

Newville's history vast, largely unrecorded

By Mark Scarborough
Reporter Staff

Newville is one of those places with a slippery history, mainly because it is a tiny place where the boundaries are not neatly defined.

As an unincorporated community within the confines of the Rock County towns of Fulton and Milton, there is a general consensus that the heart of Newville is a strip of land edging the Rock River along the state Highway 59 corridor.

Richardson Springs, Elendale and Kidder roads — all echoing names of some of the area's earliest pioneers — also are considered "Newville." But, if you've wandered as far afield as Charlie Bluff or Mallwood, you have apparently "gone too far."

The community's history is vast — stretching back to 1770s and beyond — but gathering it together in one place is troublesome, because no one has ever bothered to write it down in one place.

Early Edgerton historian and writer R. Marcelle Pett, in a 1930s history of Lake Koshkonong likely published in the *Janesville Gazette*, quotes an early volume of the Wisconsin Historical Society's "Collections" for his source that the French military adventurer Charles Gauthier de Vierville visited Koshkonong in 1778, as his troops explored the "River la Roche" (Rock River).

Two Indian villages were discovered at the lake then,

one including roughly 100 Winnebago (or Ho-Chunk) tribal members, and the other including about 200 Sauk-Fox tribal members.

Writing in the 1850s about her time as the wife of a Wisconsin Indian missionary from 1829 to 1834, Juliette Kinzie also described Koshkonong in her classic, although somewhat fictionalized, memoir "Waubun."

At the lake, Kinzie found "a collection of neat bark wigwams," with "extensive fields of corn, beets and squashes, recently planted." Koshkonong itself, Kinzie remembered, was "a broad, blue lake, the shores of which, to the south, were open and marshy, but near the village and stretching far away to the north were bordered by fine lofty trees."

The Indian village observed by Kinzie, belonging to the Winnebago, was "built but a short distance below the point where Rock River opens into the lake."

Natives of this time apparently split their year between Koshkonong and Prairie du Chien.

"Koshkonong," although a word variously and erroneously translated, apparently is Ojibwa for "the place where there is heavy fog." The name first appeared on a map, as a description of an Indian village spelled "Kuskou-o-nog," in 1820.

In 1836, members of Wisconsin's territorial Legislature briefly considered Koshkonong as a location for the proposed capitol city of the

territory.

Milwaukee, Green Bay, Mineral Point, Dubuque (now located in Iowa, but then considered part of Wisconsin), Fond Du Lac, Portage, Helena, Belmont, Platteville and Cassville were also considered, but a nearly invisible community, then banded about as a town site in the Four Lakes region and eventually christened Madison after a recently deceased former president, won out instead.

The owner of the Madison town site, James Duane Doty, sweetened the deal for the territorial fathers. He greased the political wheels by providing at least 15 legislators with "choice" Madison town lots.

Doty later became one of Wisconsin's first governors.

Among the most enduring Newville community markers, extant from earliest times, have been a series of Newville ferries and bridges.

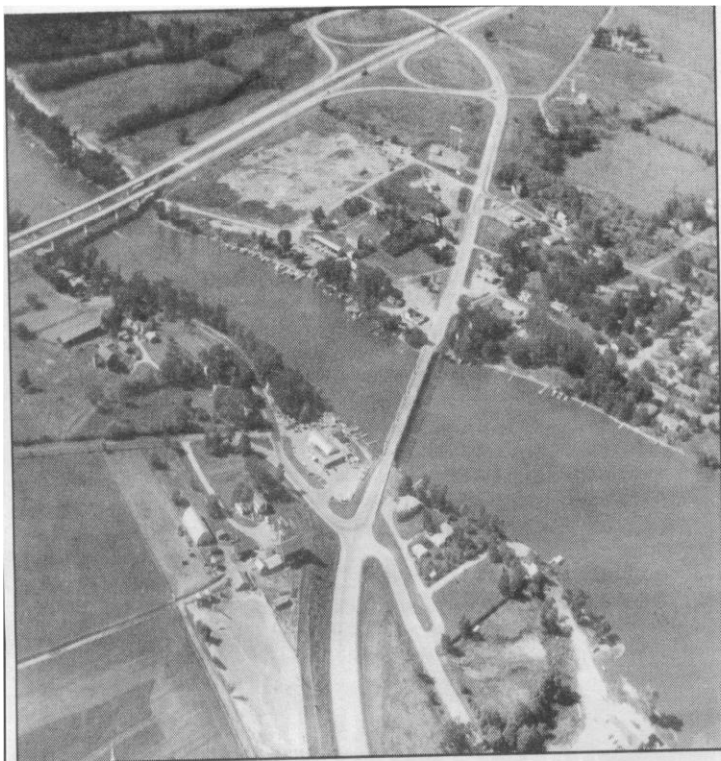
The river and, of course, Lake Koshkonong — these waterways have proverbially "marked the spot" of Newville since the beginning of Anglo-recorded history here.

