

Recollections of Things I Forgot to Remember!

by Joanie Ingraham

This is a continuation of the saga from Puckaway Lake So good! - Joanie

Louis Zellmer's Puckaway Lake Duck Camp 1898-1938

by Harlan Doering

These were the days without duck limits, and birds were bagged both spring and fall. Louis [Zellmer] partook of market hunting and many a barrel of dressed ducks, packed in ice, were hauled to the rail head at Princeton and shipped to hotels in Green Lake, Milwaukee and Chicago.

Live decoys were still in use, until the advent of the duck stamp in 1935, and as far as I know were always mallard hens. A small metal collar was slipped over her head and attached by a cord to an anchored floating board. She had her wings clipped but could swim or crawl up and roost on the board, all the while quacking at any birds she felt a fondness for. My uncles and dad had told me they were very effective and one can understand why they were called "judas ducks".

Hunters would walk the level terrain of pastureland, 200 yards to the slough. Here the skiffs would be moored, all bailed out from any recent rains, fresh dry hay on the bottom, with decoys, paddles and pushpoles at the ready. A cut down wooden kitchen chair provided a decent place to sit. From this landing the group would paddle to their assigned blinds. The distance required to paddle varied from a few hundred yards to two miles. In most cases Louis would have to accompany each sport to help him settle in to the correct location or blind.

Louis would guide and in many cases retrieve birds shot by the sports. On the big open water, skill in paddling a skiff was mandatory for chasing winged divers and picking up decoys, particularly on blustery days.

In the slough and marsh hunting, retrievers were used, American water spaniels being a preferred breed. This species had their origins in the lower Fox River Area and were bred as a small compact dog for skiff hunting. Many mongrels were utilized and became fine retrievers due to the endless practice of fetching the limitless number of ducks shot in this era.

In this early period, 1898 to 1910, most of the guns carried by the hunters were side-by-side doubles in 10 and 12 gauge. Louis Zellmer's personal duck gun in these early years was a Colt hammerless 10-gauge with Damascus barrels. Hand-loading brass shells, repeatedly, was very common in the black powder era. It could be accomplished on a kitchen table using a proper measure for the bulk black powder and shot. No scales necessary. Wadding could be purchased but hand-cut wads of various functional materials were implemented in many cases. Replacing the primer was simple and resizing of the case was not necessary if used in the same gun. The small triangular brass crimping petals were bent upon the cardboard overshot wad and you were ready. Some brass cases were manufactured as a tube without petals. The overshot was then retained by sealing with beeswax or waterglass or frequently with a moderate crimp on the mouth of the case.

By 1905 auto loading shotguns using smokeless powder with five-shot capacities were appearing. Times were beginning to change.

I'd like to travel backward in time at this point and describe the prestigious Ne Pee Nauk hunt club which was situated on the lake shore only a quarter mile southeast of Louis Zellmer's homestead. The land for the club, about three and one-half acres was purchased in 1879 from my great grandfather, Martin Zellmer. The price according to hand-me-down stories was ten dollars and a bottle of whiskey. (Good stuff, I hope!)

Ne Pee Nauk has a glorious history and is still in operation at this writing (December 2007).

The original clubhouse on this site was constructed in 1882 by a group of men mostly from Chicago. In 1902 a group of men from Wisconsin primarily from Columbus and Portage purchased the club. A few Chicago people still were members including the Trego family. Guy Dering of

Columbus, Wisconsin and Dr. Byron Meacher of Portage, Wisconsin were some of the Wisconsin executive personnel.

