

MANITOWOC COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

OCCUPATIONAL
MONOGRAPH I

1967 SERIES

SOME FACTS CONCERNING THE EARLY HISTORY OF BRANCH:
An Interview with Joseph Carbon, Jr.

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MANITOWOC, WIS.

A BIT ABOUT BRANCH

by EDWARD EHLERT

One of the first persons to locate in the present community of Branch was Mrs. G. Kunz, an immigrant from Germany, who became the proprietor of a brewery along the Branch River in 1854. Mr. C. Vogt, also a German immigrant, erected a mill in 1859, also along the Branch river.

A dam was constructed about 150 feet to the north of the bridge which presently is in Branch along Highway D. The dam was of stone construction, perhaps about 15 feet wide at the base and tapering to the top. The dam about 12 feet high, and had a spillway about 20 feet wide. Planks were used to release the water or hold it as the case might be.

There was another dam on the Branch river at Reif's Mills, and by use of these dams settlers could control water levels in a way so that the river was an important means of transportation. Mr. Joseph Carbon recalls that at one of the picnics held at Branch a party from Reif's Mills traveled via a flat boat. He remembers that pickerel fishing was usually very good in the river, and in winter there was skating. A few ruins are left of the dam today.

After the dam was constructed, other businesses were located in Branch. In the 1880's and the years following, the brewery was owned by Godfrey Kunz. A saw mill was erected south of the present bridge running through Branch (the road was Highway 18 at that time). Peter Herman owned the saw mill. He was a man of some means. At one time he owned four farms around Branch, and also was the village postmaster.

It seems that Branch has had a post office ever since the 1850's. During Mr. Carbon's time the earliest postmaster whom he remembers was

Charles Kunz. Charles Kunz' son once owned a bicycle shop in Manitowoc.

Other Facilities Located

There was a large flour and feed mill north of the bridge. There once was a canning factory in the village. Mr. Carbon remembers that this factory was one of the best customers of his father who, from 1887 on, was the owner of a blacksmith shop there. One of the early employees in the cannery was Jerome Ledvina.

There was a warehouse across the street where Brunner's grocery store now is located. Farmers brought their barley, oats and wheat to the warehouse. Most of the barley then was sold to the Manitowoc Malting Company.

It was during the 1870's that the Chicago and North Western Railroad Company constructed the road from Appleton to Manitowoc. There had been agitation for a railroad during the twenty years preceding, and several times there were great hopes of transportation of this kind. It was a great day when the first train went through Branch, for it was a means for transportation of their products.

Community picnics seemed to be customary during the summer months, and Branch always made these a great occasion. Mr. Carbon recalls that the C. and N.W. Railroad operated excursions from Manitowoc to Branch, and the Manitowoc Marine Band always furnished music for these picnics. It seems that the Turners were very prominent in these picnics also.

Branch had two cheese factories during the late 1890's and early 1900's, and has had some kind of dairy plant ever since. There were

two blacksmith shops in the village. A Mr. Mason owned the first shop. After some years he sold his shop and the building and equipment was moved to another community. It was about this time that Mr. Jos. Carbon, Sr. began his shop ... the date was May 1, 1887. Some years later Wilbert Johanek began another blacksmith shop.

Family Background Given

Jos. Carbon, Sr., was born in Bohemia in 1862. His parents came to America when he was two years old. They settled on a farm in the Town of Kossuth near the present village of Reif Mills. At the age of fourteen years, Joseph Sr. became an apprentice in the blacksmith shop owned by Bernard Kitzerow in Manitowoc. It was customary that apprentices would work for three years to learn a trade, during which time no wage or salary was received by them. Following his period of apprenticeship he worked for several other blacksmiths, and at the age of 25 years he had accumulated the funds so that he was able to open his own shop.

Mr. Carbon had a family of twelve children. It was customary that the oldest son would remain at home to help his father. Joseph, Jr., had served his apprenticeship in shops in Cato and Shoto, for his father felt that "other blacksmiths had learned secrets of the trade that he might not have discovered," and thus it would be best to serve the apprenticeship in other shops. At the age of 17 years, Joseph, Jr., began working with his father in the shop at Branch, and he continued to work in that shop until June 1966 when he suffered a stroke, and had to discontinue active

work in blacksmithing. However, blacksmithing is still his life, and very frequently he walks to the shop and sits there for he says "I like the smell of the place." Although he is in retirement now he says that he has one remaining ambition, namely to "shoe a horse when I am 85 years old."

Supplies Purchased

In the early days, the blacksmiths of the area got their hardware supplies from Rand and Roemer in Manitowoc. This store was located in what later became the Worel Hardware Co. Later on the J. J. Stangel Hardware Co. became the major supplier. Such items as bar iron, horse shoe nails, horseshoes, welding machinery and supplies, were purchased.

