

The Story of

# Milbern Cabin

On the South Shore of Lake Superior



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The site of what is now known as Milbern Cabin was first discovered from the lake side. T.A. Loveland, Mid and I had chartered a small launch and were cruising along the south shore of Lake Superior. The south shore is composed of high bluffs of red clay, rather uninviting in appearance. It is difficult to find a spot where access to higher ground can easily be attained. As we cruised along we noted we were approaching the mouth of a small river. Here the ground slowly sloped down to the lake and here we beached our launch. T.A. was the first to jump out into the shallow water, followed by Mid and myself. We stood for a minute looking at the unbroken sandy shore on which the waves were gently breaking. Lake Superior was in a particularly sunny mood that day and gentle swells were approaching the shore and quietly receding. The sun was shining brightly and the whole scene was one of utter tranquility. We stood and gazed

up and finally discovered an old trail leading up to the bank. We ascended this and found ourselves in a small clearing surrounded by large balsam trees. It looked like an ideal site for a cabin and Middy exclaimed, "This would be an ideal spot to build our cabin, Bern." I readily agreed and so did T.A. I recall there was one small balsam tree, perhaps 2 ½ inches in diameter, standing right in the center of the open spot.



T.A. looked at it and said, "Mid, if this is where your house is going to be, you should cut down the first tree." With that he handed her a small ax and Middy promptly felled the little balsam. This tree was soon followed by many others as the cabin was eventually built in this wild spot. This all took place in the summer of 1928.

After our marriage in 1916 I discovered that I had a wife who did not require much urging to indulge in some of the outdoor activities that I was so passionately fond of. Each spring and summer we devoted to fishing trips sometimes for muskellunge exclusively and then again devoting an entire trip to bass. In the fall, of course, my hunting instincts took full possession of me. For

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many years, Mid did not shoot, but she gradually entered this realm of activity and was my constant companion.

During all of our trips we were constantly on the alert for a place in which to build a cabin. Unfortunately, I was the victim of hay fever and it was imperative for me to get away from the ragweed belt every summer. One simply had to get up north and escape the deadly pollen.

We already had explored the reaches of Rainy Lake and as a matter of fact, had purchased a small island on that lake. It was a beautiful little spot, but extremely remote and difficult to get to. One must remember that in those days we did not have the airplane service that we have now. To get to International Falls and go down the lake one had to travel by train and then take a small boat and literally start exploring. There were many incidents on some of the trips that I could relate at length, some of which were extremely interesting. However, we decided that Lake Superior was not a bad spot.

There were two ambitious realtors by the name of T.A. Loveland and Dick Colburn, who had secured an option on a large piece of property on the south shore of Lake Superior. This was to be a magnificent development extending for many miles. T.A. came into my office one day and said, "Bern, I'm interested in the south shore of Lake Superior. We've got options on a couple of miles of property on lake front and I want you to come up and look at it with me." Always willing to take a chance I said, "O.K., T.A. when do you want to go up?"

He said, "Anytime."

This was in the winter. We made the trip to Duluth by car and finally reached the mouth of the Amnicon River where they already had built a large low building in anticipation of the future development. On this particular day, Dick Colburn, T.A. and I tied on our snowshoes, put haversacks on our backs and started a trek along the shore. The snow was about sixteen inches deep on the level and it was delightful to walk on top of the brush. After covering about three and one-half miles that day we finally came to a north and south cut which was subsequently known as Stump Avenue. It was a morass, covered with brush. The only indication of a road was the trees on both sides were slightly higher than the brush in the middle.

T.A. was following a map of all the property and I selected two lots right at the head of what is now Stump Avenue. Later, however, I gave them up for they were practically inaccessible. I told T.A. I simply had to have a place which we could eventually develop more easily. This led to another expedition in the summer of 1928. T.A. had rented a launch at Duluth and we set out along the shore line and eventually came to the area which is now occupied by my cabins on the south shore.

Looking back at it over the years I now realize that only an individual who was activated by a pioneer instinct could possibly have selected this inaccessible spot in which to build as large a cabin as we subsequently constructed. There were many hardships to overcome but each one of them was a challenge that I simply delighted in and Mid was right alongside all the time. The planning of the cabin was left entirely to her and as she designed it, it now stands. There were practically no variations in the original plan that Mid drew up.

Having decided to build a house in this particular spot, we now had to figure out who was going to build it and how it was going to be built. One must recall that the place was absolutely inaccessible at this point except by water, and the water route from the Amnicon to the location of Milbern was about 3 ½ miles. Here at the Amnicon, Loveland and Colburn had built a large bunkhouse and during the summer Mid and I went up frequently to formulate plans. By good fortune we met a man named Donald Felch, a retired furniture maker from the East come West to seek adventure and perhaps a place to locate. He was a fine old gentleman and intimated that he would be very glad to build the cabin for us. After several hours of discussion we finally agreed that it could be done. He was to round up local labor, locate the trees to be cut, because we wanted a log house, and get all the figures that were necessary to get started with the enterprise.

I would like to state right now that Felch was a most reliable man, had a delightful family and his son and wife were with him at this point. "One of the first requisites, Doc," said Felch one day, "is to make sure that we can get good drinking water in this area. We going to have to get hold of a well digger and find out how far we're going to have to go down."

I said, "Don, we're right on the shore of the lake. This cabin will only be about 75 feet from the shore. It shouldn't be a difficult matter."

"Oh, no," he said, "you might find that you have to go down at least 100 feet in order to get pure water."