"Rock River runs through near the middle of this county from north to south, and those who are acquainted with the west well know that the valley of the Rock River is unsurpassed in the world beside — taking all things into consideration," boasted the writers and compilers of an 1856 Rock County history.

"The rich and uniform fertility of its soil, its abundant



A visitor to Newville in the 1960s would have encountered the Richardson Marina (now Fin's) and the 1940s to 1990s Newville Bridge that crossed Rock River here. On the other side of the river was Anchor Inn and Getchell's Resort.



Neville as it appeared in 1973, from an aerial photo taken that year.

crops, the healthfulness and salubrity of its climate, its superior water power, as frequently as desirable for villages all along from the source to the mouth of the river; the purity of its spring and well water, the admirable formation of the country for the construction of railroads at much less expense than almost any other section of the country, makes this not only one of the most desirable locations for the farmer, but the mechanic, the professional man, and the manufacturer.

"Here the man of easy circumstances, who wishes to retire from the turmoil of the busy world, can find a pleasant home and that, too, in the midst of a society composed of a great majority of eastern people of the most independ-

ent, intelligent, and enterprising classes."

There were at least two Rock River ferries at Neville, dating back to the early 1850s to middle 1860s, operated by two Neville pioneers, William Anson Goodrich (a brother of Joseph Goodrich, the man who built the Milton House) and Thomas Goldsmith Richardson (a transplanted New York state shoemaker and farmer whose family members and relatives later ran a Neville limestone quarry and apple orchard).

Both of these ferries were located slightly downstream from the mouth of Lake Koshkonong, where the river was shallow and the current not too troublesome.

Richardson's ferry was in operation at least by 1861, which was the year he received a license from the state Legislature. Goodrich's ferry was likely an earlier (and occasional) thing, with Goodrich listed as operating a bridge in 1856. (The ne-

cessity for a ferry in 1861 suggests that "Goodrich's bridge," likely a toll bridge, had disappeared by the early 1860s).

From the late 1860s to the late-1890s and ever on, there have followed at least five bridges, with the first of these toll operations and the more recent bridges free-use structures provided through the largess of Rock County. The latest version of the Neville bridge was built in the late 1990s.

The old limestone quarry, operated by George LeRoy Richardson, was located on what is now known as Richardson Springs Road. The Richardson farmhouse, first constructed as a log cabin in the 1850s, was once located in an area directly behind the old root beer stand at 621 State Highway 59 (more recently known as the Squeeze Inn restaurant and soon to be known as the Blue Gilly restaurant).

(Continued on page 39)

Newville history

Continued from page 38

The apple orchard, once located near at the corner of East Mallwood Drive and East Richardson Springs Road, was owned and operated by George and Edith Sherman. George Sherman, like his father Casper Sherman before him, was a duck hunter of some repute. Edith (Cooper) Sherman, a mainstay of the Edgerton United Methodist Church who lived until her 90s, was long considered Newville's premiere historian.