Smithing coal was usually purchased from the Spindler Company. Ordinary coal could not be used, and the Spindler Company was able to secure a high grade quality of coal from a mine in West Virginia. This was coal from the "fourth layer," a coal that gave a greater amount of heat than most other coal. It was also a coal relatively free from slag.

Blacksmiths Ingenious

Blacksmiths in the early days were a very ingenious kind of tradesman. For they had to be able to repair anything that needed to be repaired. If they lacked the proper tools to repair a piece of equipment, they had to make the tool that would be needed for that piece of work.

Horseshoeing was a major source of income for the blacksmith. The going rate was 30¢ a shoe, that is, if the blacksmith furnished the shoes. If the farmer furnished the shoes, then the job was done for 15¢. It would take about a half-hour for a blacksmith to shoe a horse ... if the horse "cooperated." Of course, there was always the problem of the young horse that would be shod the first time. These sometimes became very difficult, and the services of two men were required to do the job. Even then it sometimes took a half day to get the job done. But the charge still was \$1.20.

There were price wars during those days too, and the blacksmith who would make it known that he would shoe horses for two shoes for

a quarter would have an advantage until his competitors knew what was happening.

Of course, that was one of the purposes for the blacksmith's trade association. Mr. Carbon was a leader in the blacksmith's organization, being secretary-treasurer for more than 40 years. At one time he served as the state and national association president of blacksmiths. While he enjoyed the honor that came to him, he admits that "one thing bugged me. I just did not like to make speeches." The fact that about 1200 persons belonged to the National Association of Blacksmiths indicates the esteem in which he was held by his fellow blacksmiths.

Not only did the blacksmith engage in horseshoeing and general repair work, but he also became a manufacturer. Wagons, buggies, sleds and cutters were made in these shops, especially during the summer season when work might be a bit "slow." Mr. Carbon stated that about four or five of these means of conveyance were made in his shop each year. When companies were set up which manufactured these with mass production techniques, this part of the work was discontinued, for "we just could not compete with their manner of operation." Until the present day, blacksmiths still must be prepared to "set tires" and to do general repair work on wagons. Incidentally, most of the wood used in the manufacture of wagons and sleds was purchased locally. A special curing process was engaged in before the wood could be used.

Branch Flourished

Branch at one time was a flourishing community. There always was a school in the community. At one time the one room rural school had an enrollment of 100 children with one teacher. Later a two-room school was conducted which existed until reorganization of school districts took place. Now the children around Branch are transported to Manitowoc schools.

The railroad station at Branch once was a very busy place with at least three regular employees, all of them proficient in telegraph operation. This was especially the case when highway construction got under-

way. All the supplies for highways out of Manitowoc to Green Bay and Appleton were sent to Branch.

Other Interests Available

The working day in the early 1900's usually was from sunrise until sundown. However, the community had its recreational interests too. There was a tavern which had a dance hall in connection with it. The first tavern which Mr. Carbon remembers was owned by J. B. Johnson, who also owned the grocery and general store. There was also a pool hall and bowling alley. The bowling alley had only one alley and the game was then known as "nine pins."

One of the recreational activities during the winter was basketball. Old-timers were very proud of their team, for it had on it some of the "stars" of the county. Such names as Joe Voboril and Christ Schade were prominent on teams of the period.

One of the farms close to the village was owned by a Mr. Dalwig. He raised draft horses for the Ringling Bros. circus. These were Percherons, and as Mr. Carbon remembers them they were among the finest horses that could be found anywhere. Another farmer in the community was David Sheldon, who was an uncle of Ralph Plumb. Mr. Carbon remembers that "a Yankee was usually the town chairman of the town of Manitowoc Rapids" during those days. The chairman was either David Sheldon of Branch or E. S. Bedell of Manitowoc Rapids.

