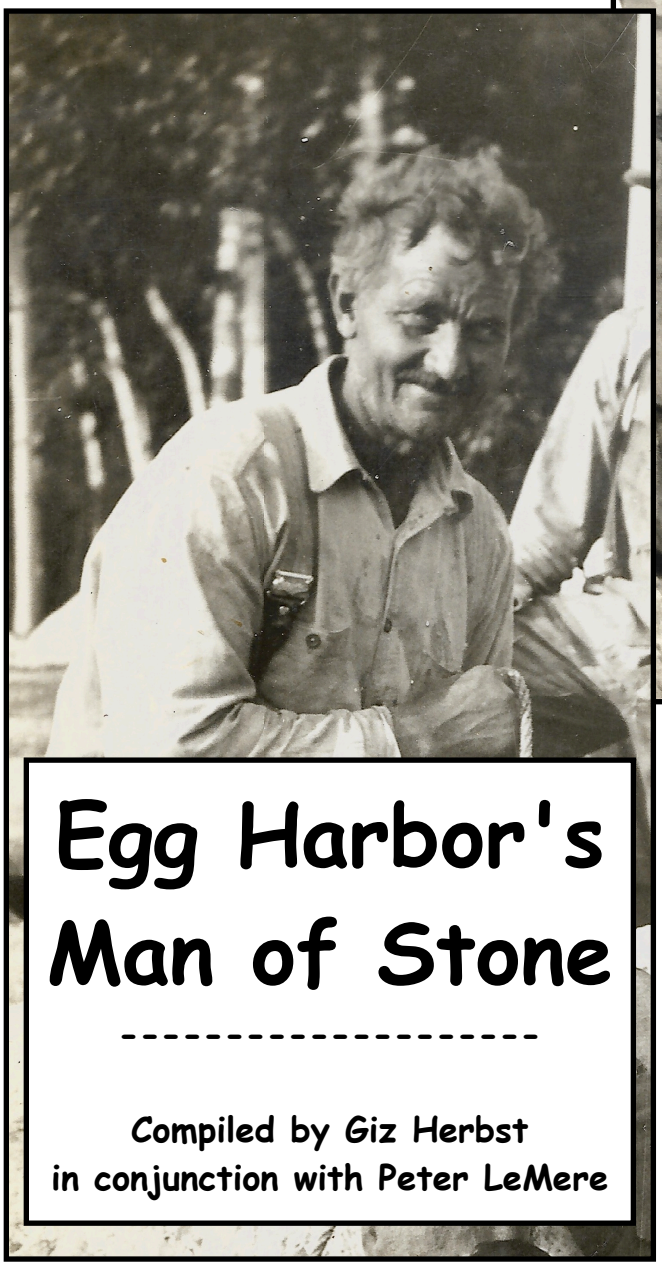
John W. Buechner





Egg Harbor's Man of Stone

Compiled by Giz Herbst
in conjunction with Peter LeMere

Information and photos courtesy of Buechner family members:

Mae Merkle Rohde
Granddaughter

Cheryl Rohde Culver
Great Granddaughter

2022

"John Buechner, Jr., Man of Stone"
Presented at an Egg Harbor Historical Society Program - 8-18-22
By Cheryl Rohde Culver

BUECHNER GENEALOGY AND BASIC FAMILY INFORMATION—

The history of Egg Harbor's John Buechner Jr., is traced back to Nichlaus Büchner (Buechner) born February 22, 1821 who immigrated to the United States from Saxon, Bavaria in 1844 and married Margaretha Renz in New York. Nicklaus was a bricklayer. They arrived in Milwaukee around 1849, then moved to West Bend about 1862 and purchased a farm in 1868. **Johann (John) Wilhelm Buechner**, **Jr.** was **born** on 7-30-1881, the fourth eldest child and second son out of eleven born to **Johann (John) and Rosalina Erdmann Buechner**. John, Jr.'s father Johann Buechner, Sr. was born on 11-23-1846, married on 08-17-1874 and died on 03-15-1914. John, Jr.'s mother Rosalina Erdmann Buechner was born on 10-03-1856 and died on 03-17-1927.

Siblings to John, Jr. are in order oldest to youngest as follows:
George was born on 09-22-1875, married to Marie Knopf and died on 12-23-1954;
Margaret was born on 09-21-1877, married to Otto Muenchow and died on 11-04-1948;
Bertha was born on 02-11-1879, married to Michael Schopf and died on 04-12-1940;
Albert was born on 06-30-1883, married to Lydia Konrad and died 12-04-1955;
Charles was born on 08-20-1885, Katherine Hausman and died on 05-10-1953;
Andrew was born on 11-20-1887, married to Minnie Hausman and died on 12-11-1975;
Pauline was born on 02-07-1890, married to Walter Schubert and died on 12-13-1963;
Minnie was born on 03-27-1893 and died on 02-26-1914;
Louis was born on 10-15-1897, married to Ruth Hasenjager and died on 04-27-1952;
Ellla was born on 01-16-1898 and died on 02-27-1914.
*According to the records, Minnie and Elia died a day apart of Diphtheria. John Sr., died on Mar. 15, 1914, less than a month after Minnie and Elia, of what some said was a broken heart.

John, Jr. **married** twenty-six year old **Hedwig (Hattie) Staats** on 10-08-1907. Hattie was the fourth eldest born on 03-27-1887 out of twelve children to **Jacob and Magdelina (Lena) Puehler Staats**.

JOHN, JR. AND HATTIE STAATS BUECHNER'S CHILDREN—
John, Jr. and Hattie had the following eight **children**:
Helene (Helen) was born 11-07-1908, married Jacob Merkle and died on 11-28-1955
Hilda was born on 07-23-1910 and died 09-04-1910
Edward was born on 08-16-1911 and died 09-1911
Raymond was born on 04-02-1913 and died 07-28-1990
Elda was born on 11-06-1915, married Jess Kornived and died 11-19-2006
Lillian was born on 03-22-1918, married John Dietrich and died on 05-25-2007;
Mae was born born on 05-01-1920 and accidentally drowned on 08-10-1933
Floyd was born on 02-18-1926, married Eileen Ray and died on 02-18-1926.

