

# Yarns of Yesterday by Gladys Hill

## Presque Isle Tour

If you are touring the area, Presque Isle is located at the top of the Wisconsin map and is bordered by Michigan on the north. The village is less than a mile from the state line. Vilas County Highways "B" and "W" enter Presque Isle. Incidentally, there are more than a hundred miles of well maintained town and forest roads in the area. Branching from the county highways, picturesque rambling roads lead to the many resorts and business places with so much to offer. Peace and quiet, plus all the activities that are a part of resort life.

The historical data concentrates on that time when the original mill town was Fosterville, then Winegar and now Presque Isle. The village is quaint, the people are friendly, the air is fresh. This is a sampling. It is for you to explore and enjoy the pristine area that is Presque Isle.

Vilas County "B" originates at Highway 45, Land O'Lakes, and becomes their main street. Leaving town, it meanders up and down hills, crosses marshes and streams, wanders beside lakes and through the forests until it reaches Presque Isle Village. There it again becomes a main street and continues on to the Wisconsin-Michigan line. If by chance, you are approaching from east or west on U.S. 2, take Michigan 64 at Marenisco to the Wisc.-Mich. line. There 64 ends and becomes Vilas County "B". Or, from Highway 51, you will take Highway "M" through Boulder Junction to its intersection with "B". There, "M" ends and "B" continues north to the village.

As you enter Presque Isle you cross a noisy little stream. On your right a unique dam has replaced the former dam of the logging era. As you go on, a bakery (now a residence) replaces the former boarding house operated then by the Fremstad family. Next door, a small white house was the home of Hilda MacKenzie - Hilda to her friends and Mrs. Mac to the school children. She is presumed to be one of the first two white women in this area; the other, Jenny Jakeway.

As you travel on, to your right St. Rita's Church is a block from the main street. Then, back on main street and up the hill to your right is a sign "Shantyboy Hill", It is an abandoned cemetery of the logging era. A large open area at the top of the hill designates the site of the former Winegar Grade School, built in the 30's during W.P.A. days and the adjoining ball park. A trail along the side of the ball park leads to Shantyboy Hill. You will enjoy the short hike to the cemetery of yesterday when Northern Wisconsin was the pinery and shantyboys were the men who chopped and skidded and sawed the giant pines that fed the mills.

In this same vicinity, the new modern Community Center including town offices and Irma Stein Library are housed in one building - interesting to visit and ample parking space.

As you exit, you may wish to visit the Presque Isle Heritage Society Museum, a reminder of bygone days.

A right turn takes you to Bethel Lutheran Church. This is a beautiful simple artistic building in a peaceful setting. with waters from the walleye rearing pond in the background.

As you continue down the hill, you will again cross the same lively little stream which is the outlet from Little Horsehead Lake. To your right; the Presque Isle AMOCO Station is built on the site of the former station house and depot for the railroad; across the street, Headwaters Real Estate is located in the general area of the former railroad turntable. During the logging period, railroads were more common than roadways. Spurs extended from the main track to the various camps on the many lakes. Many of our town roads to the lakes are constructed on railroad grades. Sometimes during spring break up you can see the outline of ties rising in the roadbed; the town crews dig them out and fill in with gravel. Occasionally, rails were salvaged during the depression.

Through Presque. Isle, you are at the intersection of "B" and "W". Drive along "W" a short distance and the first right turn will reach the American Legion, Winegar Post 480. On both sides and behind the building you view the waters of the largest walleye rearing pond in Wisconsin. It was constructed near the site of the old mill pond by the Wisconsin Conservation Department.

as you continue on "W" for a few more miles, to your right is the Evergreen Cemetery. Many of the bodies from Shantyboy Hill were reburied in this cemetery.

Following "W" you will reach Winchester, another interesting historical settlement of the days when the call "T-I-M-B-E-R" rang loud and clear; when men in caulked boots felled the giant pines that spawned a mighty industry which extended from coast to coast.

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It is noted this article was original written by Gladys Hill prior to 2006.

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