This was news to me, however, later on, after we employed Mr. Long to drill, we found that we had to go down 204 feet before reaching an acceptable flow of water. This water, after the drilling had been done, came up to within 13 feet of the top of the casing so the pump did not have an excessive lift. At this same time Felch was busy trying to locate trees to be cut. The closer the trees were to the area, the cheaper it would be to haul them in. He finally located a man by the name of Rundquist who had a fine stand of balsams, pine and spruce on his property about five miles distant. After some dickering Felch informed me that I could buy all of the logs for the house, hauled down to the site by horses on sleds in the winter and peeled on location for the magnificent sum of \$500! I readily agreed to this. Incidentally, today you could not duplicate this house under \$25,000.



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Felch also said the heart of any cabin was a fireplace and he designed a beauty to go at the head of the living room. This fireplace weighed about 8 tons by the time it was completed and it still stands without a crack in it, which is a testament to his ability. Felch also insisted on putting concrete piers underneath the house and there are now 46 of them on which the bearing logs lie. There has been very little settling in the edifice since its construction in 1929 and 1930.

Mid and I made frequent trips up into the woods the following winter. We noted that the logs were being hauled down by teams, wandering through the old logging wood trail and then down the hill. The hill of course had been covered with brush, but that was easily hacked out. Now the place took on the aspects of an old time of an old time saw mill. The ground was



heaped with large logs, the peelings were scattered here and there and gradually the yellow logs emerged. Felch was all over the place. In fact, he handpicked the logs. He had them all numbered and he knew which logs were going to rest on the piers and how they would be graduated in size as they rose. He was really a meticulous worker. One of the things he insisted on was placing a piece of zinc on top of each concrete pier so that there would be no rotting of the log above it. To this day they are as sound as the day they were placed on the piers. Felch also secured the services of several good woodsmen, chief of whom was Verner Granroth. He also located an old sailor by the name of Dave who was a wood caulker and who could caulk seams between the logs in beautiful fashion. The logs, of course, had to be hauled in over the snow so that was done in the late fall of 1928. During the winter Mid and I went up on many occasions. At that time we could drive within about a mile and a half or two miles of the cross road going into our property and many trips were made on snowshoes by my wife and myself. It was truly a great experience to see the big cabin gradually begin to take form. Already the well had been drilled and, incidentally, after starting the drilling Mr. Long found that he had only to move it about 8 inches to escape a large rock, perhaps forty feet in the ground. The house was thus oriented 8 inches to the westward. The well also had to be located in an exact spot in relation to the sink in the kitchen. From that point on Mr. Felch began his construction. The rafters in the roof consisted of straight balsam poles running from the apex of the ceiling down under the eaves. Not one of them has ever sagged. They are remaining in their original condition which is another attest to Felch's planning and sound construction. After the floor was laid Felch put up a

tent and during the winter months they lived in this tent. Temperature very often would go down to thirty below but it did not seem to make much difference to those hardy souls.

As I said before, Mid and I went up often during the winter and watched row after row of yellow gleaming balsam and pine logs gradually rise. The embrasures for the windows were cut out after the logs were laid and when the casings were nailed in we could stand and look out of the windows down to the ground and see the beginnings of our new country home. Of course, there were many vicissitudes, labor was hard to get, competent wood workers were especially rare, but Felch somehow seemed to manage. He also took charge of buying the doors which were made of red cedar. The doors were put together by him with lag bolts and are one of the beauty spots in the cabin at this time.

Back in the 1870's, this entire area of Northern Wisconsin was cut over by lumber companies. The white pine was the predominant tree and the stumps now indicate that many of the trees were 2 ½ to 4 feet in diameter. Many stumps were still visible throughout the area which gave rise to the name of the road, Stump Avenue, because this road was bordered with the charred remnants of the former great trees. Exactly where the main cabin now stands, a bunk-house had formerly stood. Prowling around through later years, we find many evidences of the construction of this camp, notably large iron bolts, square nails, pieces of old axes, etc. Where the badminton court now stands was a sink hole into which probably all refuse had been thrown. It was filled with toads and other reptiles, and surrounded with dense alder brush, when we first saw it, so one of the first jobs was to fill in this hole and level up the ground. We had no mechanized equipment in those days so all the ground moving was done by horses and drags – and I can still see the men and horses dragging in the load after load of clay, leveling down the humps and filling up depressions.

What is now the point overlooking the river had been made by piling up large logs and covering them with earth. This rampart was and is probably twenty feet above the level of the river. The same sort of structure was built up on the other side – thus providing the loggers with a roll-way as well as a means of swinging a boom across the part of the river. During the winter, trees were felled along the side of the river and pushed down into the river itself. When the spring floods came, the logs would rush up to the boom which extended across the river from the point to the opposite shore. At intervals when the lake was quiet, the lumbermen would allow a certain number of logs to go through the boom into Lake Superior. These logs were then formed in large booms and rafted down to the head of the St. Louis River where a lumber mill was located.

This stream, which is known as Bardon Creek, is very placid, the water's colored dark brown from the clay and it usually is very quiet. However, in the spring or after heavy rains, a tremendous amount of water is forced down this river. The increased volume breaks down the sandy barrier into Lake Superior and the

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current extends for a half-mile and upward into the lake. Such a flood brings with it a lot of dead trees, etc., etc....and it's very evident that when the logging operation was in force, it was no arduous task to float these heavy pine, balsam and spruce logs down this stream into the lake itself.

Today, when people come to the cabin, drive on a gravel road, go past the badminton court, everything seems in fine order. But I always recall the days when this was not so accessible. It was really an arduous task to level off the sufficient ground so that a car could be driven up to what is now the back porch of the cabin.

Since this was the first large cabin or summer home to be built in this area, it naturally occasioned a lot of excitement among the local residents. One by one, they would wander down to view the operation, give their advice and comments, and then incidentally tell me how impracticable it was to build a cabin on that spot. However, the work went on – and one by one, certain characters emerged that had something to do with the construction of the building itself and leveling off the ground.