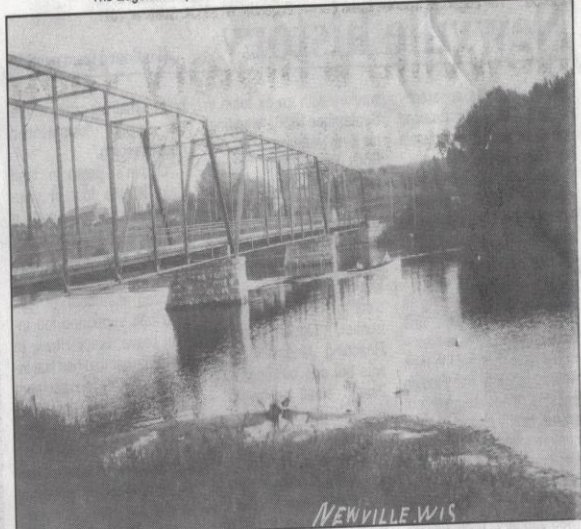
Casper Sherman (1839-1918) had been born on the Atlantic Ocean while his parents were en route from Germany. Casper and his tribe eventually landed in Albion and later moved to Newville. There, Casper (as a late

aided by two other man-made alternations in the marshy lake. The loss of the canvasbacks was due to the killing off of the duck's feed, the rice and the celery. At least partly, this happened because of the rising lake waters (tied to a series of Indianford dams) and because of the stupid introduction of an exotic fish species, the German carp.

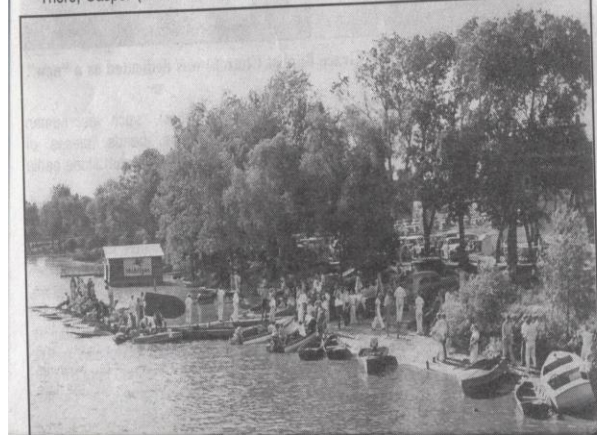
Carp, which were deliberately stocked in lakes like Koshkonong as a potential game fish and food source, reproduced at such an alarming rate and size from the late 1870s to the early 1900s that the new species literally muddied the lake's waters and left little oxygen for other prized game fish, like pickerel, bass,

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A 1920s view of one of the five Newville bridges, scanned from a real-photo postcard sent at the time.



Throughout the 1940s and 1950s an annual outboard motor regatta was held annually in Newville. This real-photo postcard shows competitors right before a race.

school flourished at least from the 1890s to the 1950s. Those earliest years were when teens who had just graduated from high school and were able to pass teaching certificate exams became teachers themselves. Particularly bright teaching candidates might have obtained a few years of study at a "normal school," where teachers went to learn their trade.

The one-time, one-room Newville school building, still standing, is the neighbor of the former United Brethren meeting hall. The white, 1890s-era one-time United Brethren hall was used in the 1950s and 1960s as the Newville Sunday School. A

but eventually absorbed into the Edgerton Public School District, is now the location of Grace Baptist Church on East Mallwood Drive, nearby North Gladys Drive.

This Newville school was closed in the early 1980s. Teachers at the school in the 1960s and 1970s included Roger Nimmer, Gladys Winters, Gervieve Marsden, and Darlene Oswald.

A goodly number of Newville's residents were farmers, with men toiling sun-up to sun-down in the fields and women shackled to the multitude of tasks involved in "keeping house."

Among some of the most prominent 1870s to 1900s

white men to see this country when they traveled to Rock County in mid-July 1835 to find a new home.

as the fort recently abandoned by Gen. Henry Atkinson during the 1832 Black Hawk War (not yet part of Jefferson County, but soon to be) before turning back toward the present site of Rock County's Fulton village. They spent the night at this spot, a bit of forest and prairie land that until then had little or no connection to European-American settlement.

There, the Inman party

Continued on Page 40

1880s hunter of canvasback ducks) gained a somewhat unsavory reputation as a johnny-come-lately user of a prohibited form of duck hunting that relied on the skilled use of a scull boat. The device, also known as a sneak boat, was a low-to-the-water, flat-bottomed sort of wooden canoe. Hunters lay flat on the boat's bottom, waiting still as a corpse, until ducks began to drift innocently overhead. That's when the hunters would swing upright and shoot as many ducks on the wing that could be safely blasted into eternity.