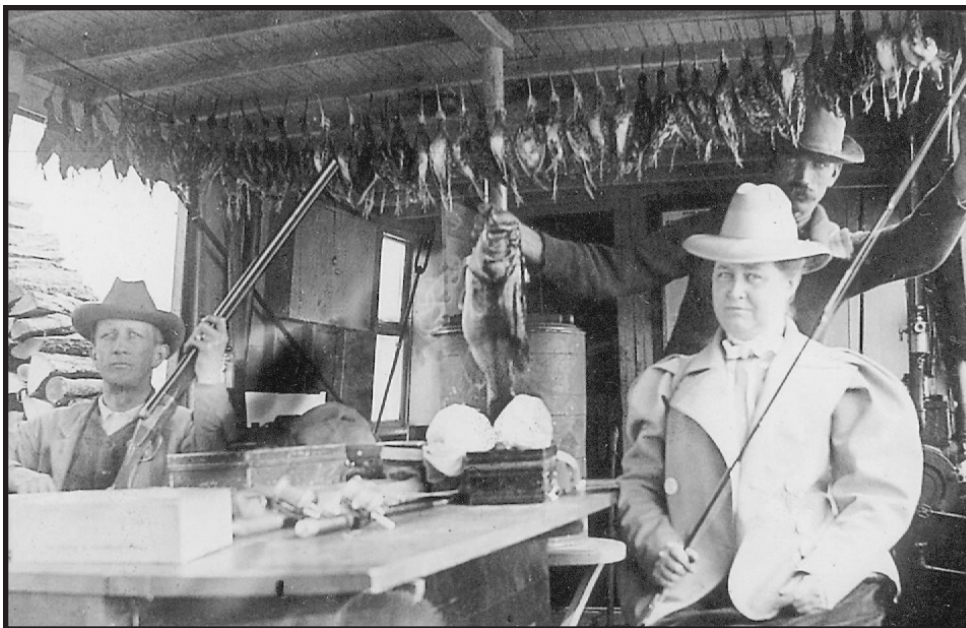
In the early days the club had its own steamboat, aptly named Ne Pee Nauk, and members from Chicago would travel by railroad to Oshkosh and then cruise up the upper Fox River sixty or so miles to the Ne Pee Nauk dock. In those halcyon days of fish and game, ducks and snipe were shot off of the vessel. Around 1912 Ne Pee Nauk owned hundreds of acres of marshland in the area.

Duck numbers began declining in the early thirties. Drought closed the season in 1931. In the throes of the Depression, the reigning members sold the operation in 1936 to a group from Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

The new owners hired Albert Stelter in 1939, a newly married nearby farmer, who led the rebirth of the club. Buildings, skiffs, and decoys were repaired. Many unused structures such as horse barns were removed and the club gradually transformed into a modern hunt club. Duck numbers have moderated but membership in the club has been sustained to this day.

By 1911 Louis and Emma had six children, three boys and three girls ranging in age from twelve to twenty-two. The boys would help in guiding and trapping, the girls in house chores, picking and dressing ducks and scraping pelts of the many furs harvested by trapping (mostly muskrats). I know my mother always complained that all the boys had to do was hunt and fish while the daughters were burdened with all of the menial tasks.

All of the girls upon reaching age 15 were sent to work summers at Oakwood Lodge in Green Lake, about 15 miles away. Oakwood Lodge