When Felch decided to look around for woodworkers, he located a man named Verner Granroth and hired him as his chief log hewer. Verner was a Finlander – a little short fellow intensely muscular, and was one of the finest men with an ax that I have ever seen before or since. He could almost cut a plane surface on a round log and when it came to chopping down trees, his speed was fantastic. If you will look around the cabin today and notice how beautifully all the joints are formed, you can attribute it to Verner's handiwork. Of course he had one or two helpers but they were only helpers and certainly did not possess his skill.



After the cabin was completed, Felch suggested that I hire Granroth as a caretaker and this I decided to do. For several winters, he lived in the house itself, battened off the dining room area from the living room, kept his stoves going, and managed to keep warm. But after two or three years of this, I decided to build him a caretaker's cabin which was built right at the base of the hill leading into the premises. This cabin was built by Verner and I provided all the materials, the concrete, the log siding, the insulation, etc., etc....

Off and on I'd go up and work with him over a weekend, helping him nail up the siding and get things in shape. Verner was an indefatigable worker, had a tremendous enthusiasm and imagination, and he and I got along beautifully. However, his wife was of a different sort and I think it was entirely due to her influence that he finally left my employ. I paid him a monthly salary and he at the same time had a job in Superior so that he was kept busy all the time. But, like all characters of this sort, that is, caretakers, he was constantly nagging away at me for more money. Whenever Mid and I were up at the cabin, we'd have a delightful talk with Verner, he'd tell me about all the progress that was being made and then just before we were about to leave, he would invariably say, "By the way, Doc, there's a little matter of so-much, I put in so – much time and I think I ought to be paid for it." I began to notice that I was being constantly hooked for more money so I decided that we had to do something about it. For a long time, I had been watching a Mr. Sage's fishing operation at the mouth of the Amnicon River and I decided if he could make a good living out of it, there is no reason why we couldn't do the same. This would provide Granroth additional revenue. Accordingly, I looked into the business to find out what we would require in order to go into commercial fishing.

The first thing that we had to provide was an ice house so Verner and I planned a large ice house right at the mouth of the river. It was placed on concrete piers; we had a cold room; we built up a dock on the river side to moor the boat. The next thing was to get hold of a boat of considerable size so that we could haul in the fish, repair the nets, and do all the heavy dragging connected with that type of operation. The third item was the nets themselves and we decided on pond nets.

The law at the time stated that no net could be within a half mile of the shore line. So, in order to get into the proper depth of water, we discovered that we would need about 700 feet of leads running out to the pond itself. At a little over half mile from shore, we found the water to be 27 feet deep. So I ordered ponds built 27 feet in depth and about 25 feet square across the top. The leads consisted of a heavy netting starting at the pond itself and gradually running towards shore. This made a fence of netting less deep at the shore end than out at the pond itself. The pike could run along the shore, hit the lead and gradually find themselves in the trap and eventually into the pond itself. Once having entered the pond, they did not seem able to escape

At that time, the walleyed pike was the finest fish at that end of Lake Superior. It's a peculiar thing about these fish; they run along the shore but stop abruptly at Port Wing, about 15 miles to the east of us. Beyond that point, no walleyed pike were ever seen. Unquestionably, the fish spawned in the St. Louis River and then came into the lake to feed. They were beautiful fish, dark black at the top with white bellies and they had a tremendous amount of food at their disposal.



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During the years we were catching these fish, I was never able to catch one on a hook. We tried fishing for them at night; we tried early in the morning; we used lived bait; we used spinners; we did everything known to man to try to catch a walleyed pike on a hook but it was an impossibility. At the same time, we were getting from 200 to 4-, 5- and 600 pounds of pike every time we would trail out our nets. Granroth was as busy as a beaver. He had boxes made to pack the fish in which then had to be hauled to Poplar, put on the railroad, and sent to New York and Chicago markets. We found it was much better to send our fish to the East because they were select fish and we got a much better price for them. Incidentally, the price for a beautiful walleyed pike at that time was \$ .18 a pound-round, that is, the fish was not gutted. The price we received for white fish was from \$ .20 - .22 a pound cleaned, and the price for lake trout was \$ .24 a pound. Compare that with the prices one has to pay today!



During the winter, Granroth and a helper cut ice at the mouth of the river and stored it in the ice house. The ice house would hold as much as 50 to 52 tons of ice and was indispensable for this type of operation. In order to set the nets, we had to drive piling into the lake -- and in 27 feet of water, this was quite a job. I finally ended up buying a

scow on which we mounted an old Ford engine and, using a 50 pound hammer, we drove our piling out in the lake. This barge was towed out there by the fishing boat with an outboard motor on it. The fishing boat, by the way, was about 20 feet long and had a 5 foot beam. I had it made on the North Shore by an old boatmaker over there and I dragged it around through Duluth, up to the South Shore on a trailer behind my Packard car. It was quite a day when we launched the boat early in the spring.

The fishing started as soon as the ice was out of the lake and the weather calmed down to a point where we could set our nets. Remember, all the piles had to be driven deep into the clay bottom and we had to wait for calm days in order to do this, but eventually, we got our 2 pond nets located. Fishing continued through the spring and summer but generally was all over by the 1<sup>st</sup> of August. Our biggest catches were made about the 1<sup>st</sup> of July and I believe one of the record catches we made consisted of 650 pounds of walleyed pike. All of the white fish and trout were cleaned right at the ice house and the livers of the white fish were delightful to eat.