STONE MASONRY BUILDINGS—
John, Jr.'s primary **occupation** was **Master Stone Mason and Farmer** and a incomplete list of the buildings he worked on are as follows:
Door County Stone Buildings
1907 John Buechner, Sr's Family Barn, Stokes, town of Nasewaupee.
1910 Jason Hall's Masonry Foundation in Sawyer., Sturgeon Bay.
1922 Alpine Resort, town of Egg Harbor.
1923-1925 Rock Island Boat House. There are other Rock Island structures including rock walls, but unsure of dates.
1924 H.A. McPepson's Point Beach Place, town of Egg Harbor.
1927 B.D. Thorp's Eagle Inn, village of Ephraim.
1929 Maxwelton Braes, town of Baileys Harbor.
1930's Baileys Harbor Town Hall, village of Baileys Harbor.
Gordon Lodge, Town of Baileys Harbor.
1934 Woracheck's Meats and Sausage Company (Blacksmith Clothing), village of Egg Harbor.
1935 Legion Hall (Forestvilla, then Forest Builders), Forestville.
1935 Lady of the Lake Catholic Church, village of Baileys Harbor.
1937 Mill Supper Club Remodel, town of Sevastopol.
1937 Daughter Helen's home stone foundation, West Jacksonport, town of Baileys Harbor.
1938 McArdle Library, village of Egg Harbor.
1938 Schmock Inn (Glidden Lodge), town of Sevastopol.
1939 Door County Historical Museum, Sturgeon Bay.
Unknown date Parkway Supper Club "The Rock" (Alexander's), Fish Creek, town of Gibraltar.
Brown County Stone Buildings
Unknown date Rock Falls Supper Club
Manitowoc County Stone Buildings
Unknown date August and Evelyn Fanslou's house stone foundation, Two Rivers.
1926 Ephraim Town Hall, village of Ephraim.
1927 Hobbins Cottages at Point Beach, Two Rivers.

JOHN BUECHNER, JR. INTRODUCTION---

"So few know what he left for us. John was a master stone mason. John spent 25 yrs leaving throughout Door County monuments to his skill as a stone mason. When you see an ever lasting stone architectural gem built in the '20s and 30s' in the county, there a chance that John had his hands involved in putting the puzzle of stones together; places such as the Door County Historical Museum, Mill Supper Club remodel, the numerous buildings in & near Bailey's Harbor, leaving behind his footprints in Door County." *Giz Herbst, Egg Harbor Historical Society.*

Some of the specifics to the footprints John left behind are lost to the ages. There are no living descendants able to clarify all that he created. My mother **Mae Merkle Rohde** is the oldest grandchild who can articulate any memory of him at all. She last

remembers seeing him lying in a hospital bed shortly before he passed. She described her maternal Grandfather as sociable and having a good sense of humor. Unfortunately, for his descendants it was the family's custom to not speak about any deceased person, so much of his true personality is lost to us. Fortunately, we have family photos thanks to Lillian's daughter **Judy Tolentino**, census records and newspaper archives thanks to the Door County Library Archives to help support what is being documented here. What we do know is that our Door County ancestor John and his fellow Door County stone masons were true craftspeople and we celebrate all they have created collectively. John had a hand in constructing three Door County stone buildings designated as **National and State Register of Historic Places**. A member of audience for "The Man of Stone" presentation on 08-16-2020, so eloquently put it, "… and don't forget about his mud man, Ed Schnick!" obviously his right hand man and rightly so.

John Buechner Jr. was second generation American of German descent born in Wisconsin, as were his ten siblings. His paternal Buechner side were from the southern Bavarian region and his maternal Erdmann side was from the northern Pomeranian region. I imagine war, economics, chain migration or possibly "wanderlust" brought earlier generations together.

The immigrant Buechners and extended family members eventually made their way to the Milwaukee area and the next generation Buechners along with relatives settled in the town of Barton, Washington County (West Bend area) as farmers and craftsmen. German was what was spoken in John Buechner, Jr.'s home until 1914.

JOHN BUECHNER, JR.'s EARLY LIFE IN MARATHON COUNTY, WISCONSIN—

John, Jr's parents John, Sr. and Rosaline, along with some of their other first generation Krueger, Weisner and Erdmann cousins would have been lured from their close-knit Washington County families to the wilderness of northern Wisconsin with the promise of economic gain if they would farm the newly logged off land. Their new land was located in Johnson Township just north of Hwy 29 between Abbotsford and Athens. Athens being about thirty miles northwest of Wausau. Farm families here were known for their self sufficiency. It was common for families to barter for venison from members of the local Chippewa people. This was true pioneering!

John, Jr. was the **first Athens baptism** for a newly founded Trinity Lutheran Church. A church that his father had help to found. I have a copy of John's German baptism and confirmation certificates in my possession. Both of these certificates state the town of residency as Holton, not Johnson for the Buechner, Sr. family. The town of Holton is to the west of the town of Johnson. *Athens, Wisconsin Centennial, June 23-24, 1990 Book, Page 11, O.K. Printing, Tomahawk, Schofield, & Athens, Wisconsin.*

The **earliest family photo shows the Buechner, Sr. homestead in 1890**. John, Sr. is horse-driving, plowing his field with the hand hewn log home and barn in the backdrop

along with his nine year old son John, Jr. and his younger three year old son Andrew. John, Jr. and the family would watch and participate in the budding development of Black Creek Falls into the bustling village of Athens that would eventually boast three sawmills, four hotel, three blacksmith shops, general store, hardware store, two planning mills, cheese factory, flour mill, bowling alley, three grocery stores, bakery, doctor, dentist, taverns, five churches, public schools, and the Abbotsford to Athens railroad. This was the young pioneer to adult enterprising world of John, Jr.'s first twenty-one years. His time in Marathon County would end leaving him fully proficient in the art of stone masonry. The city of Athens celebrated a centennial in 1990 and has an extensive antique photo collection on it's website. *Athenswis.com.*

JOHN BUECHNER, JR.'S YOUNG ADULT LIFE IN TOWN IF NASEWAUPEE, DOOR COUNTY, WISCONSIN—

What follows in **1901** is a subsequent Buechner family migration to the southern Door County community of **Stokes** located in the town of Nasewaupee.

In April of **1906**, it is reported that John Buechner (Jr.)has returned home to Nasewaupee after working at the **Parkinson Farm** for a short period.
The Parkinson Farm was a large employer just south of the larger **Horseshoe Bay Farms,** known then as the **Frank Murphy Farms**.

JOHN BUECHNER, JR.'S NEWLYWED LIFE—

John, Jr. accompanying his father John, Sr. came to conduct some stone masonry work on the **Jacob and Magdalena Staats** farm. John, Jr. got a glimpse of Jacob's tall shapely daughter **Hattie** off in the distance and he was immediately smitten.

