## Choice seeds grew tall in Newville

Editor's note: This story is being reprinted from the Edgerton Reporter's 2014 Lakes Edition in part for our out-of-town readers.

God Sifted a Whole Nation That he might send Choice Seed into the Wilderness. -Reverend William Stoughton,

The early settlers often survived by neighbor helping neighbor. Though less common today, even through the 1950s and early '60s, neighboring farmers worked together for baling and combining. It was a way of getting by when money was

And, while there were always exceptions, most rural business was conducted with integrity. Again, up through the 1950s and '60s, farm land was often leased to a neighbor with only a handshake binding the contract. All a legacy of the "choice seed": our forefathers who broke the virgin soil to plant the first crops or build the first mill, the first store...or the first bridge across an ancient

Wilma Knapton has lived all but one of her 93 years in Newville. Before her father built the house in which she now lives, Wilma spent her childhood in an old house that was once an Indian trading post. "The plaque over the front door said 1812. My grandparents settled here

on this land when they came from Germany."

The single year she lived away from Newville was the first year of her marriage to Robert Knapton who was with the University of Wisconsin. "Then my mother died and my father was alone so we moved back. We raised our family here. Those first years we had no indoor plumbing, so some of my kids know how to use an outhouse.

Her eyes twinkle as she mentions an outhouse. Wilma uses a wheelchair because it's faster than using a walker. She had heart surgery last year which has slowed her down a bit. However, her mind is still as keen as that of someone in their 20s.

"When I was young, it was so exciting to go to a friend's house with indoor plumbing," she said. "One time my sister dumped the water from our wash basin out the window. Dad, all wet, stomped into the house and ordered my mom to tell those girls not to dump the chamber pot out the window.'

She laughs at the memory. "It wasn't the chamber pot but we always carried our wash water out after

A source of pride for Wilma is the huge ash tree in her yard. State forest department officials visited every year for a time, bringing students with them, to measure the tree. She's proud of the certificate awarded her for the Wisconsin Champion Tree "being the largest on record for its species." The tree's circumference is a little over 16 feet with a crown spread of 36 feet.

Beyond the ash tree, an old pump, painted bright red, stands near Hillside Drive, now a side street. "That pump was once where we got our water," Wilma says, pointing out the window. "A cup hung there and a bucket stood by the pump. If someone was walking by, they could stop and take a drink. Or, if they were driving a team, give the horses a

Looking back to her growing-up years, Wilma recalls the old Newville Hall was a busy place on Saturday nights. "It was our social center. Sometimes there was a dance or we played cards or put on a play. My mother loved dramas put on by the Newville Mothers' Club . She always played the part of a villain."

The Mothers' Club did more than produce plays. Whatever the students needed-bats, balls, playground equipment-the club bought.

Her eyes light as she recalls the school Play Day every spring that, in reality, was a community play day. 'We all went down to Pratts Woods. All the one-room schools–Indianford, Newville, Fulton-would bring their teams. We would have relay races and softball games for the students in the morning.

"Then in the afternoon, the women's softball teams would play

but we came in second.

The men's team practiced more or less regularly down behind the Anchor Inn. Anyone wanting to play could join in.

Wilma talks of the Newville bridges that have spanned the Rock River. "A wooden bridge was built in the late 1800s to replace the ferry. It was a wooden bridge destroyed by high water around 1900."

The bridge that crosses the river today is the fifth bridge–and one built high enough over the river so that huge chunks of floating ice in the spring will not harm it. "They used to dynamite the biggest chunks of ice before they reached the bridge," she recalls. "One day we heard a big blast. We put our coats on and my mother grabbed our hands and we ran down to the river to watch them dynamite the ice. That was so much

Wilma was one of the few to go to the high school in Edgerton. "There were no buses back then. Our fathers would take us in the morning but we would walk home after school. Usually someone would come along in a car and give us a ride.

"I wanted to be a nurse but there was no money. Then there was World War II and I went to work in a shoe factory for nine years making army boots. They were heavy and I was dead tired at the end of the day so I don't remember much about the

followed by the men's game. The winners of both the women's teams and the men's went to the county fair. Then one winner at the county fair would go to the state fair. I must have been 12 the year the Newville team won. My dad was the pitcher. Milwaukee was a long way to travel back then. My uncle and aunt took my mother and me. My sister was too little and she stayed with another aunt. Everyone from Newville who could go, drove over. We didn't win

"My mother would scream and holler at the (ball) plays. I was so embarrassed. I would go behind her and wrap her skirt around me so no one would notice me."

> merited. war." And, for a few moments, she is

quiet, looking back on her life: the good times and the not-so easy times.

## **Sherman reminisces**

Tom Sherman and his wife, Bonnie, in their retirement years, live in a comfortable cottage by the lake in Charley Bluff. Besides providing great views of Koshkonong, their warm, welcoming home is filled with family mementoes from the past.

The first thing Tom shows visitors is the ornately framed arrowhead collection created by his grandfather, George Sherman. The arrowheads, found in the area by George or his family, are priceless in their history. But George's artistry as well as craftsmanship makes the display a spectacular work of art.

A board used by Tom's grandfather for drying muskrat hides and his grandfather's gun hang with the arrowheads. "My grandpa's gun is an 1894 model," he says. George framed several collections, each taking hours and hours of painstaking work. They are owned by family members scattered throughout the United States.

In her history of the area, Edith Sherman notes there are seven out-

George Sherman proudly points to his display in the Sherman living room in the 1950s. As well as many arrowheads, the center has a special knife or scraper, and several copper points are mounted in the lower center. The points are attached with fine wire over a fabric background. Sherman chose an ornate hardwood frame, which the creative shield design standing displays collected by Benjamin Cooper and George Sher-man that were then in the homes of second and third generations of their

family. George, using projectile

points, also made a sign for the An-

chor Inn. When it was sold to a new

owner, family members took it home. Tom laughs as he shares a story about his grandparents, George and Edith. "About 1910 or '12, they went across the lake in a little boat. Now Lake Koshkonong covers 10,460 acres. It's the eighth largest lake in Wisconsin. They never showed up until the next day. All my grandmother would say was, 'We have

His grandfather, who died in 1960, owned an apple orchard in Newville plus a cider pressing mill. 'Growing up I operated that mill along with a couple of cousins. He paid us a little bit." (Jim was one of the three.)

Through the early years, his grandfather hunted, fished and also built sculls (flat-bottomed boats for duck hunting) until they were out-

An article about the Sherman family operating the cider mill for

Continued on page 17



George Sherman stands by an iceboat on Lake Koshkonong in an undated photo.

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