I can remember Dorie going to the ice house and picking out livers and even helping to clean fish. She truly was a fisherman's daughter and loved it as much as I did. Also, many times we went out with Granroth early in the morning to lift the nets and it was a tremendous sight to finally get into the pond itself, lift up the sidewall and see hundreds of pike rolling alongside. They were dipped into the boat with large dip nets and sometimes were knee-deep in fish as we pulled back to the dock.

The fishing operation proceeded very well for the first year. By the end of the second year, I was just about even on the enterprise. I had made a deal with Granroth whereby he received 50% of the profits of the operation so that he was now earning well over \$100 every month, in addition to the pay which I gave him on a monthly basis. But when it came time to figure out the entire yearly operation, I found that he had the cockeyed notion that I was to personally absorb all the expenses and he was going to share 50% of the gross profits. I tried to convince him that after paying insurance, buying all the equipment, depreciating it, etc., I could not afford to pay him 50% of the gross. This was the beginning of the rift between him and me.

Personally, I think he was constantly being "pecked" at by his wife, Ingrid, who was a narrow-minded soul at best, for he himself had a very cheerful disposition and I feel sure I could have gotten along with him for many, many more years. However, fate ended the fishing operation the end of the second year. They changed the law for commercial fishermen and enlarged the mesh of the net to 4 ½ inches. By doing this, practically all of our walleyes would go right through the meshes of the net and almost every commercial fisherman on the South Shore was forced out of business. I heard one rumor to the effect that one fisherman up at Port Wing felt so badly about it that he simply walked out into the lake and drowned himself. Whether this is true or not, I will never know. Suffice it to say, I had to stop the fishing operation.

By this time, the relationship between Granroth and me had become quite strained so I decided to cut it off. I'll never forget the day we had our final discussion, at which Ingrid insisted on being present. I told Verner that I would give him the truck which I had bought to carry the fish to and from the station, give him the nets, give him the boat, the outboard motor and set him up in the business so that when the law changed again, he would have the opportunity to go back into the fish business – which he dearly loved. This was all right with Verner – but his wife sat with her beady eyes watching me and said "What about all the furniture he made for you in the cabin?" for which I had already paid him. I said I considered that part of his responsibility as caretaker but it finally ended up by my paying cash for the birch beds that were made for the cabin, and various other little things that he had constructed. Thus, our relationship was severed.

The South Shore of Lake Superior takes a terrific beating, and the shore is being gradually eroded away. By the end of the first summer, I had decided to build a

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pier out into the lake to break the impact of the waves and attempt to build up the shore line. I took this up with Verner and told him where I wanted the pier located. Immediately, of course, he took exception to it. His ideas, in his opinion, were always the best. Carefully and laboriously, I told him how the sea and sand work to build up a beach. On a quiet day, when the waves were gently breaking, I took a stick and stuck it in the water. "Now," I said, "Verner, watch how the sand hits this little stick and how it gently builds up alongside of it, and builds up the beach on the windward side." As he watched this natural phenomenon, he finally came to the conclusion that I was right and said "Well, Doctor, I guess you're right about it. We'll put the pier right here."

So we built up the first mall pier out into the lake. The following year, I decided to build a much bigger one further to the West. For that enterprise, we needed a lot of timber. In those days, there were many old wrecks that piled up on the south shore and we located one a mile and a half down the beach. There were some magnificent 14 x 14 timbers in this wreck and we pried them apart and floated these big beams down to the cabin site. I had figured out the dimensions for the big pier and we secured large pine logs, 40 feet long, anchored them together, tucked them into the shore and thus made a floor for the pier. The heavy timbers were then dug into the ground at the shore line and extended into the lake itself. These heavy timbers were spiked together with 36" long spikes which Granroth drove through the timbers. I can still see him standing, driving these huge spikes with the spray splashing over his bare back. He truly was a sight to see when he was busy. He stood like a Viking up there, his lithe form swinging a 13 pound mall as though it was a tack hammer!



After we had formed the box for the pier, we had to fill it with rock. Every one of the rocks which now lie in this pier was picked up by hand. We would scrounge all the stones from the immediate area and finally go a mile down the shore, feel the rocks under the water with our feet, reach down, put them into the rowboat, and slowly drag the boat back to the pier. Here they were

lifted one by one and dumped into the box. I figure we have 13 or 14 tons of stone in that pier today. Incidentally, the pier still stands and it has maintained my shore in splendid fashion. Of course, all the natives thereabouts saw this operation and they all told me that it was entirely futile – that nothing could control the waves of Lake Superior – that I was simply wasting my time. But – they lived and learned – and finally admitted that it was the only thing that has

kept the shore from gradually being eroded down to nothing. These Finlanders are very stubborn people. They have to be shown. You have to tell them. You have to demonstrate that you are right or otherwise, they will simply go their own way.

The combination of Granroth and deVries was a happy one. I supplied the projects and the planning; Verner supplied the brawn. We got along beautifully with only one or two exceptions. The children were all very fond of him and he often would take time off to play with them. I truly believe that the serpent in the garden of Eden was exemplified in the person of his wife, Ingrid. However, all good things come to an end and the era of Verner Granroth finally reached its culmination in about 1938.

You will notice at the back of the cabin a fine stand of spruce and Norway pine. Some of these trees are 60 or 70 feet high today. They were all planted by Verner and myself. Most of them were from 4 to 6 feet high when we planted them. The Norway pines, however, were planted from seedlings, only 6 or 8 inches high – and they were carefully nurtured and looked after. At the time we planted these trees, Verner had gotten the idea that he wanted to have a couple of goats in order to use their milk. The goats wandered all over the place and I came down on one weekend and noticed that they were chewing down my little pine seedlings. I expostulated with Verner about that and he said, “Oh, no, the rabbits are eating them.” I said, “It’s the goats.” So, without any more preamble, I insisted on putting screen netting around each one of the seedlings that were planted at the edge of the badminton court. This is the only way those trees were protected from the ravenous goats who would eat anything. I transplanted three or four of these Norways and they are only slightly shorter than those which were allowed to grow right from scratch. You will see them scattered throughout the area.