In Oct. of 1907, a **Marriage License** was issued for the twenty-six year old John, Jr. of Nasewaupee to Hattie Staats of Egg Harbor. They were married at the **German Lutheran church in Sevastopol**. Building their life together for thirty-six years would have many ups and downs due to their different temperaments and approaches to life. John worked and played hard, preferring the social atmosphere of the Egg Harbor taverns, Murphy Moore (now Shipwrecked) and Casey's Inn. Hattie worked equally hard. Her idea of relaxing was to rock with her German bible at the end of each long day sipping her small glass of homemade dandelion wine. *Door County Democrat, 10-12-1907.*

The first newspaper record of John, Jr.'s or John, Sr.'s Door County stone masonry work occurs in 1907. The newspaper's account was listed under the Nasewaupee News. "John Bueghner (Buechner) is engaged in building a **stone barn,** 40 x 50 feet, doing the work himself. It is going to be substantial as well as comfortable structure, such as needed in this climate." John, Sr. would be 61 years old and resides in Nasewaupee. John, Jr. is newly married and probably living with his parents. *The Advocate, Volume 46, Issue 32,* 10/31/1907.

The next mention of John, Jr. is in the early Winter of **1907-1908.** It is reported in the community news section for **Nasewaupee** that "John Buechner returned home from Egg Harbor after working to clear land on the Parkinson place." *Door County Democrat, Volume 16 Issue 14, 1908-04-04.*

JOHN BUECHNER, JR. AS A FAMILY, BUSINESS, CRAFTSMAN, AND COMMUNITY MAN—

The children along with the many work and life's challenges and personal sorrows will come in rapid succession necessitating numerous address changes in the years to follow.

In late 1908, John, Jr. and Hattie's first child and my grandmother **Helena (Helen) is born on 11-07-1908**. She is baptized at St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Sturgeon Bay, which lines up with their nearby Maple Street residence. Helen is married to Jacob Merkle on 05-17-30 and died on 11-28-55. When Helen 1st started dating her **immigrant husband Jacob Merkle**, it was said that John was quite pleased with Helen's choice and greeted my grandfather with a big smile. Only Hattie and the other siblings will see **Helen die** at the early age of forty-seven from a cerebral hemorrhage on 11-07-1955.

The **1910 US Census** shows John W. Buechner, Hattie and Helen all residing on (152 W.) **Maple Ave in Sturgeon Bay**. He is twenty-eight years old. Hattie is five years younger than him and Helen is one year old. John's occupation is listed as Mason Stone. He is self employed and they own their home free & clear. 1910 *U.S. Census, ancestry library.com.*

During the summer of 1910, it is reported that John has taken on John Spude as a business partner according to the Sawyer Community News— "foundation masonry work being done on Jason Hall's home by **J. Spude & J. Buechner Co."** *Door County Democrat, Volume 18, Issue 27, 1910-07-01.*

A second daughter **Hilda** is added to the family at the end of the summer of **1910**. Hilda was also baptized at St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Sturgeon Bay. Unfortunately, **Hilda died** on September 4th, about six weeks later. The cause of her death is unknown to the family. This tragic event would mark the beginning of many more family tragedies to come. *Door County Advocate, Traveling Back, Page B-10, 1910.*

I found two classified ads for **Wood Sawing** in the **1911**, January and February issues of the Door County Democrat newspaper. John's business partner is still John Spude. The business name is also the same— **John Spude & John Buechner Co**. *Door County Democrat, Volume 19, Issue 6, 1911-02-03.*

Later that summer, on Aug. 16, **1911**, **a son was born.** Edward was also baptized at St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Sturgeon Bay. **Edward died in infancy** about four months later in December from suffocation, according to family lore. The official cause was listed as presumably heart disease. The family story passed down was that Hattie was extremely homesick for her parents. She had asked John to take her, but he had put her off for reasons unknown. Hattie was determined and set off on foot with Edward bundled up. Upon arrival, Hattie found Edward dead. Door County Democrat, Volume 19, Issue, 50. 1911-12-08.

It is reported that on May 16, **1912**, John has **sold** "Tract lot 17, subdivision 61 city (Sturgeon Bay) to DC Land Co. for $1000, then purchased 1/2 of ne, sec 9, Sevastopol from the Door County Land Co. for $3750. I was unable to locate a 1912 or 1913 platt map , but a 1914 platt map shows a parcel with a home on it in the **town of Sevastopol**, section 9 owned by the Door County Land Co. It's possible that John and Hattie reside here until 1914, but had either contemplated or moved back to Nasewaupee for a short period. *Door County Democrat, Volume 20, Issue 21, 1912-05-17. Atlas of Door County Wisconsin, Compiled and Published by Otto Nelson, Sturgeon Bay, Wis. 1914.*

On April 2, **1913**, a second son **Raymond John** is born. He is the only offspring to never marry. Raymond had made one attempt with a neighboring young lady, but much to her surprise, Raymond had showed up with an engagement ring without the two ever dating. Raymond would remained living on his parents Cty E, Town of Egg Harbor farm for the majority of his life. He had worked along side with his parents on the farm and also along side his father as a stone mason. At some point he was elected as the town of Egg Harbor Constable. *Door County Advocate, Volume 88, Issue 6, 1949-04-07. Conversations with my mother Mae Helen Merkle Rohde at her home in De Pere, Wisconsin.*

Although John and Hattie both spoke English, they continued to only speak German at home. The weekly church service was also in German. When their eldest daughter **Helen**, my grandmother began school in 1914, she had great difficulties with her new English speaking environment. As a result, only English was spoken to the children after that.

