This week's community profile: Casco Junction

Tracks no longer main attraction

By Karil Van Boxel
Press-Gazette

CASCO JUNCTION — Casco Junction experienced death and resurrection.

The community about 2½ miles north of Luxemburg off Kewaunee County A once formed a junction for the Kewaunee, Green Bay and Western Railroad and the Ahnapee Western Railroad.

Today, Green Bay and Western Railroad freight trains rumble through every couple of weeks, but the depot is gone.

Passenger service ended in about 1926, said H. Weldon Mc Gee, retired Green Bay and Western president. It remained a water stop, but the depot was used as a tool shed until it was torn down in about 1940.

Press-Gazette photos by Ken Behrend

Mc Gee, 78, 235 Autumn Drive, De Pere, owns 5½ acres the Y-turn track occupies but plans to donate the wilderness area to The Nature Conservancy. The Y-turn allowed the steam engine to go back to Kewaunee without a turn-around.

Casco Junction may have started around the railroad but the community didn't end with it. Residences are springing up today in three housing developments.

Dick and Terri Ciha built a home in the Zimmer subdivision two years ago.

Ciha, who commutes 22 miles to his job at Fort Howard Corp. in Green Bay, wants a sign on County A pointing the way to the community. Although it is shown on an 1895 county map, Casco Junction is no longer acknowledged on many maps.

Many people probably aren't aware Casco Junction exists, said Terri Ciha, 33, Birchwood Circle. "It's hard to get used to it at first because it's quiet. But I love it. I would never move back to Green Bay."

Dick Ciha, 35, is intrigued by its history and happy to have train tracks nearby.

August and Helen Zimmer, N5803 Forestview Lane, are responsible for one subdivision. They turned their 80-acre farm into lots for houses after they retired.

Helen, 77, and August, 85, who came to the United States from Germany in 1929, purchased her uncle's tavern in Kolberg as newlyweds, but traded the bar for their first farm.

Helen, who was born a mile from Casco Junction, remembers watching the steam engine being filled with water and her mother walking to the depot to board the train for Algoma to visit relatives.

Verna Heim, 84, Luxemburg, rode the train from Casco Junction to Luxemburg for four years until she graduated from high school in 1924. The fare was about a nickel, she recalled.

Her brother, Gerald Thibaudeau worked at the Casco Sand and Gravel Co. that shipped about 20 carloads of crushed stone a day until the 1930s.

Heim's brother, Milton Thibaudeau, who is deceased, bought a log house built in 1917 by a Dr. R.E. Minahan of Chicago and operated the Four Seasons Maple Camp, which the doctor started as a hobby.

Thibaudeau remodeled Minahan's eight-bedroom vacation retreat when he bought it in 1937, leaving the screened porch and game room the same. Current owners Michael and Bonnie Schanhofer moved there from Sparta 23 years ago.

Only a handful of houses were in the area then, said Schanhofer, 50, an English and history teacher, and coach at Luxemburg-Casco High School.

They still make maple syrup for family and friends, but may turn it back into a business when Schanhofer has time. Maple sugar equipment is being renovated.