By 1889, the use of scull boats had been outlawed. Casper, however, was charged with using them in at least two court trials in late October of that year (being charged separate fines of \$8 and \$30 for the same offense

killing as many canvasback ducks as they could. Each pair shot locally put 75 cents in Casper's pocket. By the time these ducks were shipped by rail to New York City, each pair of canvasbacks was bringing \$3.

Hundreds of thousands of the ducks, fed on the wild rice and celery that Koshkonong boasted from the 1840s to the 1880s, became dead-head railway passengers, destined for the plates of East Coast hotel dining rooms.

Unsurprisingly, the canvasbacks that dotted the waters of Koshkonong eventually went the way of the Dodo and passenger pigeon. This was largely thanks to "professional hunters" like Casper, although the large-scale environmental change was also

bluegills, and catfish. The carp also ate the remaining vegetation at a ravenous rate, leaving ducks little to eat.

By the time of his death, Casper had become that for-certain hero of the developing wilderness, the founding pioneer. "Though he was of a quiet and retiring nature, he was always anxious to assist in any move that was for the betterment of the community," the Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter noted on May 3, 1918.

Newville schools also helped define the community, with a late 1860s frame structure on the Goodrich place (later the farm of Maxine and Huck Spaulding, in the 690 block of East Ellendale Road) being the very first school.

Across the river on North Hillside Drive, a one-room

day school was Bernice Ruth (Richardson) Schultz. Christmas pagents were held here, as late as the mid-1960s, with children rewarded with bags of popcorn and crisp apples.

The old North Hillside Road school building, most recently painted a neon green, was especially active as a school from the late 1930s until the middle 1950s. The building was thereafter the location of a sort of general store. Operating from the early 1960s to the middle 1970s, the store sold a wide variety of things children loved, including candy that was no good for them and comic books that only rarely improved their minds.

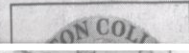
Another Newville school, this one dedicated in 1959

Shermans, Pecks, Moores and Coopers.

In the "History of Rock County and Transactions of the Rock County Agricultural Society and Mechanics' Institute" - compiled by Orrin Guernsey and Josiah F. Willard, and published in Janesville, Wis., by Wm. M. Doty and Brother, Printers, in 1856 - Newville gets a crisp description.

"This is a small village in the north-east corner of Fulton," the authors wrote of Newville. "It has a steam mill in successful operation, one tavern, one grocery, two blacksmith shops, and eight dwelling houses."

A party of Anglo settlers led by John Inman, originally hailing from Lucerne County, Pa., were among the first



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Newville history

Continued from page 39

"lost" their ponies, apparently not stolen but just misplaced due to neglect. (The animals were later recovered).

From where Fulton village was to grow, Inman walked to the place where Janesville would become, noting along the way "an ocean of waving grass and blooming flowers." Prairie grasses - growing as tall as nature allowed, and only hindered by rare fires - would have dwarfed the men walking gingerly along Indian trails. Prairies topped out then at nearly six to eight feet or more, often obscuring men on horseback.

The Inman group was later joined in December 1835-January 1836 by Mr. and Mrs. Samuel St. John and their infant son, as well as Dr. and Mrs. James Heath. These first white settlers in Rock County, some 11 in number, "wintered" together in one, 18-foot-long-by-16-foot-wide log cabin at the place later known as Janesville.

Men of the party would eventually walk back and forth to Milwaukee to register their land claims.

Henry Janes, for which Janesville was named, arrived in the summer or winter of 1836. He operated a ferry across Rock River and kept a rough-and-ready traveler's inn at a spot which is now located in downtown Janesville.

waukee with an ox team in September 1836, "wending" his way westward for the Rock River valley "for the purpose of finding homes in this, the then far Northwest," Ogden wrote.

"We took aboard a bag of flour, some pork, and a very few cooking utensils - sufficient for 'batching' it on the frontier," Ogden recalled. Reaching Janesville, there was but one building - Mr. Janes' "small log tavern" - where Ogden's party slept "on some deer skins, thrown on the floor" and were glad of the luxury, after long miles of wilderness travel.

Next morning, the Ogden party "started on Atkinson's trail, a little east of north, and traveled across Rock and Du Lac prairies, until we arrived at Otter Creek, in the north part of the county; from this point we traveled due west until we reached Rock River, at the foot of Lake Koshkonong."