In March of **1914**, John, Jr.'s two **younger sisters Minnie** age 16 and **Ella** age 20 **die from diphtheria** one day apart from each other on 02-26-1914 and 02-27-1914. Their bodies were displayed in the front windows of the John Buechner, Sr.'s home for the community to pay its respect from the outside. The two youngest daughters were initially buried on the property due to the highly infectious nature of the disease. *Door County Democrat, Volume 22, Issue 11, 1914-03-06. Conversations with my mother Mae Helen Merkle Rohde at her home in De Pere, Wisconsin.*

Within a week of his two younger sister's death, John, Jr.'s **father John George Buechner**, Sr. age sixty-eight dies of Heart Failure. "Sufferer of paralysis for several months." John, Jr's parents and siblings were extremely close knit. This was

devastating for the extended family. John, Sr.'s funeral along with two daughters' memorial service was combined and held in yard, since the house was under quarantine. John, Sr. was buried in the nearby Schumacher Cemetery to the northeast. Many of the extended family are buried here as well. John Buechner, Sr's obituary states the following: Co. B 48th Wisconsin Civil War Veteran; born in New York on 11/23/1846; family moved to Milwaukee at age three (and resided there for thirteen years.); moved to the town of Barton (near West Bend), Washington County; married Rosaline Erdmann on 8/17/1874; a few years moved to town of Johnson, Marathon County; and moved to Stokes, Town of Nassewaupee, *Door County in 1902. Door County Democrat, Volume 22, Issue 13, 1914-03-20.*

The 1914 platt map shows a forty acre property in the name of John Buechner adjacent kiddy-corner to the deceased John Buechner Estate's eighty acre property in the town of Nasewaupee. Both properties are located in section 21, in the area known as Stokes. John and Rosaline Buechner, Sr.'s farm was located northeast of the Hwy 42/57 split on the north side of the highway bordering Idlewild Road to the *east.* A 1917 platt map shows ownership to **R. Buechner**, which I believe to be a nephew. A 1937 platt map shows it belonging to John, Jr's youngest brother **Louis**. *Atlas Door County, Wisconsin, 1914, Otto Nelson.*

In the late summer of **1914**, John, Jr. and Hattie have fallen victim to a **theft**. A Lehman delivery milk wagon driver stoled their Lehman cheese factory milk check in the amount of $70.98 and go on to forged John's signature. *Door County Democrat, Volume 22, Issue 36, 1914-08-28.*

It was reported in **1915** that **John's residence is Horseshoe Bay**. This once thriving small bay side settlement still had numerous homes remaining, probably available for rent. Horseshoe Bay or Cooperstown was originally a 1870-1890 fishing settlement that included forty settlers, a general store, post office, school, sawmill, coopers barrel making shop, blacksmith and pier.

On Nov. 6, **1915**, middle **daughter Elda is born.** Elda is also baptized at St. Peter's Lutheran Church in SturgeonBay. "John Buchner (Buechner) of the town of Egg Harbor was in the city (Sturgeon Bay) on Monday. Mr. Buchner (Buechner) was all smiles, the stork laving left a fine baby girl at his home on the previous Saturday.". *Door County Democrat, Volume 23, Issue 47, 1915-11-12.*

In the beginning of **1916**, John is listed as a **Stockholder for the United Fruit Growers** of Horseshoe Bay Farm and is listed as a resident of Egg Harbor. John attended the annual meeting held in Green Bay. "The annual meeting of the stockholder of the United Fruit Growers company of Horseshoe Bay was held at their Green Bay office during the week. A report was made of the improvement during the last year which consisted of planting numerous fruit trees, clearing of land for this year's planting and the building of 'Cherry Lodge' which will be ready for guests this season. *Door County Democrat, Volume 24, Issue 4, 1916-01-14.*

One can easily imagine that the many challenges of life and work on a farm or construction site were dangerous for most, including John & his family. It was reported under the Egg Harbor community news "**John Buechner** was laid up last week with **blood poisoning** in one of his hands which was caused by running a nail in it." *Door County News, Volume 2, Issue 51, 1916-06-14.*

"John Buechner moved his family and household goods to Horseshoe Bay Friday, into the home recently occupied by V. Bach. Mr. Buechner is interested in the United Fruit Growers organization and will be nearer his work." He will also keep his **boarding house at Horseshoe Bay**. *Door County News, Volume 3, Issue 24, 1917-03-21.*

John and Hattie Buechner had made numerous moves throughout various Door County communities in a short thirteen year period from 1907-1920. I was able to locate them probably at 152 Maple Street, Sturgeon Bay, Ward 4; a farm in the town of Sevastopol, section 9; a rooming house and single family home in Horseshoe Bay; and at least two other properties in the town of Egg Harbor, the vast majority were owned. It is probable that they had moved in with John's parents as newlyweds and moved back to live with John's mother for a short period after the passing of his father. "John Buechner **moved his family to Sevastopol M**onday. They have made Horseshoe Bay their home, since early Spring." *Door County News, Volume 4, Issue 8, 1917-08-23.*

A **Canadian Border Crossing** record shows John W. Buechner, age 37 left Sturgeon Bay and arrived by Train No. 19 (W.W.P.) on **August 30, 1917** at Fort Francis, Ontario (International Falls, Minnesota) for the purpose of harvesting crops in Morse, Saskatchewan (about 200 miles north of Billings, Montana). He is listed as a Farmer and is carrying $80 in cash. *Library and Archives; Ottawa, Ontario, Canada; 1908-1935 Border Entries; Roll; T-5469.*

On early spring of **1918**, John and Hattie's **daughter Lillian born** on 03-22-1918. Lillian was also baptized at St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Sturgeon Bay.

John is required to fill out a **WWI Registration Draft Card** on Sep. 12, 1918 at the age of 39. His present occupation is listed as Farmer and his employer is Herbert Petersen of Sturgeon Bay. John and his wife Hattie's permanent address is listed as R.F.D. 2, Sawyer. *U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918 for John William Buechner, Ancestrylibrary.com*.

The Jan. 16, **1920 US Census** shows John W. Buechner is thirty-eight years old and living with Hattie age thirty-two and Helen age eleven; Raymond age six; Elda age four; and Lillian age one. John's occupation is listed as a Dairy farm laborer for which he receives wages. He and his family are renting his home in the town of Egg Harbor. I'm unable to determine the exact location of this home. *Ancestrylibrary.com*.

Another daughter **Mae** is born on 05-01-1920. My mother Mae is named for her. My mother's Aunt Mae will go on to die in her early teens in the late summer from a drowning accident on 08-10-1933.

Later that **winter in 1920**, it is reported in the local newspaper under the Egg Harbor community news that "John Buechner and family of **Horseshoe Bay** are making **preparations to move elsewhere.**" *Door County News, Volume 7, Issue 29, 1920-11-11.*

"John Buechner bought the Valentine Bach farm that was auctioned off last Monday, the price being $3500. Mr. Buechner took possession at once." *Door County News, Volume 7, Issue 22, 1920-11-25.*

John sells his new farm bought on 11/25/1920 at the Valentine Bach farm auction for $3500 to Theodore Peterson and purchases the John Bertschringer County E, town of Egg Harbor farm. Both transactions took place on 12-09-1920. This will be his last real estate transaction. *Door County News, Volume 7, Issue 24, 1920-12-09.*

The Cty E Egg Harbor farm would be John and Hattie's final home. It came with a commercial cherry orchard. Hattie was the true farmer in the family, but she thought this farm would bring long term economic stability to the family.

