

The following letter was written by Louis Nadeau on March 17, 1935, and sent to Gene Worth, Editor of the *Menominee Herald Leader*. The letter was given to the Menominee County Historical Society by Howard E. Nadeau on March 4, 1968.

Seattle, Washington  
March 17, 1935

Mr. Gene Worth  
Editor Herald-Leader  
Menominee, Michigan

Dear Gene,

You suggest that I write you from my memory of the early days. I have plenty of time and am glad to do this in the hope that you shall thus be able to record a few interesting facts that might otherwise escape.

My own recollections of Menominee County go back to 1871 but as Mrs. Nadeau is a daughter of J. R. Brooks I go back to mention that in 1864 he was selected to lay out the Green Bay and Bay De Noc road north from Menominee - so we have been interested in Menominee County's highway for quite a spell.

In 1871 we lived in Green Bay and my father Barney Nadeau but recently discharged from service in the Civil War was employed as a foreman by a contractor named Wallace who was building the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad from Green Bay to Marinette. On October 8 the Peshtigo fire occurred. It had been a very dry year and along the latter part of the summer they had had quite a lot of trouble with fires set in clearing the right-of-way. I remember one place south of Oconto where a large part of the grade, which was mostly peat, burned up.

At the time of the Peshtigo fire father's camp was about one mile north of Peshtigo. My brother David was in the crew employed as water-boy. Their camp was on a sandy knoll just north of which there was quite a deep swamp which was ditched in making the grade. The night of the fire they saw the light and heard the roar some time before the fire neared them. Some of the men wanted to run but father convinced them it was smarter to stay where they were. They buried their bedding and most of the supplies in the deep ditches and intended lying down themselves with their faces in what little water there was with the rest of their bodies covered with sand to prevent their clothes from burning. Through one of the pranks that the fire played it split at the south end of the ridge and went both sides of them leaving unharmed only a very small area on which their camp was located.

The next morning the entire crew, my father and brother, Dave, among them walked down to Peshtigo and saw many terrible sights which there is no point in repeating here. While they were in Peshtigo a call for help came from Marinette by messenger and for the next several days the entire crew fought to save that city on a circle that was established to the south of the town.

In the spring of 1872 Mr. Wallace took a contract to build the main line of the C & N. W. from Menominee to Escanaba and father went with him, this time as a sub-contractor. The first job was sections 6 and 7 (near Birch Creek). The camp was built where the old State Road crossed the railroad below Birch Creek (between the Julius Theuerkauf farm buildings and the track). Our family came up from Green Bay and we all lived in the construction camps until the job was finished in December.

At this time Menominee County, north of Birch Creek was practically virgin forest, except for pine cuttings along the Menominee River and with few minor exceptions which I will note briefly. A farm at Ingalls had been started in 1858 by Thomas Caldwell. That farm later passed to Louis Dobeas who built the first store in Ingalls in 1879. There was a small settlement near Ford River and a farm, so called, south of the railroad near Bark River may have been in this county.

The clearing of the right-of-way was mostly done on a piece-work basis in one hundred foot units and much of the grading was done by hand. In the swamps the grade was shoveled up by hand from the ditches - some used wheel-barrows and planks. It was only in the large cuts that work was done with teams with scrapers and wagons.

Father's next job was section 13 (near Wallace) and then he went to the Section 39 and 40 (just south of Powers) and built his camp at about the location of the old Sterling house east of the track at Kloman just above the present school house and which was removed in the building of the County Road. This job wasn't finished until December and fires were kept in the cold nights to keep the ground from freezing. In the swamp which is now the lower end of the Powers railroad yard there was heavy tamarack timber which was felled lengthwise the right-of-way instead of being removed and then the ties were laid across the trees without dirt filling and the first trains went over the track in that condition.

There had been crews working out of Escanaba and they met on the bridge between Powers and Spalding in the week between Christmas 1872 and the 1873 New Year's day. The construction of this part of the railroad was paid for with a land grant under contract that provided that a train must run from Menominee to Escanaba by January 1, 1873. They made it with two or three days to spare but there was not ballast on the ties in the swamps and they practically went over the tops of the hills. It took all of 1873 with gravel trains to make the railroad usable. After the grade was finished across the swamp south of Powers it dropped through the bog and had to be moved to one side on more ties with trees holding them up and for several months a train poured stones and dirt into the hole before they could put the track back on the original right-of-way.

The first houses along the railroad were the section houses built by the company. At Powers they also put up a small building in which George Haggerson was the first operator and agent. The first store at Powers was built in 1874 by A. A. Archibald who later sold it to George Westman and he to Charles Bradner.

In the spring of 1873 father took the job of boarding the crews of the gravel trains. At Bagley they built a large frame camp out of twelve inch white pine boards stood on end with battons over the joints (regular barn construction). For several months there were about 100 men in this camp and then another camp was built near Wilson and another at Section 49 (Indian-town). I was put in charge of this last camp although only fifteen years old, with Marcel Dumas and a cook named Quimby, who had a peg-leg.

Each camp had a "Van" and this 49 camp was my first merchandising experience. I had charge of the Van besides having to keep the records and help wash the dishes. The men called me the "Tobacco Boss". The first time the pay-car came along the construction engineer had quite a time convincing the paymaster that it was safe to turn over \$2000 (which was a lot of money in those days) to a 15 year old kid. The construction engineer in charge of this work was Frank H. VanCleve then little more than a boy himself.

Father took the money he earned in this railroad work and went into the hotel business at Marinette but with his lack of experience and the 1873 panic it was soon necessary for the family to resume its interest in the development of Menominee County for in 1874 the family moved onto a soldiers homestead where the town of Nadeau is now located. The trains those days were drawn by "wood-burners" and for the next few years the family income came largely from fuel wood for the engines.