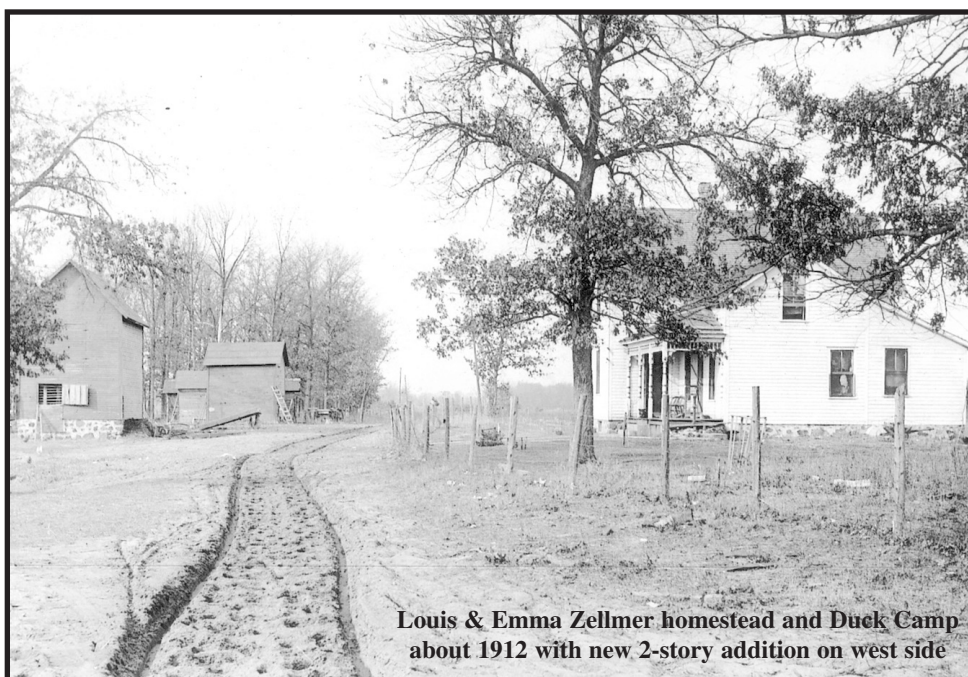
Mrs. Trego (Chicago, IL) on steamboat circa 1890's - early 1900's, Puckaway Lake - probably Mr. Trego with double gun. Both were members of Ne Pee Nauk Hunt Club.

catered to the Chicago family crowd. Mothers and children would stay there during the entire school vacation period and husbands would travel by train to visit, when possible.

This immense resort complex had its own farm and gardens to supply the massive amounts of food needed to feed the hundreds of full-time guests.

The Zellmer daughters all worked as waitresses, some even after they were married. My mother and dad were married in 1923 and resided in Milwaukee, but she returned to Oakwood working part-time for several years. Dad toiled up on weekends on his Indian motorcycle taking many a nasty spill on the unimproved roads.

Business was flourishing, children were growing. In 1912 Louis decided to expand. An extensive addition, wood frame clapboard 18' wide by 32' long, was constructed two stories high, with two bedrooms and a large living and dining room on the first floor and four bedrooms surrounding a central gathering space on the second floor. A



Louis & Emma Zellmer homestead and Duck Camp about 1912 with new 2-story addition on west side

basement with an outside entrance was built under the new section with fieldstone walls and dirt floor adjacent to the existing crawl space of the original building.

In addition a small three-bedroom, wood frame, cottage was constructed in 1913, a hundred feet east of the homestead. The framing was done with rough sawed oak, where a 2" x 4" was a full 2" by 4" nothing planed off. This structure is used by myself and is in good condition at this

chain saws or power splitters. This plot of woodland also functioned as a pasture for the two to four cows and horses that served the Zellmer homestead. Each day they were walked or later strolled with the Model "T" "chuk-chuk-chukking" along to the grounds for their daily grazing.

The cows were milked by hand, sitting on the proverbial three-legged stool. Milk and cream were divided by a separator, a centrifugal force machine, powered by hand. Butter was made by hand using a wooden agitator to churn the cream into butter in a small three-gallon crock.

Chickens were kept, and provided eggs and meat as necessary; a few pigs were also raised for meat. Fruit was purchased in bulk quantities and canned in glass mason jars for use in winter. Carrots and potatoes grown in the garden were stored in the basement, the carrots in a sand-filled bin.

Refrigeration was provided by ice in the old familiar icebox. An icehouse for storing a year's supply of ice was an integral part of any farm in the area. This normally was a two-story structure with three to four doors placed vertically one above the other. The walls were packed with sawdust for insulation and the ice layered between sawdust until filled to the highest level. As the layers of ice were consumed through the year, the door that provided the best accessibility was used to retrieve the ice chunks.

The ice house was filled in late winter or early spring when ice depth was its thickest. Ice on the lake was cut by hand with saws in roughly 3' by 3' chunks, ramped up onto a horse-drawn wagon, hauled to the icehouse and by hand ramped and slid into layers - filling the building.