In **1922**, **John** began work on the **Alpine Resort**'s fireplaces, chimneys, & exterior stone walls. He is forty-one years old.

In **1924**, "H.A. Mc Pepson of Green Bay is adding many beauty touches to his fine summer home and grounds at this place. Among the many improvements being done is a very artistic stone fence made out of beach stones. John Buechner and Jerry Shields are doing the work." This would be later known as **Point Beach Point Place**. It is located due west of the village of Egg Harbor and the Alpine Resort. *Door County Advocate, Volume 63, Issue 18, 1924-07-18.*

On February 18, **1926**, John and Hattie's youngest son **Floyd is born**.

On March , **1927**, **John's mother Rosalina** dies from heart problems at her Nasewaupee home.

It is reported in the late spring of 1927, that "John Buechner, contractor for mason work , and Albert Schnick (his mud man), have finished work at the **Hobbins cottages at Point Beach** (Two Rivers, Manitowoc County) and are now employed for B.D. Thorp at **Eagle Inn**." The Eagle Inn is still in operation and is located in the village of Ephraim.

In **May of 1930**, John and Hattie's **eldest daughter Helen is wed** to Jacob Merkle. The ceremony was performed at the bride's family church— Zion Lutheran Church located in West Jacksonport.

John started the **Rock Island Boat House & Fireplace project in 1923** at age forty-two as it's lead mason. This would become without question John's longest and most magnificent stone masonry accomplishment. This building will eventually be placed on

the **National and State Register of Historic Places**. John would complete the boathouse and fireplace in 1926 at the age of forty-five. We believe John returned numerous times to work on other Rock Island stone structures for Chester Thorinson. In **early 1926**,

John and Hattie's youngest son **Floyd** is born on 02-18-1926.

In **late 1926**, it is reported that "Mr. and Mrs. John Buechner returned home Tuesday of this week after spending a few days at Two Rivers where their daughter Helen is engaged at work in the Aluminum works." Their eldest daughter Helen completed 8th grade at the Pleasant Grove Grade School 2 years prior. John had constructed the stone masonry foundation for their house and other stone structures outside of Door County including and the **Rock Falls Supper Club in Brown County.** Door County Advocate, Vol 65, Issue 34, 1926-11-05. *(Unknown) Conversations with Ray Buechner, 1975.*

Sometime in **1926** the **Ephraim Village Hall** was started as a federally funded WPA project to house municipal functions in addition to a post office, library, barber shop, movie theater, basketball court & a place for youth groups to meet. It would be completed in 1927. This is one of John's first WPA projects and I'm certain he would have considered this as a prestigious job. The building would also go on to become another **National and State Register of Historic Places**. *(Unknown) Conversations with Ray Buechner, 1975.*

In 1929, forty-eight year old John was hired to construct the **Maxwelton Braes** Fireplace. Michael W. McArdle & his brother James were the impetus for a golf club resort.

In the **spring of 1930**, John (probably because of Hattie) receives a **National Honor Certificate** from the National Dairy association for high year production of butterfat yield of 328 pounds from his herd of ten grade Holsteins. I found numerous reports of similar recognition, but I doubt this translated into economic prosperity. *Door County Advocate, Volume 69, Issue 2, 1930-03-21.*

In **early 1930**, John is about forty-nine years old. He is hired among many others to help construct the **Baileys Harbor Town Hall**. It would be Michael W. McArdle who was instrumental in getting this **National Registry of Historic Places** building built. The remaining funds would come from the WPA work relief program.

In the early 1930's, John is hired on to work on the **Gordon Lodge** located on county road Q on North Bay, northeast of Baileys Harbor.

In 1931, John volunteered to be the **school board director** for the **Pleasant Grove School** located just southeast of his property. All six of his children would eventually graduated from this grade one through eight one room school house once located on School Harbor Road. He would hold this important position of school board director for a

number of years. Later on, his son Raymond would purchase the abandoned school house and have moved to the Buechner property. It was my Aunt Loretta's greatest wish before her passing that the Pleasant Grove Schoolhouse be donated to the Egg Harbor Historical Society and restored for all to enjoy.

During the late **summer of 1933**, John's **daughter Mae dies** at the age of thirteen on 08-16-1933 from an accidental drowning. Mae had been staying with her sister Helen. Helen had given Mae permission to go to the Parkinson Farm, since her husband Jake was working there at that time. It is reported that the Mae was playing out in the water in front of the farm manager's home with his two daughters Etta and Charlotte.

It is reported in **early 1934**, that "Joe Worachek and sons Elmer and Robert and son-in-law Lloyal Cornell formed Woracheck's Meats and Sausage Company and announced their opening in the DC Advocate Feb. 2, 1934. It was one of the first buildings to be constructed of cement blocks and included a smokehouse still present at the rear. **Decorative 'hard head' stones on the front were split by hand using stone hammers and chisels and the cement blocks were made by John Buechner.** Oscar and Walter Kurtz were the masons and Francis Bogenschutz the mason tender.

In **1935**, John was hired to work on the all stone arched-roof **Legion Hall** located in Forestville in the southeast part of southern Door County, later known as the Forestvilla.

In **1935**, A fifty-six year old John is hired to do stone work on the **Lady of the Lake Catholic Church** located in Baileys Harbor. It would be completed sometime in 1936.

In **1937**, John takes out a larger advertisement relating to stone masonry work that he and his crew have just finished on **The Mill Supper Club** remodel.

In **1938**, John is hired to work on the **McArdle Library**. Micheal W. McArdle left in his will money to start up a library.

In **1938** John is also hired to work on the **Glidden Lodge** located on the southern aspect of Whitefish Bay near Valmy.

In **spring of 1937**, John is elected as **Justice for the town of Egg Harbor**. He remains an incumbent for several terms. *Door County News, Volume 23, Issue 42, 1937-04-08.*

During **1937**, John age fifty-seven is constructing the **stone foundation of his daughter Helen's home on Fairview and County A in West Jacksonport.** In the fall and winter of **1939,** John also plastered the interior walls of Helen's home.