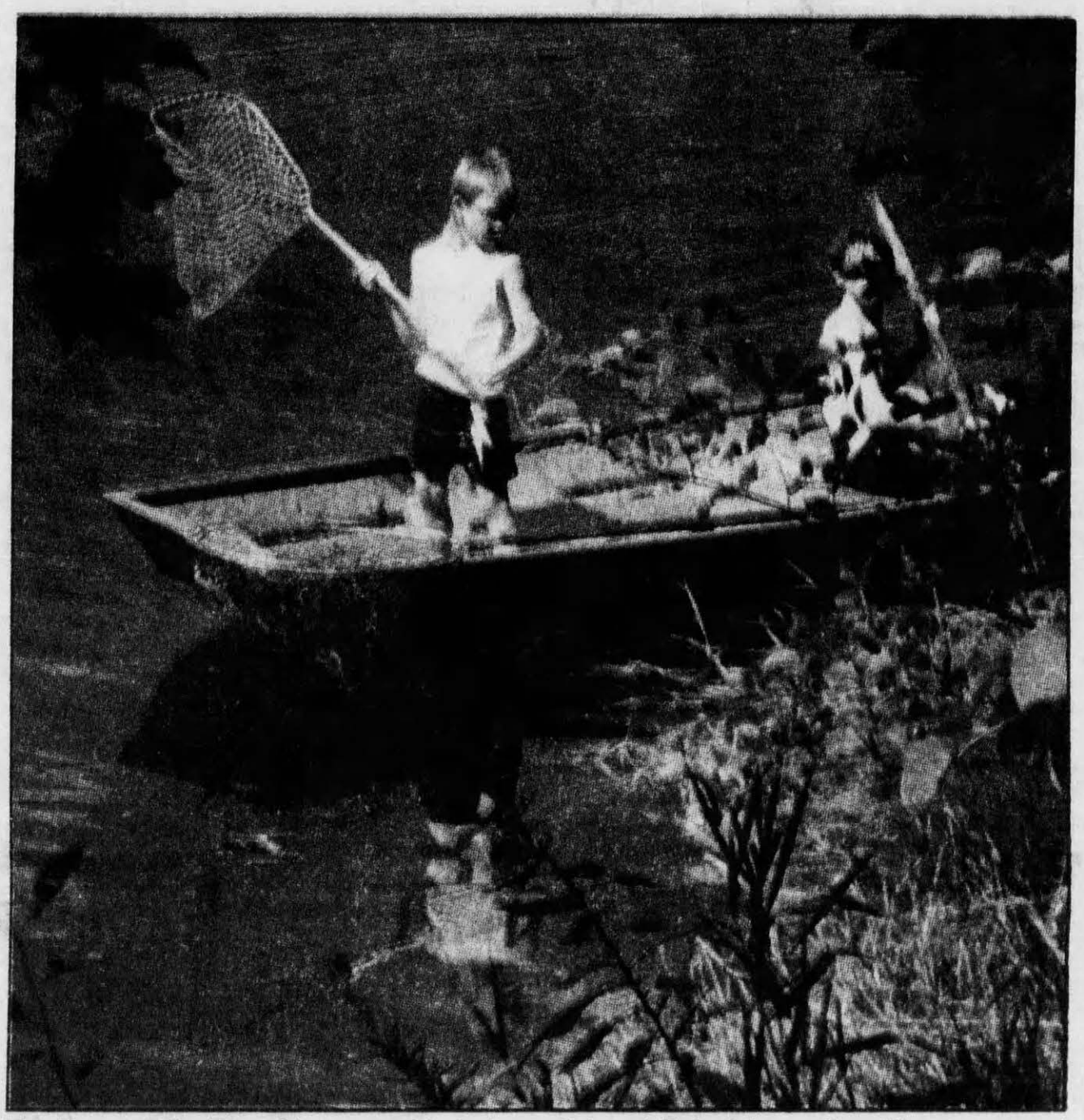
Trails long used to get sap from trees to camp are utilized by area youths with dirt bikes, all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiles and cross country skis. "That's my contribution to Casco Junction," Schanhofer said.

Russell Veeser, 49, E2487 Sunset Lane, another housing developer, started a plumbing, sewer and water business with two brothers about six years ago. His father Quentin helped lay the rails, along with others such as Mike Frisque, now 91, a 45-year railroad man.

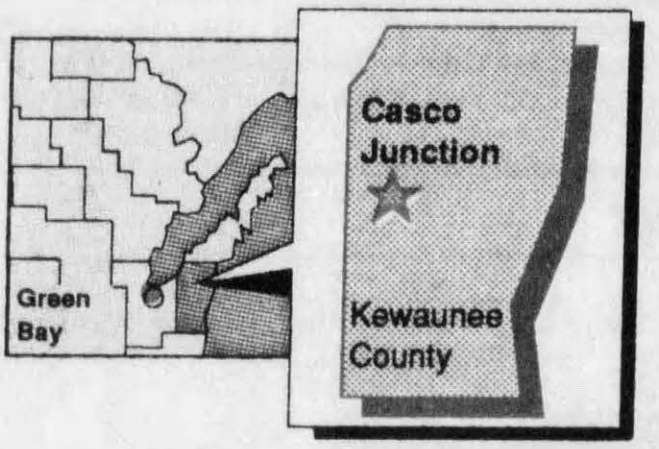
Across the road is Veeser's pond, created when stone was taken from the pit for the railroad.

"I wouldn't live any place else," said Veeser, whose sons work with him when school is out. "It's quiet on this dead end road. I hope it stays that way."

■ **Next week:** Peninsula Center in Door County



Turtle watch: Bart Veeser, 11, left, searches for turtles with his friend Eric Marcelle, 13, at a pond in Casco Junction.



Casco Junction file

Population: About 125.

Boom town: Casco Junction had its chance for fame about 30 years ago when Mission Oil Co. leased land from Nick Salentine, 69, N5404 Hawthorne Road, and other farmers. An oil well was dug on his neighbor's property but crude was limited.

When the company stopped paying the promised $1 a year, the contracts were voided.

Home maintenance: Michael Schanhofer caulks maple logs on his Casco Junction home.

Handiwork: August Zimmer and his wife Helen of Casco Junction show a parka she made.