RIB FALLS

By Emma Baeseman

These are the words of Emma Baeseman, wife of Ervin, Grandson of Frank Baeseman, one of the original family members of this area. She wrote down her memories for the rest of us to keep alive in the future generations of our family here in Rib Falls.

North of Rib Falls, across from the Baeseman Cemetery, there was a house, the home of Henry Baeseman. The Baeseman Cemetery Organization is a group with money set aside for upkeep, etc. by Baeseman's who have left it in their will. A meeting is held once a year and anyone named Baeseman, or married to a Baeseman can be buried there. Right South of it was Gus Baeseman's house and barn. He owned the land now owned by the Wisconsin Valley Improvement Co., and Marathon County.

Across the road was a little country church about the size of one large room. A Minister came once a month and Baeseman held services other Sundays. Later Baeseman donated the land to build St. John's Lutheran church where it now stands. On the corner next to the church was a high two story building, named Sebels. I don't know what it was used for originally in my day. Fred Sodke used it for a garage for his truck. Going east there was a house. People by the name of Draves lived there. These buildings were torn down or rotted. Across the road was Kohler's tavern. It was an old building with a porch, on the north side there was an iron pump for water. We used to drink there, since there was no running water in those days except to run to go get it.

Next to the East was an old horse barn. Later it was fixed over into a dance hall. No dances were held from first part of Oct. until May, as no heat was in it. A little part was built for a toilet. It held a big pail, with a seat over it. Lots of times it ran over. Nothing to wash hands. They sold beer for 5 cents a glass, hamburgers with onions 10 cents. The price of dance was 25 cents for men, women free. Lots more men than as you came in a place was fenced off for the men who didn't dance or had the price of a ticket. That was called the bullpen. With prohibition in effect, that was the time liquor was forbidden by law. People made it and sold it outside the hall for 25 cents a drink, or so much a pint. Those days whenever there was a dance there would be some guys who would drink too much and start a fight. They had a guy who was the bouncer who would break up the fight.

Now going south across the bridge there was a different bridge very high and on Sundays the guys used to sit up there and watch the girls walk by. On the West Side of the river there was a dam. There was a flourmill and a gristmill there, too. They tore down the flourmill around 1934. My brother-in-law helped tear it down. He worked for Tony Schultz at that time. He gave me a piece of silk that they put the flour through. So it was really ground fine.

On that side, also, was a Post Office at one time. I don't know if the people got their mail there. It was before my time. Later Reimer had his blacksmith shop there. Across the road was a tavern owned by Frank Baeseman, Ervin Baeseman's Grandfather. Later Kraft had

it. Going up the hill to the West on the corner south side right up to the road was a building, a creamery. I was told on the top and over the hill north side a bit was a big building painted grey called the Boarding House. It was were the men stayed who worked at the sawmill which was run by the Wausau Lumber Company. There also was a planing mill. In case you don't know, that's were they smoothed the lumber for finer work. Then the rough lumber would come from the regular saw. They had a pond close to the mill where they put the logs. They would cut logs in winter and pile them along the river banks up stream. In Spring, when the water was high, they would float them down stream. The guys used to ride them down stream some times. Later the sawmill burned down and Wausau Lumber Co. gave up. Different people turned the planing mill and bought logs from farmers and sawed them.

Across the road from the Boarding House was the lumberyard east of where Gordy Geise lives today. One time there was a fire, there was lots of damage, no fire trucks or such in those days. Also to the south of that was a dance hall at one time, a floor and roof and no sides only dances in the Summer. All the way west along Highway U the lumber company had houses built all the same one story painted red. West of the Charley Geise house stood one in the swamp. It was about 4 ft. high on wooden posts. Wood sidewalk led to the door. Then on the south side on the hill was the company store were the corner is. It was a tall two-story building. They sold just about everything. The men who worked at the mill could have their wives buy on credit. Some hardly got any money as it all went for the bill. Food, clothing, yard goods, hardware, kerosene for light, etc. were all bought at this store.

Across the road was a big building only a few feet from the road. Upstairs was a dance hall and some bedrooms, downstairs was the bar and living quarters, Uekert's owned that. Mrs. Uekert and her youngest son Clarence, owned it last. Later it was tore down. To the east of it was a house and also north was a house. From the corner going to the west was Pempek's Tavern. From the corner going west there are still houses. A wooden sidewalk was built all the way from down town until all the way up till the last house, where I used to live. The sidewalks were high off of the ground. This one old guy used to come home drunk, fall off the sidewalk and fall asleep under it.

The train hauled the lumber away and brought things in two times a week. Lots of people came here from Poland and Germany. It didn't take them long to learn the English language. They worked 10-12 hours a day 6 days a week. It was all done with horses, no tractors or anything like that then. Mrs. Draves was the midwife, anybody having a baby got her when the time came. Hitch up the horse so get her for miles around.

There used to have a lot of fish, pike, perch and such. There used to be bums walked the rail road tracks looking for handouts. Indians used to camp up the river. They asked my mother-in-law for garden vegetables. She lived where Tom Napierala lives now. Also on that curve there was a swamp at one time it was fenced off trying to raise muskrats by Charlie Geise.

When we were married in 1936, we raised ginseng. We hired men with families for $1.10 a day, 10 hours, imagine what those in the sawmills made at the time they worked there.

At one time north of Rib Falls on the west side of the road in the woods farther back was a dance hall. It burned down, was rebuilt and later burned again. I was told this but have no details.

Going South of Schauer's Store which, by the way, was a house standing another way was turned around and added onto by Mrs. Kempfs. It was the minister's house. Where Harvey Krueger lives now was Gustave Laumner. They farmed there, I believe she belonged to the Homemakers. They had a daughter who died of typhoid fever, said at the time from bad water. Believing the cemetery across the road caused it. There was a schoolhouse just south of the cemetery, also one up town north of Larry Hoffman about a block north of the road. This was later moved north of Rib Falls and is now a home with a deer painted on its garage doors.

South of Harvey Krueger's house, a little ways up the hill, was a big two story house, renters were in it. My parents lived there for 2 years and my Dad worked at the mill.

At one time Henry Ford wanted to build a factory here to make cars. But Rib Falls wanted to tax them too high, so he decided to go elsewhere.

Farmers raised their wheat and rye and took big loads down to the flour mill to grind for their flour to bake bread, etc. There were so many children in Rib Falls that they had to have 2 schools, and now?

A few common names at that time were: Winkert, Uekert, Schultz, Ludwig, Krueger, Kania, Randt, Schraeder, Kraft, Hollman, Pempek, Sodke, Reimer, Lackman, Loogin, Laumer, Koehler, and Geise.

There were only dirt roads at first. Then gravel, now black top. Few, if any, cars back then. Horse or walk. People walked a mile or two to get to work. Then after 10 or 12 hours, walked home, 6 days a week. I wonder what they used as light? Kerosene lanterns? As there was no electricity. In 1938 we had the electric brought up to the new town so we all got lights, etc.

The school plays for Christmas was a big event. Santa gave the kiddies a bag of goodies, for some, that was all the sweets they got at Christmas. Ain't you glad you live now instead of then?