John is doing his stone masonry work with a young **Harvey Haen** as his assistant (mud man). John is also hired in 1939 to work on one of his last major projects- the **Door County Historical Museum** located on the east side of downtown Sturgeon Bay. *Egg Harbor 1861-2011 Volume One: A Patchwork of Family Memories, page 88, Published by Egg Harbor Historical Society.*

The **1940 U.S. Census** shows that John owns his home and farm. His occupation is listed as a Laborer and he is self-employed. It shows he has a seventh grade education. *1940 U.S. Census, ancestry library.com.*

JOHN BUECHNER, JR.'S CAREER CHANGE—

1941 John took a job with the Smith **Sturgeon Bay Shipyard**. *Door County Advocate, Volume 82, Issue 39, 1943-12-10.*

In 1942, at the age of sixty, John is required to fill out a **WWII Registration Card**. He is among the few men out there that were either too valuable as a local farmer, stone mason and shipyard worker or was he just too plain old to serve from the government's perspective? John's WWI draft card describes him as having light brown hair and blue eyes. Early family photos show him to be a rather dashing young man. In one family photo, John appears shorter in statue than most of his very tall siblings. Another photo of John shows him as approximately six feet in height and extremely well muscular for being in his early sixties.

At the end of **1943, 62 yrs old John** falls off scaffolding and fractured his shoulder blade. He had returned to work, only to suffer a ruptured appendix. During his **ten day hospital stay** he had a **Pulmonary Embolism** which resulted in his death. "Uncle John was quite a large man and that even provided some excitement after he died. His body was shown at the house and when moving his body outside from the house to the church, the pallbearers broke through the front porch of the house. I would like to think my great grandfather would have found this incident hilarious.

John's widow Hattie would reside and work her remaining years on the County E, town of Egg Harbor Farm with her son Raymond until her death in 09-13-79. My mother Mae made a list of Hattie's **daily chores** on the occasion of her grandmother's **80th birthday** on 07-21-1967 as follows:

Helped with milking
Made Breakfast for two or three.
Cleaned closet.
Fed Chickens.
Fed calves.
Fixed two beds.
Swept the floor.
Made dinner (lunch).
Did some baking.
Cut rhubarb.
Washed clothes.
Hung things on the line.
Fed hens two times.
Watered hens.
Carried in eggs.
Packed twenty dozen eggs
Made supper.

Credits and thanks to:
Judy and John Tolentino
Helen Buechner
Loretta Merkle Robertoy
Mae Helen Merkle Rohde
Patty Williamson
The Door County Pulse"
Pete LeMere and Giz Herbst - Egg Harbor Historical Society

Washed dishes for three meals.

TWO MEN WHO HELPED TO CREATE ROCK ISLAND STATE PARK AS REMEMBERED BY THEIR GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTERS

By

Patty Williamson, PhD

This is a story shared by two unrelated women whose great-grandfathers were involved – in quite different ways – in the creation of Rock Island State Park.

Cheryl Culver is the great-granddaughter of Johann "John" Wilhelm Buechner, Jr. born on July 30, 1881, in Marathon County, Wisconsin. He was the fourth of Johann and Rosalina (Erdmann) Buechners' 11 children. Both his parents, along with a number of relatives – Krugers, Weisners and Erdmanns – had immigrated from Germany and, although John, Jr. spoke English, German was the only language spoken in his home until 1914.

The Buechner family, following many of their cousins, migrated to southern Door County in 1901, settling in the Stokes community in the Town of Nasewaupee.

By 1906, John, Jr. was employed at the Parkinson Farm, just south of the Frank Murphy Farms (now known as Horseshoe Bay Farms.) Back in Nasewaupee for a visit, he accompanied his father to conduct some stone masonry work at the farm owned by Jacob and Magdalena Staats in the town of Egg Harbor (now Country View Farm, still owned by Staats' descendants). In October 1907, John, Jr. married Hattie Staats, the "tall, shapely" young, woman he'd caught sight of 18 months earlier. He was 26, and Hattie was 21.

That same year, *The Advocate* reported that John, Sr. and Jr. were building a 40-feet by 60-feet stone barn. By the time of the 1910 census, John, Hattie and their first child, Helen, were living at 152 W. Maple in Sturgeon Bay, and John was self-employed as a stonemason. Apparently, he was busy, as he had just taken on John Spude as a partner.

The family experienced many heartaches. In 1910 and 1911, two more children were born and died in infancy. In March 1914, John's two younger sisters, ages 16 and 20, died of diphtheria just a day apart and, within a week, his father died of heart failure. A few months later, their $70.98 milk check (equivalent to $2,962.76 today) was stolen – a devastating loss to a young family. Another tragedy was the accidental drowning of 13-year-old daughter Mae in 1933.

There must have been setbacks in John's work as a stone mason, because the 1920 census listed him as a dairy farm worker, but later that year the *Advocate* reported that he and Albert Schnick, his "mud man," had finished work on the Hobbins cottages in

Two Rivers and were now working for B. D. Thorp at Eagle Inn. In 1922, he completed the fireplaces, chimneys and exterior stone walls for the new Alpine Resort.

In 1923, John began his longest and most magnificent masonry accomplishment as the lead mason for Chester Thordarson's boathouse and other structures on Rock Island. It was the first of his projects that would be named to the Wisconsin and National Registers of Historic Places. Others were the Ephraim Village Hall and the Baileys Harbor Town Hall and McArdle Library.

Additional major projects for which he did stonework included the Mill Supper Club, the Rock Supper Club (now Alexander's), Glidden Lodge, the Forestville Legion Hall (later known as the Forestvilla), the Door County Historical Museum, Gordon Lodge, Lady of the Lake Catholic Church and Herman Birnschein's gas station.

In 1941, at age 60, John went to work for the Smith Shipyard in Sturgeon Bay. He died two years later of complications from a ruptured appendix.

Dixie Jorns is the great-granddaughter of Rasmus Hanson, a Danish immigrant who lived in the Jackson Harbor area of Washington Island at the turn of the 20th Century. He was an industrious man, involved with boat building, shipping and logging, and he purchased the interior of Rock Island, planning to log off the timber.

In earlier days, transient Native American tribes had used Rock Island for fishing. By the time the Pottawatomie Lighthouse was built in 1836, Jesse Minor, one of the first lightkeepers, reported as many as 50 wigwams coexisting with a village of families that occupied the east side of the island. By the mid-1800s, however, the island was all but empty, apart from the lightkeeper's family.