Before I forget it, I must mention another old character who played a part in the construction of the main building. This was a man named Wilkerson. He was a little bit of a chap, very energetic, always had a happy smile, and delighted in doing little extraordinary things for people. Felch had employed him to assist in laying the logs but I guess Felch early discovered that he was not as adept at the job as he might have been. There is one corner of the cabin which was laid exclusively by Wilkerson. None of the logs fit properly – they’re a little bit askew and they’re mute evidence of his inability with the ax. However, I would not change that corner for anything. It is a constant reminder to me of this kindly little old gentleman who was really a true friend. He delighted in making little canes for the children, making small objects of furniture out of green balsams. He’d allow them to dry and they became very sturdy. There is one little footstool in the kitchen which has remained there since we took possession of the cabin in 1930. It still stands and it is still rugged enough that you can put your full weight on it to reach up for something on a high shelf.

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Dear old Wilk lived all by himself and how he got along, I will never know. He reached a tragic end, however. He was splitting wood with his ax and one of the big chunks flew up and hit him in the forehead, fracturing his frontal bone. This paralyzed him almost completely but eventually he got around a little but had to be cared for until he passed away. However, he has left his imprint on the cabin and I shall always remember him as a very dear kindly, old soul.

Another character who left his indelible imprint on the cabin was old Dave the Shipscaulker. Where this man originally came from, I will never know. However, he appeared at the Amnicon looking for a job and Felch thought it would be a good idea to hire him to drive the oakum between the logs at the cabin. This man had been a ship's caulker for many years and, of course, when the wooden ships went out of business, he also went out of business. He was very adept with his wooden chisels and the long strings of oakum which he would buy by the keg. Every joint between the logs was plugged by him with his wooden mallet and then the seams were covered over with a triangular molding. The cabin was redolent of the smell of oakum

for many, many years and even today, on a hot day, you can still get the odor of old tarry rope. Dave also helped impregnate the hardwood floor of the cabin with a material known as ligne salvor. This was something made in Europe and had much creosote in it. It was recommended to me by Wilbur Tusler. For years and years, the smell of creosote



permeated the cabin. That, combined with the oakum, gave it a real tarry, nautical odor. I might say now that the floor has never sagged, consists of inch and a quarter oak flooring, tongued and grooved, laid on diagonal 6" boards underneath, with a layer of tar paper between the floor proper and the base. Felch had insisted on placing this kind of a floor because it was vermin and mice-proof. The floor may be mouse-proof, however, but there were other small interstices through which the little rodents gained access to the cabin and thereon hangs another story. The eradication of the mice! In that connection, Boonie was the expert trapper and he received a penny for every mouse he caught. Some nights you could hear the click-clack of the traps going on 8 or 10 times.

Looking back at the early days, I believe my most formidable opponent to a peaceful existence was the red clay road that led to the cabin from the mailbox.



By the spring of 1930, the cabin was in fairly good condition so we decided that the whole family would go up at the close of the school year in early June. The family at that time consisted of Dorie, Boon, Dirk and Viola, our German maid, who was a marvelous addition to the family. Accordingly, we loaded up the big seven passenger Packard, hooked on the trailer, filled it with mattresses, etc. and set out for the Amnicon.

We made the trip successfully and spent the night in the big bunkhouse at the mouth of the Amnicon. I well recall that first night; it was mainly a battle against the miller moths which infested the place and the mosquitoes which got in through every crack. One noteworthy fact was that we had muskrats for dinner that first night. It was the first time I had ever eaten these little animals. The meat is rather sweet but not at all objectionable.

The following morning the boat was loaded up with everything we could get into it, including the moose head which I had mounted from a trip early in 1924. This head now hangs over the fireplace and has been preserved these many years in its fine pristine condition. It was mounted by Mr. Richardson of the University and he spent a long time at it. In those days the foundation over which to stretch the hide was made of Plaster of Paris, and the entire mounted head weighed almost a hundred pounds. Nowadays you can achieve the same results by stretching the hide over a papier-mâché form which weighs considerably less. Every article had to be carried up the pathway to the house, dumped inside and the business of organization gotten underway.

The first night in the cabin must have been rather hectic because not all of the screens were on the porch, we had many moths around and a lot of mosquitoes as I recall it. But eventually we passed the night successfully. Everybody took turns pumping water into the big tank over the bathroom and I might say that it took one thousand strokes of the pump handle to fill the tank. Many weary hours were consumed doing this.

We had bought a second-hand cook stove, which had six holes in the top, and was a tremendous thing. Of course, we had to split our own wood in those days and keep a small supply on hand. I soon came to the conclusion that we'd better cut some of the dead poplar trees in the woods, saw them up in 14 inch lengths and then split them for use in the stove. For firewood in the fireplace we relied on driftwood of which there was a great amount washed up on the shore. Everybody had something to do, but of course Boon and Dirk were small youngsters, and Dorie who was nine at the time, was in and out of the place constantly. She was as busy as a bee flitting hither and thither and having the time of her life. Incidentally when we were living on Lake Harriet, Dorie, who was a regular tomboy, insisted on swimming in the lake every day. She would swim out to the spring board which was mounted on a platform, and there try her dives. She was competing with a lot of stringy youngsters in the area, many of whom were good divers, but Dorie was surely a neophyte. I would stand on the shore

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and watch this little tyke leap from the spring board and land with a belly flop time after time. Every time she would hit the water I would hurt, but she certainly was persistent and it was not long before she was having a fine time. Incidentally, later on in her life she became one of the outstanding swimmers at her college at Mills. In fact, she was captain of the swimming team as well as captain of the skiing team. She was always an outdoor girl and enjoyed living at Milbern those early years very much indeed.

