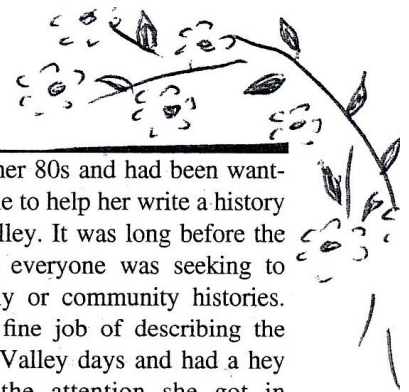


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Irish Valley Reunion
By Doris Litscher Gasser

It was a beautiful, sunny, breezy day for the Irish Valley reunion in Leland Park, Sunday, Aug. 13, hosted by "Dutch" Sprecher and Shirley Albers.

Like surrounding communities, Irish Valley was first settled by the Swiss and Germans. Unlike their surrounding neighbors, Leland, Plain and Little Prairie, there were some enthusiastic Irish Canadians who found their way to Irish Valley six years later and made such an impact that the school district was named Irish Valley.

Peter Hemi, according to his own account, at the age of 19, immigrated from Switzerland to Irish Valley in 1848 with his father, Ulrich Hemi, his uncle Ulrich Gasser, his mother, a sister, Mrs. Ulrich Gasser and two brothers eight and 10 years old. They bought a team of oxen in Milwaukee and were on their way to the great unknown, until they found some springs, where they built a house in what became known as Irish Valley. Early Irish families who came to join the settlers were Moylan, James and John Buckley.

A number of Irish Canadians followed later, according to Bessie

Buckley, but they must have moved on soon as the only two Irish names that lived on into current memories of people are McKenna and Buckley. Settlers from Switzerland who arrived in the 1860s and 1870s were Rose, Schmidt, Sprecher, Wintermantel, George Gasser, Schmidli and Maegerlein. Some of the names are familiar today, the others I heard my grandmother (Wintermantel Sprecher) tell about. Settlers built their homes and schools out of logs, with kerosene lamps for light and fireplaces for heat and home-made furniture. They were on their way to the good life.

The Buckley sisters were probably the most outstanding women of the Irish Community and were proud of their education. They came out from Milwaukee, from their positions in education for many years to spend vacations on their farm, where they had preserved a section of their home for them to enjoy on the farm, which was rented to Eva and Andy Fiegl. The farm is now owned by Ramona Ochsner.

Bessie Buckley was delighted in the early '50s when I met her when I came to live and teach in Irish Valley. She

was up in her 80s and had been wanting someone to help her write a history of Irish Valley. It was long before the time when everyone was seeking to write family or community histories. She did a fine job of describing the early Irish Valley days and had a hey day with the attention she got in Milwaukee when her story was written in the Milwaukee Journal. Her lifetime dream had come true. The little book can be found in the Tripp Memorial Museum.

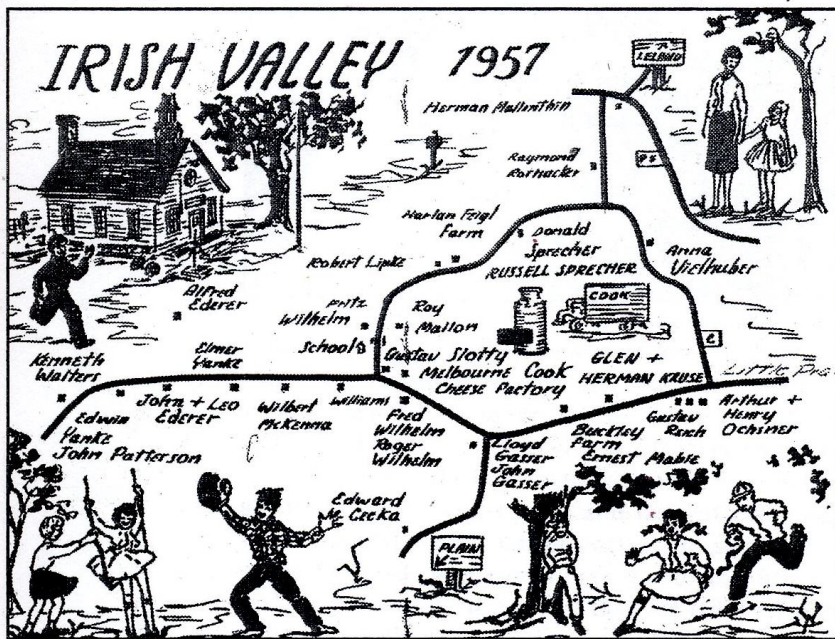
Changes took place in the school during the years with the coming of electricity, WHA educational radio programs, an oil-burning stove for heat. For a time, from 1942-1949, the school was closed because there were so few students. The children were transported to neighboring rural schools. All told, Nelson Sprecher had eight children who attended Irish Valley School. Five of them attended the reunion. Three are deceased. The organization of the Homemakers Club through the U.W. Extension at Baraboo gave women an opportunity to communicate and learn new practices and methods of homemaking and put a positive light on their tasks.