About 1910, Chester Thordarson, an Icelandic immigrant and self-made millionaire from the Chicago area, became interested in purchasing land around Washington Island. During this time, Rasmus Hanson's family was suffering hardships. After losing two infant daughters, his wife, Rasmine, was very depressed and longed to see her family in Denmark. Rasmus sold his holdings on Rock Island to Thordarson to finance her trip. Sadly, Rasmine contracted
pneumonia on the journey back from Denmark and died in a boarding house in Sister Bay.

After purchasing Hanson's land, Thordarson began to develop the island. Believing that Icelanders were the best craftsmen, he advertised for workers in Canadian newspapers with circulations in communities with large concentrations of Icelandic immigrants. A young man named Daniel Lindal was one of the nine
who came to work on Rock Island.

A massive stone boathouse, big enough for two 50-foot yachts, was built, along with a few other smaller structures. As structures began to be built, Agnes Hanson, Rasmus' daughter, was one of the people who delivered supplies to the island. She caught the

eye of Lindal, and they eventually married. Lindal worked for Thordarson until the day he suggested that the workers should be given a coffee break during the day and was fired on the spot.

However, that did not end the Lindal family connection with Rock Island. Daniel's sister, Helga, moved there and married Thordarson's son, Dewey, in 1931. Chester Thordarson died in 1945 and was buried on Rock Island.

In early 1961, officials of the Town of Washington Island, led by Jack Hagen, the town chairman, proposed that Rock Island become a state park. A feasibility study was conducted in September 1961, and the Door County Board approved the acquisition on December 11, 1961.

In the spring of 1962, the Department of Conservation negotiated with Dewey Thordarson, who was administering his late father's estate, and on July 17, 1962 an agreement was reached, stipulating that the state conservation department would exercise temporary custodial care of the property along with the option to purchase the land for a park in the future. It expired on August 31, 1963, and funds were not available to purchase the island. In order to keep the land undeveloped for a longer time, while waiting for the state legislature to approve funding, a three-year scenic easement was purchased for $5,000 which counted towards the eventual purchase price. The property was finally purchased in April 1965.

Dewey died in 1968 at age 70, and Helga in 2001 at age 95. Both are buried in the Washington Island Cemetery.

Ten buildings on Rock Island, including the boathouse, are part of the Thordarson Estate Historical District that was placed on the National Registry of Historic Places in 1985 and on the Wisconsin Registry in 1989.

Cheryl Culver's great-grandfather, "Egg Harbor's man of stone," was the chief stone mason on the boathouse and many of the other buildings on Thordarson's estate. And it's quite possible there would never have been a state park on Rock Island, had Dixie Jorns great-grandfather, Rasmus Hanson, not sold his land there to pay for his homesick wife's ill-fated visit to her family in Denmark.

John was listed as the 1st child Baptized at the "Athens Lutheran Church." His father John Sr. was one of the founders of that Church —



Little John, Andrew & John Buechner SR.
ATHENS - Wis around 1890



Children of John and Rosaline Buechner @1913. Front Row: Ella, Albert, Bertha, and Charles
Back Row: Louis, Pauline, **John, Jr.,** Minnie, Andrew, Margaret, and George.





