

One man's memories

Steve Plautz, one of Willard's early residents, recalls all from fires to logging to pioneer life

Editor's note: Willard resident Steve Plautz Jr. recorded the following notes in 1976.

Joe Justin didn't have any children. Steve Legatt and J.J. had a store here. I remember that they kept store in the depot for a couple of days before they bought the store from Gus Sandberg and he moved out. I bought a gallon of kerosene there, he pumped it out of a barrel. They left about 1915. Steve did.

Joe was a great hunter and trapper. He didn't stay in the store very much. He was a likeable guy. Steve ran the store, then Joe's brother-in-law came in there, Mrs. Justin's brother. Joe was always trapping and hunting and fishing. He was a great one to drink whiskey and wine. Everyone made wine in those days. My folks always had plenty of wine -- also our neighbors. He liked to drink and he could carry a lot before showing any effects of alcohol. He liked the kids, the young boys. He always had a group of boys around him.

He and I were good friends. I had to cut poles for him one time, cordwood. Some guys left him holding a store bill, which he couldn't pay, but said he'd give Joe some cordwood. The wood was on land down south of where Mike Krultz lives now. I was out of the eighth grade (March 1916). George got a team somewhere in Willard to haul the wood back to Willard. It was about four miles one way. Soon after, they left Willard, closing the store. I haven't seen them since.

Soon Ignac Cesnik bought the store when he was the land agent for N.C. Foster Lumber Company. He used to live where Leo Gregorich lives.

N.C. Foster built a railroad from Fairchild to Owen. Before he went to Greenwood, he built a spur down to the Eau Claire River. He owned all the land here which was covered with virgin pine and some white oak timber. He logged the timber and used the railroad to haul the logs out. When we came here in 1908, that railroad was abandoned. He had the rails pulled up. We used that railbed for a roadway. It was the only road we had in those days.

Dad came to Willard on Sept. 9, 1908. He built a log cabin east of the Lucas property. Darwin Kokaly bought our land after my mother died. John Routar (Happy) came in 1910.

Mr. Cesnik came to Willard every day to meet the train. He picked up any newcomer that was interested in buying land. Trains came here about 7:30 a.m.; they had left Fairchild about 6:30 a.m.

We came to Willard on Oct. 16. Our uncle, John Popovich, lived with

us in Calumet, Mich. He worked in the mines and boarded with us ever since he came from Europe in 1902. We left Calumet on Oct. 12, Columbus Day, in the evening at 10 p.m. We rode most of the night. We changed trains in Astoria, Mich., and in Bibben, Wis., southeast of Ashland. The train was called Little South Shore and Atlantic R.R. It's the Soo Line now. My uncle came with us and John. Joe was just a baby so mother carried him. We sat up in the train all night. That morning we got to Bibben and had to wait for the Northwestern to take us to Eau Claire. Had to climb a long flight of steps. Bibben isn't on the map now. It was a junction for the above two trains. There is a tavern now, where Bibben was. We got to Eau Claire at 3 o'clock and waited until 9 for a train to come from St. Paul to take us to Fairchild. When the train came I was so sleepy, I barely remember getting on the train. I don't remember anything until my uncle was shaking me when we arrived in Fairchild. We walked up from the depot to the Gladstone Hotel. That's a nursing home now. It's near where the old Omaha

Depot used to be. We stayed there that night. My uncle went up on the Foster train early the next morning, before I woke up. He went to tell my Dad we were in Fairchild. He returned on the noon train to meet us and take us to another hotel called Stearns Hotel, a less expensive hotel. We stayed there two nights while they were buying furniture. When we came, we had no furniture and had to buy everything. On Oct. 16, we loaded it all on a boxcar and went to Willard. My Dad went to see Mr. Trunkel to get a team to haul the furniture in for us. My mother and I walked down to the Cesnik place. There was an old log camp where Foster had a logging camp (by Leo Gregorich's house). It was on an old railroad grade. It goes past Happy's back of the parish house, along the trees. You can see signs of it yet, there is a ditch on each side. It went straight north through a field with a big fill (Ludwig Artac owns it now) west of Gabrovic's old place. Mrs.

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