In 1957 Irish Valley was closed to consolidate with other Honey Creek rural schools. In 1960, the county school system was dissolved Irish Valley became a part of the Sauk Prairie Schools.

The Irish Valley reunion was a great day to enjoy, with a picnic dinner and conversation in the out-of-doors in the Leland Park. After dinner there were pictures and memories. Shirley Albers brought a treasure of a book compiled by the school children in the early '50s as a nature project with Ranger Mac, specialist instructing on the WHA radio station, as well as some of our old school newspapers, Irish Valley Monthly Mirror. Some of the men enjoyed a game of cards.

Today there is no trace of Irish in the valley. Old family names that continue, mostly in farming, are Lorin Wilhem, Eddie Patterson, Yanke, Patterson, Pete Trachsler, Trachsler-Mallon, the Fiegls and John Gasser.

There have been many outstanding



students who attended Irish Valley School. We'll mention a more recent one: There was a little boy who wasn't much interested in his father's cheese factory in Irish Valley, a community resource and a fine field trip for the school youngsters. He grew up and had a change of mind about cheese factories. Now he is the owner and operator of the top notch Carr Valley Cheese

Factory. He is Sid Cook.

The idea of having reunions every two years was instigated by Lou Sprecher and Arlene Yanke Patterson, 1936 graduates of Irish Valley School. Iola Wilhelm Kamrath was a 1935 graduate. Old friends from Irish Valley will be looking forward to another time together in two years.



Hail! Hail! The gang's all here! Pictured from left, Charles Wilhelm, Pam Wilhelm, Harvey Diehl, Arlene Yanke Patterson, Louie Weber, Dorothy Sprecher, Iola Wilhem Kamarath, Nick Lesster, Kathy Mallon Lester, Lou Sprecher, "Dutch" Carroll Sprecher, Carol Sprecher, Gertrud Wilhelm, Eldred Sprecher, Arlene Sprecher Pete, Shirley Albers with grandchildren Kiana and Ross Litscher, Kirsteen Litscher, Tom Litscher. Harlan and Diane Slotty, Terriane Bradbury, Rachel and Lauren, Chris Wilhelm and his friend took off before picture taking time.



Arlene Yanke Patterson and Lou Sprecher, 1936 graduates of Irish Valley School, enjoy the community get-togethers. Other members of their class were Howard Hehenberger and Betty Gasser, both deceased. Betty served as a nurse for the front lines during WWII. Della Sprecher, who was 18 years old, was Arlene and Lou's teacher when they were in first grade. The Catholics in the community attended St. Luke's School in Plain during good weather. In winter they came to Irish Valley School. Nelson Sprecher, Lou's dad, with his team of horses and sled took all of the Irish Valley pupils for a ride to the neighboring schools, Little Prairie, Leland, Witwen and Pine Grove. Lou recalled that the children in the other schools were happy to see them.

PHOTOS BY DORIS LITSCHER GASSER.