Boon was a stringy youngster of six and little Dirkie was just a chubby baby of three. Viola, being a farm girl, was right in her element. She not only took care of the kitchen stove but she watched the kids as well. And Mom and I, of course, were tremendously busy making the place habitable.

After our first early trips by boat from the Amnicon, we decided to come up by car and accordingly, one day we loaded up the trailer, hitched it on the Packard, and drove up Stump Avenue. The entire road from No. 13 to the edge of the lake was simply a mass of clay ruts. When dry it was passable, but after a shower or a rain, it was the most slippery road I ever traveled on. Invariably, I took chains along because we were stuck many, many times, and after the wheels began to spin, there was no recourse but to jack up the hind wheels, crawl underneath the car, put on the chains and go our merry way.

Arriving at the end of Stump Avenue, we had to go by foot along a trail to get to the cabin. This trail followed the crest of the clay bluff and crossed seven ravines before the cabin was reached.



Boon and Dorie could navigate this walk in pretty good shape but for little Dirkie it was really tough. The grass in places extended well over his head and he tried manfully to keep his footing but I decided finally that the only way to get him in and out was to put him on my back and carry him. He seemed to enjoy this, because he was having a good ride at Daddy's

expense. All the things we had to eat and wear also had to be carried in by hand. As time went on, whenever I would leave the cabin on Sunday afternoons, I would pack my packsack with about sixty pounds of dirty clothes, carry them up to the end of the road, transfer them to the car, and take them into town to be cleaned up. Then, when I returned on Friday night, I would park the car, strap on the packsack, and walk down the trail to the cabin. This went on for a

considerable period of time, but by the end of the summer, Mid had come to the conclusion that we had to have more accessibility to the place. This made me contemplate knocking a road through from Stump Avenue to the top of the hill which was no little task. It was all rough brush and trees, of course, but I had the blue print of the entire development which indicated that every lot which faced the lake was about 700 feet deep. A road had been projected along this route but of course nothing had been done. Accordingly, Bob Haxby, my brother-in-law, and I went up early the next summer to lay out the road. Using a 34 foot length of rope to establish the width of the right of way, we tried to adhere to a line approximately 700 feet from the lake, curving the road here and there to make it a little more attractive than if it were in a straight line. Today, you will see many little curves that we put in this road intentionally which add greatly to the beauty of it.

We would measure off 34 feet, blaze trees on either side, then proceed another 25 feet, blaze two more trees, and proceed along this line until we reached the top of the hill. After we blazed out the road, I then had to figure out how we were going to clear it. So, I conferred with Granroth, who got a helper, and they began cutting down the trees. These fellows were tremendously effective with their axes. Every tree of any reasonable size was, of course, kept to construct additional outbuildings around the cabin. Verner hauled these down with his two-wheeled tractor, they were peeled on the premises, and he constructed what are now the woodshed and the power house where the generator is now installed. Originally, the generator house served as an icehouse for us for use during the summer. Verner would cut the ice in the winter, haul the chunks into the icehouse, cover them with sawdust, and from there, they would be transferred to the big icebox which stood on the back porch. These outbuildings, you will notice, are not at all air tight. The air circulates in them freely and this was done intentionally because they had to have ventilation. The only damage that has resulted to these buildings is due entirely to porcupines. The porcupines have eaten out the floors to the woodshed consistently, in spite of all that I could do. They also have performed the same depredations in the old icehouse. Originally, I killed quite a few of these little animals but in recent years, I rather enjoy having them around. After all, they do not do much damage, they're a dumb sort of critter, but it's fun to see them scurry up a tree and sit there for hours, until finally after you leave, they will quietly climb down and disappear. The only trouble we really ever had with them was when my big black Labrador dog would mix with them. He tried to bite them and as a result, his lips were filled with quills. On several occasions, I had to tie his feet so he couldn't move and with a pair of pliers, pull the quills from his mouth. It was an excruciatingly painful job but he never seemed to learn to leave the porcupines alone.

After Verner and his helper had cut down the trees, there then remained the matter of cleaning up the brush and getting rid of the bigger stumps. Verner concluded the only way to get the stumps out was to dynamite them. This seemed like a pretty drastic method to me but I told him to go ahead and buy a

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lot of dynamite sticks, which he accordingly did. We would dig a small hole underneath the bigger stumps, pack in two or three sticks of dynamite, light the fuse and then run like the devil before the blast went off. The stumps would fly into the air from 20 to 30 feet and make quite a picture. In fact, I have it all recorded on moving picture film.



We now had a way through the woods, but, of course, it was impossible for any kind of an automobile to traverse this road. Even Verner had difficulty getting through with his big two-wheel tractor. The next step was to get the road graded. For this purpose, I employed a man by the name of John Bong in Poplar. His son, Richard, eventually became one of the most famous aces in the Second World War. In fact, he downed many enemy planes and really was one of the outstanding heroes. Today, there is a memorial erected in his memory in the town of Poplar. I used to see this little tyke riding with his Father on the seat of his tractor and little did I realize what a tremendous national figure he would become.

