

Tobacco City win this game

by Cynthia Swanson
From North of the Mason Dixon Line...

I was famished, so on one of my road trips to the outer banks of North Carolina my friend and I stopped off at Jacks Bar-B-Que to use the loo and grab a bite to eat. Jack's place, a small tidy establishment with a tin roof the color of tomato soup, sat in the middle of nowhere on an unlandscaped gravel lot void of anything lest his painted sign. Smack across the narrow two lane road a few acres of tobacco grew. The tobacco looked different somehow from Wisconsin tobacco, but the setting was rural North Carolina quintessence and I loved it.



Cynthia Swanson

It was my first time at Jack's. My friend had been stopping there for years and said it was some of the tastiest vinegar spiked Bar-B-Que around. Jack, a portly sixthish man wearing a heavy gold neck chain, a deep tan and a grin the size of my foot introduced himself and took our order.

My friend ordered a loaded pork sandwich with a side of banana pudding. "Plain hot dog for me," I said. Jack took a step back, looked mildly offended. "No slow?" "Pardon?" "No slow?" I didn't understand so I said, "Slow what?" Jack squinted and

looked at me like I might be slow. Very slow. I looked to my friend for help.

My friend said, "You know. Grated cabbage."

"Aw, you mean slaw! No thanks," I told Jack.. I'll just have my hot dog plain."

Jack shook his head, leaned in close and told me he makes the slaw himself, roasts and shreds the pork everyday and bottles his own distinctly flavored vinegars. Then he asked me where I was from. Wisconsin I said. He threw back his head and laughed, a hearty laugh that showed off a mouthful of gold fillings. "Figured it was some far off place like that. It's where they wear them big ol' cheese hats, huh?"

I felt defensive, but I liked this hulky guy and figured he was just poking a little southern fun at me, so I said, "Yup, we all wear 'em—it's state law. And we eat the artery clogging stuff by the pound. Major food group."

Jack cracked up again, tongued my hot dog into a bun and handed it to me. I bit into it, dabbed my mouth with a paper napkin and chewed. The hot dog was delicious, thick skinned and juicy. It needed nothing.

I finished my dog, complimented him and balled up my napkin. "Hey Jack," I said, pointing across the road. "What's that growing over there?"

"T'bacca."

"Yours?" He nodded.

I leaned in. "Did you know, we raise tobacco in Wisconsin? Prize plants half the size of barn doors."

Jack's eyes widened. "Cows eat it, I betcha?" he said, bowling over and elbowing his assistant.

Now I chuckled. Jack was just too

darn happy giving me grief so I gave it right back. "Maybe I can give you a tip or two," I said. Your plants look a bit puny."

Jack puffed up his chest. "Haven't had enough rain."

I boasted freely, telling him that I was born in the small town of Edgerton, Wisconsin, tobacco king of the midwest for a century. We have our own Tobacco City sports cheer—I sang him the last bar—and warehouses all over town. Every year there's a huge celebration commemorating our history. It's called Tobacco Days! Bands, floats, more food and music than gnats on flypaper. Folks come from everywhere—we're downright famous! Haven't you heard of us?"

Jack scratched his head, looked me straight in the eye and ruefully shook his head. "Sorry ma'am. Didn't know there was t'bacca up in cow land."

"Too bad," I said. "Well now you know. Spread the word!"

Jack poked fun non-stop as he assembled enough loaded pork sandwiches to feed the clamorous army of regulars that bustled in and plopped themselves down at the counter. Then he scooped slaw into one container, Bar-B-Que into another, slapped on lids and slid both down the counter to me. "On the house, Missy," he said. "You spread the word."

I did spread the word and over the years Jack's became a regular stop on those road trips. Jack still brings up my tobacco story. I tried his slaw and admit loaded Bar-B-Que sandwiches are tasty as all get out.

But I had to draw the line somewhere. Push as he does, I still eat my hot dogs plain.

The history of our hometown.....

By Betty Dallmann Witzel

The William Bliven family was said to be the first permanent white clan of settlers in the Edgerton locality. The Bliven's first house was a log house, on what is now Thronson Drive. This log cabin was where very early school lessons were held, and also church services. The William Blivens stayed with the Horace Blivens—William's brother—in Albion, when they came to the area in 1844. This is the story of their trip from New York to Wisconsin.

