

This week's community profile: Rankin



Wash day: Leona Breitlow hangs out wash at the old homestead. She and her husband, Glenway, now

live in another home nearby and her son, Gary, and his wife now operate the farm, milking 80 cows.

Still hitched tightly to its past

By Peg Schmeling

Press-Gazette

RANKIN — The farms are larger today and the language is more likely to be English than German, but this crossroads community still mirrors its past.

Rankin is at Wisconsin 54 and Kewaunee County D, three miles west of Algoma.

Press-Gazette photos by John Roemer

It's a collection of farms, many of which have been in

the same families for generations.

St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church, which is marking its 125th anniversary, crowns a hill overlooking the Rankin countryside. A majority of its close to 400 members are native to the area.

Paula Braun, who operates PK's Corner, the neighborhood tavern, is considered a newcomer. She's only been in the area for 10 years.

By contrast, Elmer Haack has lived his entire life in the farmhouse where he was born in 1914. That house was built in 1898.

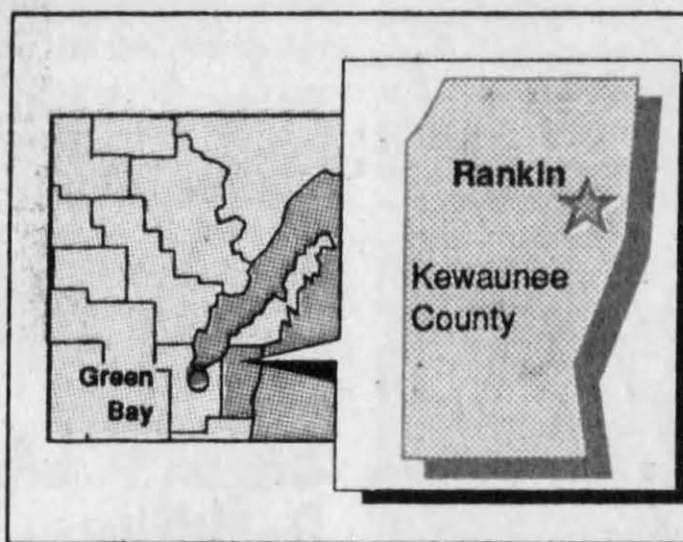
When Glenway Breitlow began farming in 1943, farms were smaller. Four farms at that time are likely to be consolidated into one now, he said.

Breitlow had 90 acres when he started, and that has grown to 250 acres — still not considered a large farm.

Breitlow and his wife, Leona, moved off the farm a year and a half ago. It's now operated by their son Gary, 36.

Milking 80 cows, he has the closest farm to Lake Michigan still in dairy.

He sells his milk to Lake to Lake. But



The Rankin file

- **Early settlers:** German farmers.
- **Location:** Three miles west of Algoma on Wisconsin 54.
- **Longtime organization:** St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church is 125 years old. The church has 400 members, including children.

years ago all the farmers carted their milk to a local dairy, formerly between the tavern and the house next door.

A blacksmith shop and general store were nearby, but all have been torn down. The tavern is the only business that remains.

Braun bought the tavern with her sister Kathy — hence the name PK's. Kathy has married and left, but Braun gets help from her husband, Robert.

"All our neighbors are farmers," she said. "When the farmers are doing good, everyone is doing good."

About three years ago, the Brauns tore the second-story ballroom off the building. Now they concentrate on food.

"The bar business is not what it used to be. It's not like it was years ago when they would sit all night long," Paula said. "Usually we're done cleaning up around 11, and if there's nobody around we lock her up."

There's a hitching post in the parking lot for the convenience of local farmers who enjoy riding. The equestrian customers often stop in on Sunday afternoon.

The area's best view is from the church hill.

"You don't have to go down to the windy city of Chicago. We have a windy hill right here," said the Rev. John Neugebauer, who has been pastor for seven years.

Sailors on Lake Michigan years ago used the steeple of the former church as a focal point.

St. John's, which is part of the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, is a social center for its members. One hundred quilts were stitched last year for Lutheran World Relief.

The present church building, dedicated in 1969, is the fourth for St. John's. The congregation began its worship history in a log cabin. That was replaced by a white-frame building which was destroyed by fire in 1893. A brick church was begun between the parsonage and the cemetery the following year.

■ **Next week:** Lunds in Shawano County



Pastor: The Rev. John Neugebauer sits in a pew at St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church.



Longtime resident: Ginny and Elmer Haack stand on the porch of the home where Elmer was born.