Accordingly, the road was graded. This simply meant that a ditch was dug on each side and the clay heaped in the middle. As soon as the right-of-way from the cabin to Stump Avenue was opened up, even though it was practically impassable except in very dry weather, the era of Daisy the Saddlehorse and her colt came to an end. This also meant the end of much manure pitching for me, so we cleaned up the little barn and that was that. During all this time, Mid had insisted that we get a flock of chickens so we would have available a few fresh eggs and perhaps a chicken or two to eat on occasion. She also wanted a few ducks to put in the river. The ducks lived in a little pen down on the river's edge. They didn't last long because the mink disposed with most of them. The chickens, however, thrived. The only trouble was to keep them on the premises. In a very short time, they became practically wild and were impossible to catch. Whenever we'd feed them, they'd

congregate but, feeding time over, they'd immediately flutter into the brush. The only way to have a chicken for dinner was to shoot one so either Mid or I would take the 22, carefully stalk a chicken clucking through the brush, and eventually drill him with a 22 long rifle. Occasionally, however, we managed to trap one and then, Viola being a good sturdy farmhand, would grasp the chicken firmly by the feet, swing the hatchet over the chopping block and cut the chicken's head off. Then she'd throw him on the ground and the chicken would flounce around squirting blood in every direction. I have a very interesting moving picture of this particular episode. Before the clearing of a road-way was decided upon we had come to the conclusion that Mid, Viola and the family had to have access to Stump Avenue from the cabin. The big Packard was always parked at the end of Stump Avenue and securely locked but to get to it from the cabin was not always easy. So Mid conceived the idea of getting a saddle horse! We pondered the idea and finally concluded it had merit. A man named Hawkins had several horses and one was a saddle horse but it had recently had a colt which was still nursing. No problem – the colt came along! So, Daisy and her colt were rented for the summer – Verner and I built a tar-paper shack for them and Mid and Vi now had transportation to and from the car. They both would get on Daisy's back, tie on a pair of saddlebags and sally forth. The horse would be tied at the end of Stump Avenue and the women would drive to Poplar and get victuals. Then these were transferred to the saddlebags and so they came home. Only once did Daisy throw them off and that was a mess! Every weekend I shoveled the manure out of the make-shift barn! It was quite a summer!

While we are the subject of the horse, there are one or two things that come to my mind. One episode in particular stands out very, very clearly. You must all remember, that Middy and Viola were the only two adults up there throughout the entire summer, save for weekends when I arrived, and they were all by themselves during this period of time. Naturally, they had many adventures. It seems one night about midnight after the children had gone to bed, Viola and Mid were sitting in front of the fireplace when suddenly Viola heard Daisy neigh out in the barn. She immediately pricked up her ears and said, "Mrs. deVries, there's something wrong. That horse would not be making that noise if everything were all right. We've got to go and investigate." With that, they both put on their jackets, opened the door into utterly black night, walked down the steps over toward the barn. Viola was holding the flashlight. As they got near the end of the badminton court, between the trees which were then very short, Viola suddenly stopped and said, "Mrs. deVries, there's a man! I can see him! Look at his legs! What are we to do?" Mid told me afterwards that they were utterly terrified, that they could see the long legs of a man who was slowly moving in their direction. They stood stock still and suddenly Viola began to laugh. She said, "Oh, Mrs. deVries, it isn't a man at all! It's the colt." The colt had gotten loose and naturally its mother was neighing for it to come back to the fold but it certainly must have looked like the two long black legs of a man. Much shook up, they went back to the cabin and finally got to sleep.



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On another occasion, while they were up there alone, along about 11 o'clock on a dark gloomy night, they heard a pounding at the back door. They went cautiously to the screen door which was hooked, Mid peered out, and here stood a man! He said, "I don't want to alarm you. Everything's all right but we've got a sheep killer in the neighborhood and we've finally tracked him down to your cabin. He must be around here somewhere. He's been killing sheep of the people down the road a few miles, throwing them into his car, and making a getaway. Do you mind if we hang around here for a while and see if we can catch him?" Naturally, this didn't do much to allay their worries. The man stayed around for 3 or 4 hours and, of course, there was no more sleep that night. Needless to say, the sheep killer was never apprehended.

These episodes were constantly occurring because, after all, it was a very remote spot. Another violent character who lived in this area was a chap named Black Johnny. He was some kind of a moron who was a thief and everyone was on the lookout for him. He'd broken into many houses and was a really a desperate character. Every once in a while, someone would come in and say that Black Johnny was seen in the neighborhood and, for heaven's sake, be on the lookout for him because if they could find him, they wanted to arrest him for some misdemeanor or other. This kept us in turmoil for a couple of years but eventually we learned that Black Johnny had left the country entirely and I think he never returned.

Looking back at all this, I am utterly amazed at the fortitude my wife exhibited. She was absolutely fearless. Her family was the greatest thing in her life and with Viola, her staunch ally, both of them had a perfectly delightful time up there during all these pioneering years. After things became settled down, the cabin and its environment never again possessed the wildness that it did during these first early years. By this time, many of our friends had begun to come up to Milbern to enjoy a primitive vacation. They always came with their automobiles and I begged them to bring chains to extricate them in case they got stuck.

The old Packard car was the first machine to come in over the new graded road. I was driving alone up from Minneapolis and finally got to the end of Stump Avenue late in the afternoon. The road looked like nothing so much as a plowed field but I stuck the nose of the car into it and away we went. As I recall it, I got within about 100 feet of the end of the road before I bogged down. Verner was right there with his tractor; he hooked up the chain to the front of the end of the car, and dragged me through the last sink hole – and there I was finally at the top of the hill. Of course, it was an utter impossibility to get up and down the hill at that time. I felt like one of the Argonauts having made a successful voyage.