William Bliven is generally recognized as the first permanent resident of Edgerton. He was born in Ashaway, Rhode Island the 11th of November, 1818. He was the first-born of Beriah and Betsy Burdick Bliven. He had 10 brothers and sisters. His daughter Sylvia Ann Bliven Balch, his third-born, was the first white baby girl born in Edgerton on June 4, 1845.

William is the sixth generation of the Bliven family that came to America in the 1600s. His first immigrant ancestor was married in Rhode Island in 1691 and received 100 acres of land from Ninecraft, sachem of the Narragansett Tribe for £10 on Feb. 9, 1708.

The story is told about the year 1700, that the family lived in its own blockhouse near the center of town, surrounded by a high stockade. One stormy night a squaw came asking for shelter and was allowed to stay. A male member of the family was suspicious however, armed himself with an axe and stayed up all night to watch. Sure enough, in the middle of the night the squaw arose, tiptoed to the gate and opened it for the braves waiting outside. The watching Bliven gave the alarm, and aided by other members of the family, beat off the Indians and got the gate closed again.

Early in William's life the Bliven family moved to Alfred, New York. Here he married and two of his children were born. About this time soldiers returning from the Blackhawk War told about the Rock River Valley and its rich soil, magnificent forests, lakes and streams abounding with game. The news traveling from mouth to mouth and probably gaining stimulating credibility as it spread east until it reached New York.

Filled with bubbling enthusiasm and a determined urge for adventure, three young men decided to take their families west and grow up with the country. They spent the winter building a very large raft, of logs, in the lowlands of the Allegheny River. Three cabins for shelter were built on a raft. Just before the spring rains caused the banks of the river to overflow, they had loaded their wagons with supplies, and soon the raft was swept away from the river on its westward course. There was no time for farewells, the tide was there, their bark afloat bearing their hopes, their fate and their future.

They were compelled to tie up each night to avoid passing boats and treacherous shoals. For many weeks they manned the 15-foot sweeps that kept their raft in the current and clear of snags and projecting headlands that

would have piled up the raft in a hopeless mass with all the worldly goods they possessed.

Sickness and disease sought to disrupt them but liberal use of the standard remedy and specific of that day, "fetty" (assafoetida) routed the grim spectre. They were a strong people and a medicine were strong it could not be any good, and fetty was certainly strong enough in both smell and taste to satisfy the most exacting.

They arrived in Cincinnati and sold their raft and took passage on a steamer down the river to Cairo, Ill. and then they went up the Mississippi to Galena. Here they disembarked, the land of promise almost in sight, less than half way across the Territory of Wisconsin. They bought a yoke of oxen. The women, children and such necessities as they could carry were loaded onto the wagon that they had brought with them. The remaining possessions were left in storage at Galena and picked on a return trip.

Though a pathless unmapped expanse lay before them, by following the explicit instructions to go northeast by south five days until you strike a big river, then up the river two or three days travel, William Bliven, his wife, two sons and the family dog arrived at Albion, after three months travel, in the summer of 1844. The family stayed with brother Horace Bliven and obtaining another oxen team William spent the next two weeks returning to Galena for the rest of their goods.

The story of the incidents and hardships of that trip would probably fill pages; of impassable streams and marshes that required hours of ingenious labor to cross at imminent peril of losing or crippling oxen in depthless mire or breaking down their wagon; and though their belongings were few, they were too necessary to be lost. Frequently they would have to unload the content of the wagons, packing each article separately, across streams and up steep banks. Night would find them on the grass carpeted shelter of a spreading tree, undisturbed even by the howling wolves.

A slab of bacon or jerked venison, parched corn or wheat, a small bag of flour and a handful of salt supplied their daily food and needs; the last items were the most precious, and to keep them dry required the utmost vigilance as terrific thunderstorms were very frequent.

The spirit of independence and self reliance and determination enabled them to accomplish the wonders they wrought. No questioning thought of "can it be done" but rather "how shall it be done."