At this place, "civilization had not yet made a mark," with railroad lines and consequent cities and villages only a distant dream. "Here, we concluded to stop and commence our future homes," Ogden wrote.

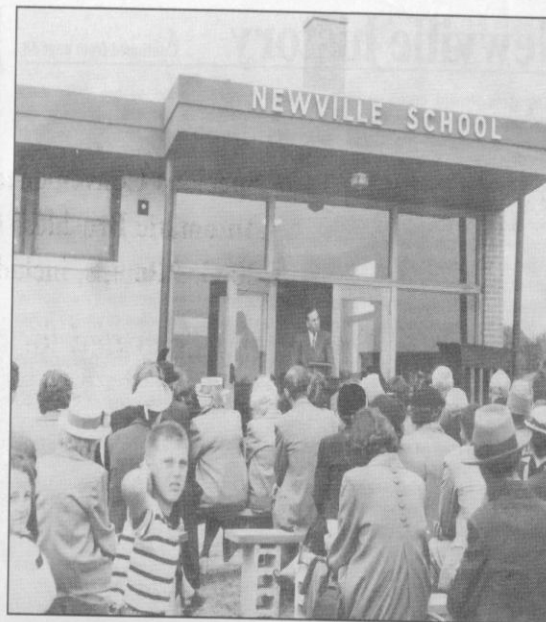
Ogden's brother, working a month or so before the party's arrival, had already

built a small log cabin, where the group "commenced housekeeping."

Ogden's personal land claim at the foot of Lake Koshkonong contained a camp that had once been used by the band of Sauk and Fox Indians. Several hundred members of this tribe had supported the Indian brave, Black Hawk, in the 1832 war that had first inspired Anglo excitement about the Rock County region.

The Indian campground might have been used prior to the war, perhaps by the native Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) tribe, but the land had definitely been used by Black Hawk and his band during this only Indian-Anglo war within the state's borders (which Black Hawk lost, forcing his supporters to move forever from Wisconsin and Illinois and reluctantly settle across the Mississippi River, in Iowa).

"From indications, the Indians must have stayed several weeks, living on clams, fish, wild rice and game," Ogden wrote about those first days of scouting out his farm land in 1836. "We found heaps of clam shells, three or four feet across, and a foot



Newville Elementary School (now Grace Baptist Church) was dedicated as a "new" building in 1959.

deep."

Even in 1856, Ogden wrote, he still frequently plowed through these "heaps of shells," including large shells measuring about a foot and a half and shaped like a periwinkle, which Ogden thought were "undoubtedly sea shells."

The old Indian campground covered two acres, with tent poles and a "fantas-

tic" flag staff still standing when Ogden first arrived. "Here were several graves, also one skeleton, placed in a wood trough, with another turned over it, inside of a small pen, laid up of poles, all on the surface of the ground," Ogden wrote.

"A large number of ancient mounds are here; I have, however, leveled several of them with my plow, and

(relics), such as human bones, beads, pieces of wampum, (and) stone battle axes."

Indians "in considerable numbers" remained in early Newville from the mid-1830s to the mid-1850s, with Ogden engaging the tribe members in trade, selling the natives such items as "quashagon" (bread), "cococoosh" (pork), and "wahbumbra" (melon and squash), the pioneer

of 1836. He operated a ferry across Rock River and kept a rough-and-ready traveler's inn at a spot which is now located in downtown Janesville.

At the town of Fulton, the area that would come to include Newville and environs, the first Anglo settlers were the Stone brothers, Robert and Daniel, who arrived in the summer of 1836. By the summer-fall of 1836, George Ogden settled on his farm land in the town of Milton, within an easy walk of where the Newville bridge now stands, adjacent to the mouth of Lake Koshkonong.

Ogden remembered his adventure for historian Orrin Guernsey in 1856.

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The farmhouse of Thomas Goldsmith Richardson - once located on Richardson Springs Road, behind the old root beer stand and nearby the current Culver's Restaurant - looked like this in the early 1920s. The care of the house was neglected over the years and the dwelling had been torn down by the 1980s.

The
Corner
Closet
Consignment