With ingenuity he had steady work, provided for his family, and, only seldom needed government food doles. Just after the depression in 1935, he was able to buy a farm. This was located where Indianhead Ski Resort is now, and was operated as a farm by Fred for 30 some years. Prior to that, the family moved to many locations, living in Planters frequently, (it grew to be a community of 24 families with a school but no longer exists), Phelps, Wakefield.

Fred's expertise as a blacksmith was well known. Although Fred wasn't living at Black River Harbor at that time, (late 30's), the Caretaker, Blondie LaGrew, came and got Fred when a cable across the river broke during construction of the Suspension Bridge. The cable held the air hose for the compressor. Fred was able to neatly splice the cable so it didn't have to be replaced.

Fred was Township Treasurer for 20 years, giving up the job when he suffered a heart attack. He and Edna had 9 children, 7 surviving childhood. The 1st was Elmer, born in 1914 and who was an infant when they moved to Black River. (Descendents of an apple tree Elmer planted may still mark the site of the cabin, Ben believes.) The second son, Harold, was born at the harbor, and died of complications of a brain tumor before he was one year old in 1919. Other children were Ben, Ralph, Evelyn, Ruth, Betty, Vena Mae, and Charles E.

Fred died in 1965 at age 72, and Edna died in the 1970's.

(Written Sept. 2001 by Nelda B. Ikenberry from information given by Fred's son Ben and his grandson Ken Drier. Their assistance is greatly appreciated! NBI <gikenber@yahoo.com>)

Our officers are
Connie Noyes, President
Gary Harrington, Vice President
Pam Bretall, Secretary
Eddie Sandene, Treasurer

Meetings of the Gogebic County Genealogy Society, Inc. are held at the Bessemer Public Library on the second Saturday of the month from 10 am to noon.

Everyone is invited to attend. If you are from out-of-town, please stop and visit us.

