

Dismal Outlook Expected at WWII End

Tales of Earlier Days

By Bob Dewel

Regular readers of this column may have noticed that we rarely write of Badger Ordnance, or of the Circus World Museum. The reason is that both of these very important Sauk County entities have their own well developed publicity and history offices. Since their significant county history is well represented, we use our column for less publicized events, old and new.

An exception to this rule is a Badger research paper, "Impact of the War", recently submitted to me by Gregory Anderson and produced in July, 1943. It is remarkable in that the federal government was already considering the local postwar outlook. Despite the precarious situation we faced in that early year of the war, similar papers were produced regarding 26 other major sites of national defense.

Sauk County appears to be the smallest entity considered, ranking with installations at Pittsburg, Detroit, and similar locations. In this 21 page paper the government worries about the fate of Baraboo and the surrounding area when World War II ends. The author assumes that the total victory will result in world peace. He knows nothing of subsequent conflicts in Korea and Vietnam, etc., conflicts which will vex our nation and require the Badger plant to stay open for decades longer.

The publication is replete with 12 graphs of the total 1943 Sauk County wartime employment (14,300), Farm income (\$340), retail sales, value of products, permanent population growth (static), school attendance and educational achievement, and even growth of dwelling units since 1899.

In addition, there are dozens of tables on such local statistics as women in the local labor force (15.7%), unemployment in 1940 (11.2%, national 14.4%), persons employed in farming in the county (5,212), manufacturing (1015), 1939 farm production (\$5,456,000), etc.

Sauk County only boasted 14 private manufacturing companies, 9 in Baraboo and 5 in Reedsburg. In Baraboo only the McArthur plant still exists. Gone are industries such as Effinger Brewery, Gunnison, Virgil Hunt, Island Woolen Mill, Midwest sports, Schuelle Lumber, and WPL. In the county before Badger, there were fewer industries and industrial employees than in 1929. For the same period there were also lowered total sales figures. The statistics were not encouraging!

We cite these dismal figures for two reasons. One was to show the virtual lack of local progress during the Depression in just about every category when compared to the rest of the country. Industry was hardly existent, employment small, and retail and manufacturing sales and population growth stagnant. The bright spot was the construction of Badger, but it was coupled with the belief that it would cease operation when victory was achieved.

The other reason for citing the study is our astonishment that the government of that day was even concerned with the serious impact when a huge war industry was placed in a small community. This was particularly true with the country engaged in

a life or death struggle and a pitifully late start on combat readiness. It is assumed, however, that we will be victorious in the end.

So what does the well-meaning study conclude? They note that the county manufacturing work force once numbered only 1000 but now numbers 6000. Badger will be "among the first war plants to shut down", and "there will remain practically no manufacturing in the entire county".

There is a bright possibility, concludes the study. "The possibility of converting this plant to the production of other goods is therefore a vital question which should be carefully studied." Noting that "Sauk County has neither the raw materials nor the location to attract new industry", it must turn to manufacturing of agricultural needs and other small pre-war plants as before.

It was expected that some of the imported war time work force would remain (due to our attractive rural amenities, we suggest), with agriculture as the best resource, but unemployment problems should be expected. The county community should direct its attention now (1943) to the postwar transition to allow only a minimum of hardship to its residents.

Well, the report did not anticipate the development of a strong community effort to attract industry in the area, of which we have written in the past. Unknown then would be the arrival of the plastics industry, frozen foods expansion, or location of the printing industry. A number of industries have since come and gone in Baraboo and in the county, often replaced by stronger manufacturers.

Indeed, the county has more than doubled its population, and greatly increased its manufacturing output, not to mention the

great expansion of the tourist and entertainment industry in Baraboo and Lake Delton. This was accomplished despite consolidation of the county agricultural operations, unforeseen in 1943.

Perhaps this study was a wake-up call in 1943 for Ted Mandt, John Lange, and the stalwart group of leaders in the Baraboo Industrial Expansion effort after the war ended (see our "Baraboo and Sauk County", Vol. III, pages 881-893). If so, they can thank the unknown author and the benevolent government that produced this analysis of what Sauk County might expect when the plant closed.