We know that the villages of Albion, Cooksville, Fulton, Indian-ford and Newville were settled before settlers came to Fulton Station (eventually Edgerton, by name). One can see houses built in the 1840s in Cooksville—where house tours have been open to the public, at times. Edgerton grew with the coming of the railroad through town, in 1854.

William Squires and Robert and Dan Stone came here in 1836—and may have built log cabins at that time

—as was often done by early settlers. Arnold Collins bought land here in 1845 from the government. His house at one time was said to be the oldest house standing in our city limits. Where is that house; I wish I knew!

Thomas Quigley came to the area in 1843 and lived southeast of what was to become Edgerton. His name was remembered, as we have a Quigley Street on the south side of town. In 1853 Dr. Head (a medical doctor who was prominent and owned a brickyard) built a shanty on Albion Street, to house workers in his employ at the brickyard. Mr. Croft built his house on Fulton Street (and allowed church services to be there at times). D.F. Coon's house was built in the early days on Albion Street, as well as Roswell Robinson's house. The Copley's house was built in that time too—at the top of Albion Street. At a much later time this fine house with its enclosed Widow's Walk was moved to Stoughton Road when the new schools were built in the 1850s and 60s. You can still see it there today! Ira Pierce built houses for Ferdinand Davis and for William Hall, our first postmaster, who served in that capacity in his home. The Jessup home was an early structure in the downtown area of town. In the 1860s, Dr. Simon Locke Lord built his house on Albion Street, and later joined his house to another white frame house, putting his office between the two. Go to see that now —at 11 and 13 Albion Street!

The early streets and lanes presented a semi-rural scene—barns still in evidence by most houses. You'll even see them there today. We don't know specifically where and when our lovely streets had house after house built, one by one. Randolph Brown, a nursery owner, can be thanked for the shady streets, as he did much tree planting. Randolph Street is named for him. We do know that houses near our downtown are among the oldest in town, still giving comfort and shelter to our families. North Main Street was built up with pebble-dash houses, put up by the Highway Trailer Company for its workers to buy in the 1920s. You can see them on North Main now, but with a variety of attractive exteriors and additions.

We are a town of many neighborhoods, all of them great; and in our minds—one's own, the best!

P.S. Horace Bliven was the wagon-master for Mr. Goodrich, owner of the Hilton House. Horace's house still stands in Albion. Mrs. Bliven was secretary to Goodrich.

The Hanson Studio

Editors note: In addition to this article we had hoped to have a feature on the Stockbridge Photography studio that was upstairs of a downtown pharmacy. We will have this interesting feature in an upcoming issue of the Edgerton Reporter. Meanwhile enjoy this article by Betty Witzel.

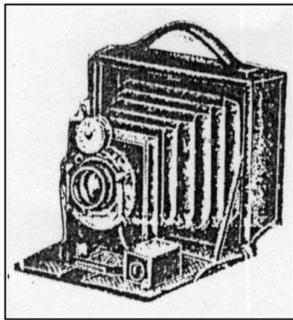


By Betty Dallmann Witzel

Oscar Hanson was our town photographer for so many years. His photo studio was upstairs above the Gamble Store; and he and his wife

Florence took pictures and developed them for the families of Edgerton and villages nearby. The Hansons were our neighbors, across the street from us on Broadway Street. When I was six and my brother was three, Oscar came over one morning with his camera on a tripod and a black cover to put over his head, and then took pictures of us. Townspeople went to The Hanson Studio for pictures, which you might say, were from cradle-to-grave; baby baptisms, confirmation, graduation, family reunions, wedding scenes and 50th wedding anniversaries. Oscar Hanson was also the commercial photographer for the Highway Trailer Company.

The Hanson Studio photo work was perfection, and we value the great array of Hanson photos we have, of generations of our family. It was so pleasant to be neighbors of the Hanson family—Oscar, Florence, John, Joyce, David and Winston. Memories carry me back to Palm Sunday afternoon in 1935 when confirmation photographs were taken, and to wedding pictures taken on a snowy March day in 1946. In many homes in town, there are treasures of the photography of The Hanson Studio.



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