You will notice in the various bedrooms of the cabin four or five little white pine chests with wooden knobs on the drawers. I had these made in Minneapolis and decided to haul them up on the trailer. Accordingly they were packed, covered up with a tarpaulin and I made the trip. It began to rain about the time I hit Stump

Avenue so it was necessary to stop and put on the chains. I then managed to sideslip and make my precarious way to where the East and West road began. Then I turned the car on to the new graded road and proceeded. I got about half way down the road when the old car simply would not haul the trailer another inch. I had to get out, unspan the trailer, block it in the middle of the morass and proceed to the end of the road. It rained all that night, the next day was lugubrious, everything was mud from top to bottom, and along about noon, the sun came out and everything began to steam. Verner and I walked back to where the trailer sat dejectedly in the road, and he hooked on the tractor. We finally made it to the top of the hill and then dragged the trailer down behind the tractor and eventually got those five lovely little white cabinets into the cabin. When you look at them now, you just see five nice little cabinets. But every time I look at them, I can shut my eyes and think of the night I left them in that hot muddy road and remember how they looked the next morning with the earth steaming and the rain pelting down.



All this time things were moving along, down at the cabin site itself. I had decided to put up a garage so that we could store two cars in it. This having been accomplished, we built a lean-to adjoining it where Verner could store wood for his stove during the winter. At this time, of course, he was occupying the little caretaker's cabin right at the bottom of the hill. Whenever the road was dry, we had no difficulty in coming down the hill or getting back up but whenever it rained, even a small amount, the hill was simply impossible to negotiate. Whenever we had company at the place, I used to lie awake at night, waiting to hear the first raindrops on the roof and at the first sign of rain coming down, I would immediately get up, back my car out of the garage and climb to the top of the hill and leave it there in readiness to take my guests home.

In spite of my admonitions, practically none of our visitors ever equipped their cars with chains. And many times they had to be hauled out. On one occasion we had five cars at the top of the hill. It had rained for a couple of days but we

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finally managed to get to Stump Avenue. Everybody had to get out and push cards until finally Stump Avenue was reached. There the lead car simply could not go any further so I had to walk to Peterson's place, then over to Dave Palms and get him to bring out his sturdy team of horses. Those horses pulled all five cars out of the mud, five times, -- before we reached Peterson's farm. By the time the last car had been hauled out, the horses were practically exhausted.

On this particular occasion, Ben and Marguerite Paris had come up in a brand new Packard automobile, cream colored. They were in the line that had to be pulled out. As the team backed up to their car, I can still see Maggie sticking her head out of the window and yelling, "Don't pull the bumper off that car. If you do, you'll have to pay for it." Dave Palm looked at me questioningly and I said "Hook it on and jerk 'em out!" They hooked the chain on and the horses gave a tremendous lurch. Fortunately, the bumper stuck on the car and rolled out of the mud. When we finally got to 13, Benny got out of his Packard. His white duck pants were daubed with red clay and his car was a mess. "Doc, he said, "from now on, I'm going to stick to the pavements around Lake of the Isles!" It came from the heart!

The problem of this road, into and out of my cabin site, was the major problem that I encountered for 25 years. It has taken 25 years before finally we have gotten a good bottomed road and had a sufficient amount of gravel on top to insure easy accessibility to this place in rainy or dry weather. Of course, to me, much of the charm of the place has been lost since the mud disappeared. I guess, after all, I'm a mud hound at heart -- but those were really interesting days when you had to figure out every eventuality and be prepared to meet it.

Now in 1972 as I write this, Milbern Cabin still stands. The little trees which I planted almost 40 years ago are now fine, large trees and it is difficult to remember them as being only 6 feet in height. The caretaker's cabin was moved from its original position to its present location on the point. I hired a local man named Colby to do the job. Colby was a deer hunter and the game wardens were always trying to catch him but they never succeeded. He had done some moving of small buildings so I gave him the job. He did a fine piece of work -- in fact, the fire in the stove kept right on burning and two of the helpers sat inside drinking coffee while the building rolled to its new location. Even the brick chimney remained intact.

Dorie and John and their family then took over the cabin on the point and it was gradually enlarged and changed so that it could accommodate them all. I had Long drill a well and install a pump for them and the pipe had to go down to 196 feet in order to get good water.

In 1950 I put in a three and a half kilowatt generator to provide electricity for the two cabins. Dear old "Woody" Wood was my "angel" for this job. Through him and his employer, the Onan Company, we got the generator and Woody and I

did all of the wiring for the cabins. It was a tough job putting in all of the outlets but we did it. Originally we used gasoline to fuel the generator but now it has been converted to the use of Skel-gas and it functions beautifully. I still insist on using wood in the cook-stoves but probably the day will come when wood will no longer be available and gas will take its place.



The second generation now is taking over the old “Milbern Compound” and rightly so. I choose to feel that the three children do possess a real feeling of affection for the place which figured so largely in their childhood. They have been at me for years to sort of wrap up the history of Milbern and I have tried to set forth some of the high-lights. But there are so many episodes I can recall that it would require a complete volume to enumerate them all. Like the numbers of sharp-tail grouse and partridges that provided so many dinners – the time Dorie, Boon and I shot the big deer – Dorie was about 13 and Boon was about 8; the days of gas rationing when John Lake was my friend! Etc., etc. it goes on ad infinitum!

To me Milbern will always be green in my memory – it was a challenge to be picked up in its

conception and a personal joy to sail through to completion. I have wished many times that dear Mid could have seen her many grandchildren crawling all over the place and enjoying its freedom but maybe it's better this way. For me she is still present in every room and that's why I try to patch it up after every break-in, keep the wood-sheds full, see that the road is maintained because that is the way she always wanted it and that's they way I hope I can hand it over to Dorie, Boon and Dirk and all the rest of the family.