During the whole period and beyond of the Zellmer Duck Camp the outhouse was located about 50 yards away on the other side of the road. It was a two-holer and I can remember they actually had Sears catalogues for emergency wiping. (Charmin soft it was not!) This facility was still in use at the time of Grandmother Emma's death in 1950.

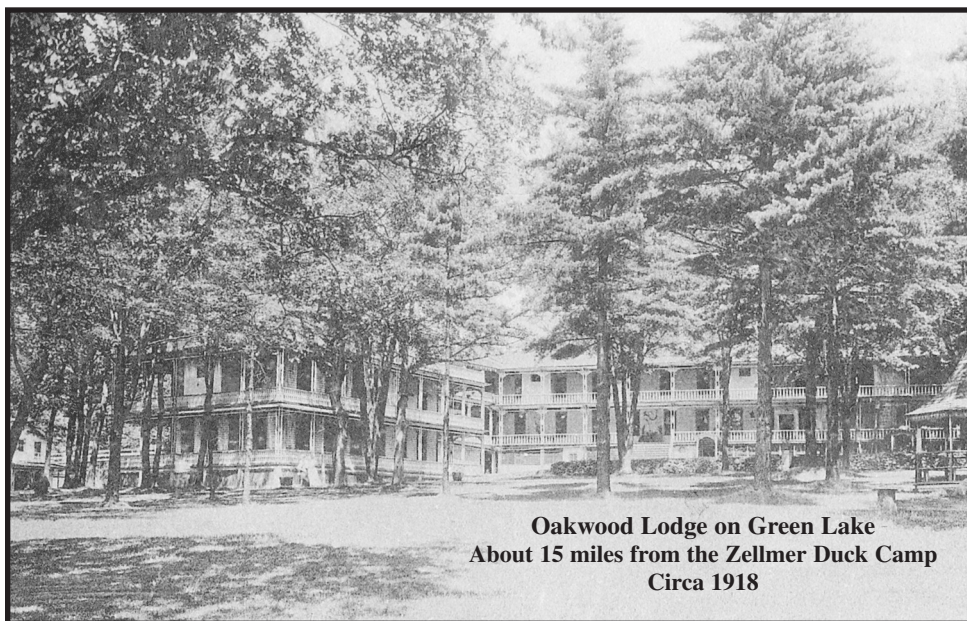
Water was obtained via three hand pumps: one in the house, one at the milk house, and one at the barn. Most wells in the area were constructed by driving a drill point, attached to sections of 1-1/2" diameter pipe, to a 15-20 foot depth. (A drill point was a 4-foot section of 2" diameter perforated tube with screen and mesh to strain the water to be drawn up in the pipe. One end was steel formed in a triangular cone configuration for penetration and the other threaded to attach four or five foot sections of pipe.) About a five-foot diameter, four-foot deep hole was dug around the well pipe and filled with hay to prevent the water from freezing inside the pipe in the frigid periods of winter. A wood board platform was placed over the hole to provide a place to stand.

writing in 2007.

The Zellmer boys were all versed in the hunting, fishing and trapping skills. In addition, they were all adept at the fabrication of skiffs, paddles and decoys. Erwin, the last child, born after a thirteen year hiatus in 1912, and Harry became excellent decoy makers and both were well known gunsmiths in the Waupun and Milwaukee areas respectively.

Historically it is interesting to know how these people lived and functioned in a rural area in this era of 1913. Predominant travel to town, church, or other farms was by horse, either wagon, buggy or sleigh depending on the time of year. Roads were very primitive, automobiles few and far between and expensive in proportion to income.

Louis owned a ten-acre parcel of woodland, three-fourths of a mile east, which provided all the firewood needed to fuel the three wood-burning stoves used in the operation. Mind you, this had to be sawed with one or two man wood saws, split, piled and hauled home. All by hand! No



Oakwood Lodge on Green Lake
About 15 miles from the Zellmer Duck Camp
Circa 1918



Ne Pee Nauk Hunt Club (1879)
Puckaway Lake - as it stands today (2007)