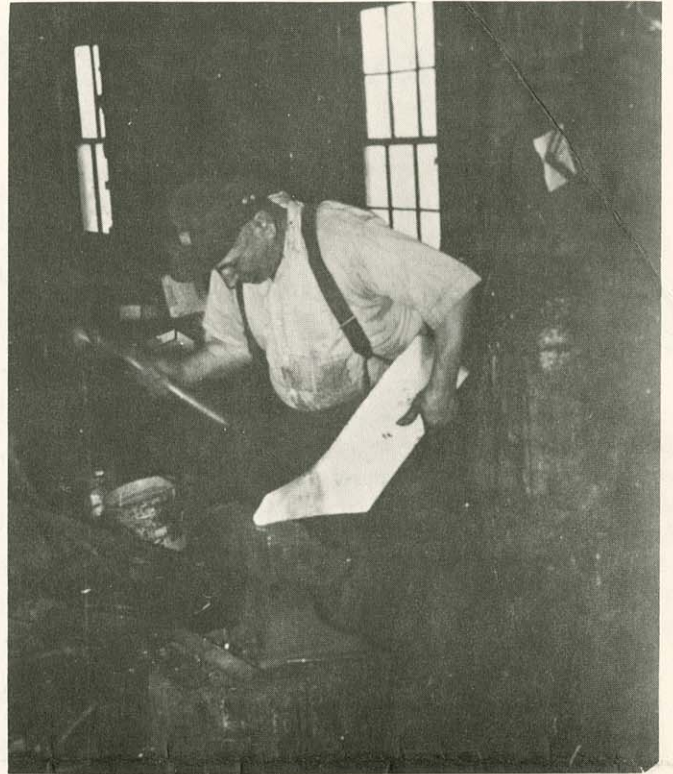
At one time there was a church in Branch. The Rev. George Groetner was pastor of the First Reformed Church in the community. Later this church relocated on the site of the Court House annex in Manitowoc. A cemetery is located across from the old school about a half mile down the highway to the south.

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The author, Mr. Edward Ehlert, is currently Secretary and Treasurer of Manitowoc County Historical Society. He was Principal of McKinley School in Manitowoc from 1931 through 1965.



Joseph Carbon, Jr.



Joseph Carbon, Jr., sharpening a plow point—picture taken in 1945. A plow point was sharpened by heating it, and the plow point was then hammered to a sharp edge. It was then heated again, and put in water, for tempering.



This picture taken in 1925. Joseph Carbon, Jr., shoeing a horse, Joseph Carbon, Sr., at left.

Does it hurt a horse to drive a nail into its hoof? Not at all — in fact, if it is done properly it doesn't hurt at all. Each hoof is made of hard, horny material, something like the dead cells that make up your hair or your fingernails. The hoof has no blood vessels or nerves, so the horse can feel no pain as the nail is driven into it.

Two Rivers – Conrad Baetz
 Mishicot – Joe Dufek, Frank Hrudka,
 Pat Conelly, and Jim Pivonka
 Tisch Mills – Wencil Ciha
 Skubal Corners – Wencil Prucha
 Maribel – Henry Becker
 Rosecrans – Emil Petska
 Kellnersville – Charles Muench, Joe
 Stangel, Joe Lambert
 Kingsbridge – Wencil Dufek, Walter
 Lambert
 Menchalsville – Joe Blaha
 Taus – Joe Stelzer
 Reifs Mills – Jake Hynek
 Shoto – Henry Rahn, John Leiterman,
 Louis Jansky
 Rockville – John Leiterman
 Four Corners – Albert Johanek, An-
 ton Witt, Lloyd Witt
 Branch – Byron Mason, Wilbert Jo-
 hanek, Jos. Carbon, Sr., Joe
 Carbon, Jr.
 Whitelaw – Fred Preuss, Joe Staud-
 inger, Jack Kohlbeck, Tony
 Brandl
 Cato – Brunner Bros., Steve Stefl,
 Chas. Augustine
 Grimms – Carl Liermann, Charles
 Logan
 Reedsville – Frank Kondelka, Otto
 Dahlke
 Collins – Mr. Schnell
 Valdars – Art Thiel

St. Nazianz – Philip Koenig, Ed
 Bruechert
 Highway 151 – Jacob Koenig
 Clarks Mills - Geo. Staudinger,
 Frank Hoehring, Ed Kasbaum,
 Geo. Schuh, Arndt Pederson
 Newton – John Janing
 Highway 42 – William Kolb, Walter
 Kolb
 Cleveland – Joe Casper, Webbur
 Casper
 Francis Creek – Joe Frye, Jos.
 Shupita
 Melnik – John Shimanek
 Larrabee – Mr. Graycaek, Frank
 Witt

MANITOWOC COUNTY BLACK- SMITH AND HORSE-SHOERS FROM ABOUT 1889 TO THE PRESENT.

These names were supplied by Joseph Carbon, who for a number of years was secretary-treasurer of the Manitowoc County Blacksmith's Association. Several blacksmiths never took out membership in the association, so their names are not included in the above list.

Manitowoc (city) – Frank Hinz, Al
 Norris, William Heise, Frank Le-
 verenz, Andreas Rank, Andy Beck,
 August Gauger, Phil Heidorf, Ber-
 nard Kitzerow, John Kibler, Jake
 Stueber, Tom Posvic, Charles Sleight

Note: Names underlined are those
 who still are operating blacksmith
 shops today.

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