

Something About the Word Baraboo

Tales of Earlier Days

By Bob Dewel

Ever had a telephone sales person ask "Bear-a—what?" when you name our home town? To those unacquainted with the beauty and the uniqueness of our fair city, the name "Baraboo" may seem not only odd but almost comical.

Yet there is something about that uniqueness and spelling of Baraboo that has spawned a host of uses, some in foreign countries. Actually, there is no other city in the world spelled the same, though dozens come close---Barabas, Barabati, Barabra, Barabinsk, Baraba, Baracalda, etc. But we are the only Baraboo in the world.

Movies

There are dozens of uses of our name, however, the most recent report being noted on the front page of this newspaper featuring a new movie, 'til We Get to Baraboo. This is not the first instance, for a stage play "The Butcher of Baraboo" recently had runs not only around the country but on or near Broadway. They should have premiered at the Al, Ringling Theatre! I have a copy of the script which I will donate to the county Historical Society.

We did an article similar to this in years past, which needs not only repetition but updating. For example, in an update a couple years ago we showed a picture of the license plate of a car registered in Western Australia, proudly displaying the word "Baraboo".

Family Name

As noted previously, there are several persons in Wisconsin whose last name is Baraboo. They are descendants of Gabriel Barbeau of Quebec, apparently a brother of Francois Barbeau. Francois was identified by Mark Tully in his book. A Man Called Baraboo, as the French trader after whom the Baraboo River, (and subsequently the city), was named.

Just as Francois Barbeau's name was Anglicized to Baraboo, so did Gabriel Barbeau's descendants. A current Wisconsin family, headed by Eugene and Marge Baraboo of Rothschild, has been my guests in the city, and they are members of our Sauk County Historical Society. They have several relatives with that surname in three or four states.

Restaurants, Books

We now have the menu for the Great Baraboo Brewing Co., a restaurant and brewery near Detroit which bases its name on the famous Baraboo Whiskey War ladies of 1854, of which we have written. The menus feature at least 8 dinners or sandwiches which are named the Baraboo Burger or Baraboo ribs, etc. The menu also contains a short history of the Baraboo

Whiskey Ladies as an explanation for the catchy name of the restaurant. There once was a restaurant in Miami that carried our name also.

Both the library and I have the 1980 book "City of Baraboo" by Barry B. Longyear. It is a fictional story of an inter-spatial circus and its travels and travails as it visits the planets. Also named the City of Baraboo was Garvin Kowalke's real life B-29 Bomber which preceded by a day or so the bomb dropped on Hiroshima in WWII. This is also treated at length in an earlier story in our series.

According to an ancient newspaper clipping, the New Zealand schooner "Baraboo", carrying an acting troupe actors and their trunks, had sunk. The actors were saved but the costumes, etc. were lost. According to early theatre tradition, when later the actors found things missing, they were said to have been "lost on the Baraboo". Speaking of travel, you have to listen carefully, but Baraboo is mentioned in "I've Been Everywhere", as sung by Johnny Cash. Devils Lake is mentioned also.

Meantime, know that we live in a town with an unusual but attractive name. I don't know how today's Canadian Barbeau descendants in Quebec would feel about the translation of their name, but the name Baraboo is recognized in more places than is Barbeau.

In a previous article I raised the question of what do we Baraboo residents call ourselves: Barabooites, Barabooins, Baraboobians, Baraboomers, or what? Whatever the answer may be, we can be amused that others have adopted our name for so many purposes. So, when asked, say "Baraboo" proudly!

The Eugene Baraboo family photo...