The furnishing of this fuel wood really started the first settlements in the central part of the county. Just south of Nadeau, Wendle Worley established a wood camp which became a farm now owned by Joe King. Charles Russel, who the first fall shot one of his own oxen with a head-light between the logs of this partly built barn, took up a 160 acre homestead to the north of us and started a farm now split into two 80 acre farms owned by Henry Mercier and Dick Menard.

The panic of 1873 which put our family back into Menominee County slowed things up a lot but a few small businesses started along the line of the new railroad. In 1873 Mellen Smith built a mill at Wallace. In 1874, S. A. Benjamin built a small mill at Ingalls. In 1877 Andrew Lundquist and Mose Landre built a mill at Ingalls that burned in 1882. In 1880 Norwood Bowers built a mill at Ingalls that burned in 1883. Ira Carley and E. L. Parmenter built another mill at Ingalls in '83 of which Mr. Carley became the sole owner in 1892.

The first mill at Nadeau was built in 1875 by Schomer & Galligher of Oshkosh; this mill ran about 2 years and I worked for them setting and riding carriage. They used a circular saw and the power was a two-horse tread power such as were later used by small threshing machines. In the winter of 1880, the year I was 21 my brother, Dave, and I formed the firm of Nadeau Brothers and logged for the H. Whitbeck Company. The next year we cut cedar poles, posts tie cuts, etc., and drove them down the Little Cedar River to Stephenson for M. C. Burch who built a mill there. This mill sold to H. P. Bird who moved it to Wausaukee.

In 1880 Louis Forcier and Theo Rubens built a small mill at Nadeau about where the August Jean mill is now located. Nadeau Brothers had a small store and furnished supplies for this mill and a camp and in about a year had a camp and a mill in settlement for the account. After permitting this mill to stand idle a couple of years we moved it over to the east side of the track and it became the first of six mills in about the same location that we built and which were destroyed by fire.

About 1880 George Westman and Wilson Brothers of Marinette built a mill at Daggett. They operated a few years and established a store in which they employed John Dunhan as manager and they later sold the store to him. Westman moved his mill west and established the town of Westman, Idaho.

When we moved onto the homestead in 1874, the house was a quarter mile from the railroad down a woods trail. When we wanted to take the train we went down to the track and built a fire which stopped the train, provided heat when it was cold and helped keep off the mosquitoes in summer. There was one train a day and it hauled everything and was faster than walking. In a couple of years a market developed for bark, poles, etc., and a short spur track was built for us.

The first school house in Nadeau Township (still district #1) was about a mile north from the spur and there was no road but the railroad. On Saturday a car of lumber was set out on the spur for our school. Sunday we got together every person in the proposed district, pushed the car out on the main line, ran it up the track a mile and unloaded it and then pushed it back and out on the siding without getting caught at it. We were pretty badly worried because it took longer than anticipated.

About 1875 the Spalding Lumber Company built a mill on the bank of the Big Cedar River at Spalding - they already had one at the mouth of the river. This mill was operated by them as long as there was pine to cut but Mr. Spalding saw no future in the other timber and sold the Spalding mill to Ross Bros. who operated it for a number of years and bought all of the Spalding Company holdings north of the railroad. About the same time the Spalding holdings south of the railroad and the mill at the mouth of the river were sold to Samuel Crawford who had experience in the manufacture of hemlock in Pennsylvania and was very successful at Cedar River.

The mill companies in Menominee and Marinette were logging all along the river and hauled their supplies by team up the old State Road. They early established the Relay Farm and the Pembina Farm. As soon as the railroad was completed they built a road across thru the present location of Nathan from Carney to the Pembina farm which was just below the Pembina Falls. This was in about 1874 and at that time they built a warehouse at Carney and put Andrew Porterfield in charge. He built the first house in Carney and started a farm on which he lived many years. He was a valuable citizen in the community and many years later served Menominee County well as a construction foreman when the old County Road No. 1 was being built. The supply road from Carney to the Pembina Farm was laid out and built by James Holmes.

The most important industry to the early development of farms in the county was the charcoal kilns. The furnace at Menominee was built in 1872 and they soon built kilns at several points along the line. A little later the Fox River Iron Company of DePere built kilns at Carney, Nadeau, Wilson and Harris and Kloman. One set was operated by a man names Phillips east several miles from Stephenson and he had to haul his coal to the track. These kilns used up all the hardwood almost to twigs and as the hardwood stumps soon rotted the settler had gone a long way toward clearing a farm when he finished cutting this kiln wood. We hauled stone all one summer for the kilns at Nadeau and then operated them for many years after they were built.

What is now the large I.X.L. plant at Hermansville was started by C. J. L. Meyers in 1878 but it was 1887 before the manufacture of flooring commenced.

The post office at Nadeau was established in 1880 and Barney Nadeau, Sr., my father was the first Postmaster. He served many years until he lost his sight. Stephenson Township originally extended up to Spalding Township and my father was the first Highway Commissioner. Thru his efforts Nadeau Township nine miles square was cut off the north end of Stephenson Township, and he was the first Supervisor.

The development of Menominee County's road system with which I was so actively connected for over 30 years is in itself a very important chapter in the development of the county. Frank Betts covered this so fully in his first annual report to the Board of Supervisors that I need do no more than refer to it here.

If I can assist you any further in your search for information concerning the early days in the county please feel free to call upon me.

Sincerely yours,

Louis Nadeau

Note by Howard E. Nadeau –

Daggett formerly called section 25. Mrs. Clara Daggett Faulkner was first Postmaster and named post office her maiden name but none of the Daggetts ever lived there.