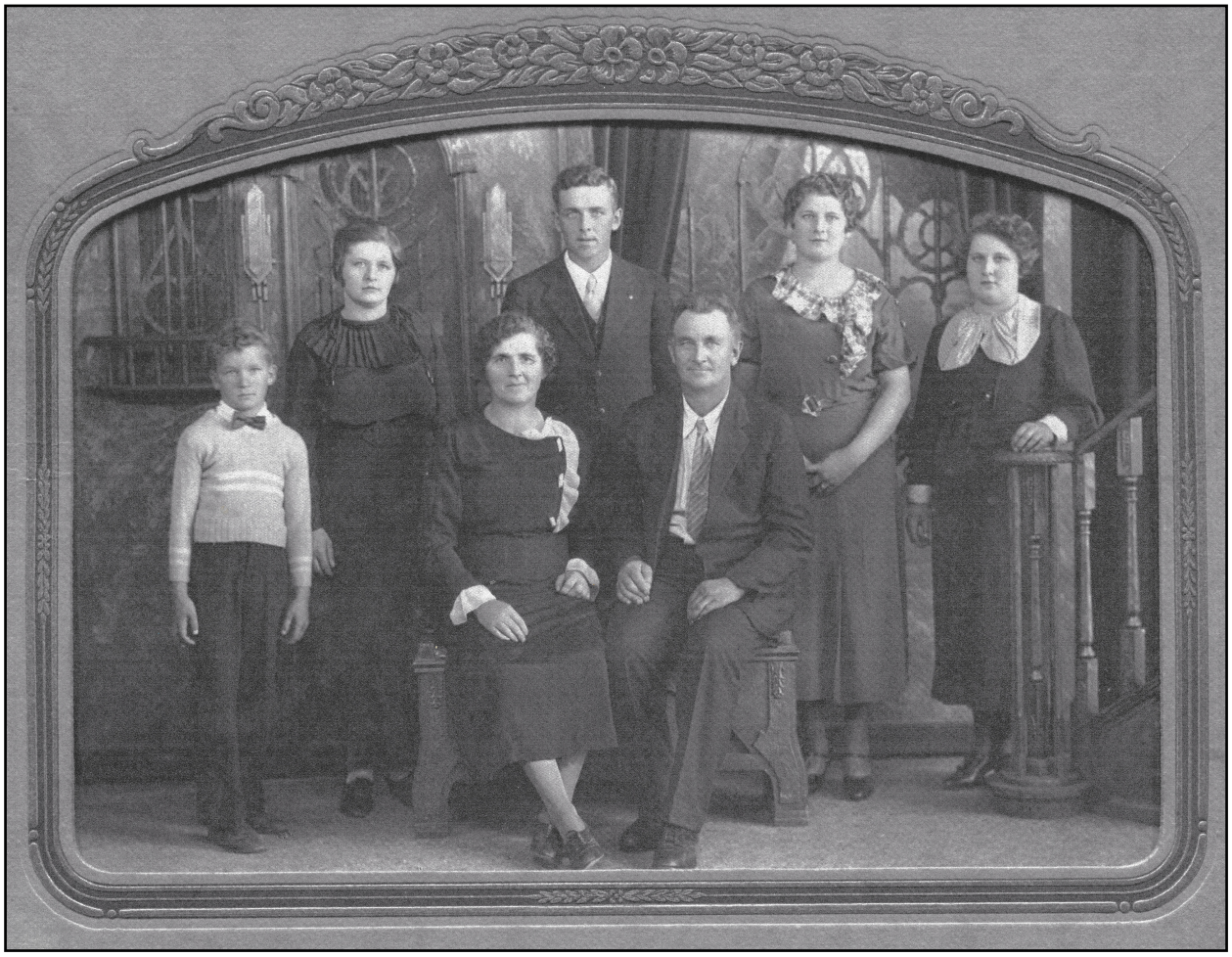
Hedweg (Hattie) Staats



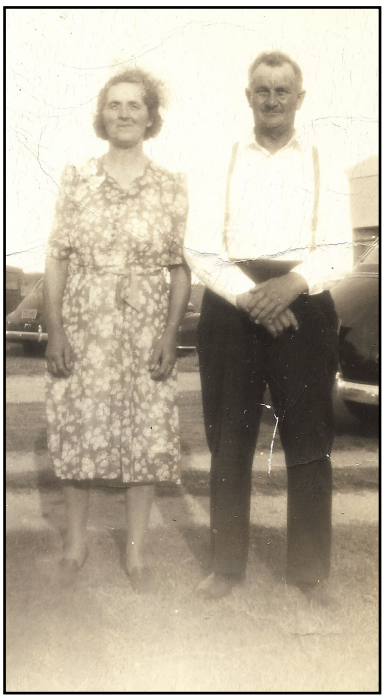
Hattie and John's wedding photo

Democrat 12 Oct 1907

The marriage of Miss Hattie Staats, of this town, and John Buechner, of the town of Nasewaupee, was solemnized at the German Lutheran church in Sevastopol on Tuesday, Oct. 9, Rev. F. Schumann officiating. Edw. Staats and And. Buechner acted as best men, and the Misses Minnie and Pauline Buechner as bridemaids. After the ceremony a reception was held at the home of the bride and a large number of friends and relatives were in attendance.



Hattie and John Buechner. Children lt.-rt.: Floyd, Lillian, Raymond, Elda, and Helena





Hattie and John….and Buechner family members

Wis. Form No. 206
PRINTED BY H. C. MILLER CO., MILWAUKEE
Copy Certificate of DEATH

WISCONSIN STATE BOARD OF HEALTH
Bureau of Vital Statistics

Local Registrar's No. 354

Do not write or stamp anything on face of certificate except in answer to questions asked there.

Reserved for coding

1. PLACE OF DEATH:
(a) County: Door
(b) Township or City or Village: Sturgeon Bay
(c) Name of hospital or institution: Egeland

2. USUAL RESIDENCE OF DECEASED:
(a) State: Wisconsin (b) County: Door
(c) Township or City or Village: Egg Harbor R. D. # 1
(d) Street No. (If rural, give Route No. and Post Office):
(e) If foreign born, how long in U. S. A.?

MEDICAL CERTIFICATION

Residence

3. (a) FULL NAME: John Wm. Buechner
3. (b) If veteran, name war: --
3. (c) Social Security No.: 395-09-8675

Local—Cause of death

4. Sex: M
5. Color or race: W.
6. (a) Single, widowed, married, divorced: married
6. (b) Name of husband or wife: Hattie Staats
6. (c) Age of husband or wife if alive: 56 years.
7. Birth date of deceased: May (Month) 16 (Day) 1881 (Year)

State—Cause of death

8. AGE: Years: 62 | Months: 6 | Days: 22 | If less than one day: hr. min.

Age

9. Birthplace: Athens (City, town, or county) Wisconsin (State or foreign country)
10. Usual occupation: Mason & Farmer
11. Industry or business:

Acc. Co.

Father:
12. Name: John Buechner
13. Birthplace: New York (City, town, or county) (State or foreign country)

Acc. Place

Mother:
14. Maiden name: Rosa Erdman
15. Birthplace: Germany (City, town, or county) (State or foreign country)

16. (a) Informant: Mrs. Hattie Buechner
(b) Address: Egg Harbor, Wisconsin
17. (a) Burial (Burial, cremation or other) (b) Date thereof 12-11-43 (Mo.) (Da.) (Yr.)
(c) Place: burial or cremation: Schumaker, Nasewaupee
18. (a) Signature of funeral director: J. A. Stoneman
(b) Address:

Queried

19. (a) 12-9-43 (Date received local registrar) (b) E. C. Huff (Registrar's signature)
(c) (Date received sub-registrar) (d) (Sub-registrar's signature)

20. Date of death: Month Dec. Day 8 Year 1943
21. I hereby certify that I attended the deceased from Nov. 24, 1943, to Dec. 7, 1943; that I last saw him alive on Dec. 7, 1943; and that death occurred on the date stated above at 5:10A M.

Immediate cause of death: Pulmonary embolism — Duration: 10 min.
Due to: Peri appendiceal abscess — 18 days
Due to:
Other conditions (Include pregnancy within 3 months of death):
Major findings: Of operations:
Of autopsy:

Physician: Underline the cause to which death should be charged statistically.

22. If death was due to external causes, fill in the following:
(a) Accident, suicide, homicide (specify):
(b) Date of occurrence:
(c) Where did injury occur? (City, village or township, county and state):
(d) Did injury occur in or about home, on farm, in industrial place, in public place? (Specify type of place)
While at work? (e) Means of injury:

23. Signature (M. D. or other)
Address: Date signed:

John Buechner (son of John & Rosaline) was a mason by trade. He left many monuments to his labor.

He did the stone work on The Mill supper club, The Rock supper club, Evelyn and Augie Fanslaus' house in Two Rivers, the Forestvilla, (formerly Legion Hall), Ephraim Town Hall, helped with fireplaces etc. at Maxwelton Braes and Alpine resorts, did all the arches at Rock Island, stone work on "Lady of the Lake" Catholic church in Baileys Harbor, Baileys Harbor Library and the stone wall on the left of it.

Ray Buechner (1975)

UNCLE JOHN BUECHNER

Among the many talents that Uncle John Buechner had, one seemed to stand out and that was his ability to do masonry - the laying of stone for buildings, fireplaces and walls.

Examples of his work are McArdle library and town hall in Baileys Harbor, St. Mary of the Lake Catholic Church of Baileys Harbor, the buildings on Rock Island (including the Great Hall), and the stable area of the barn on the family farm on Cty E, east of Egg Harbor.

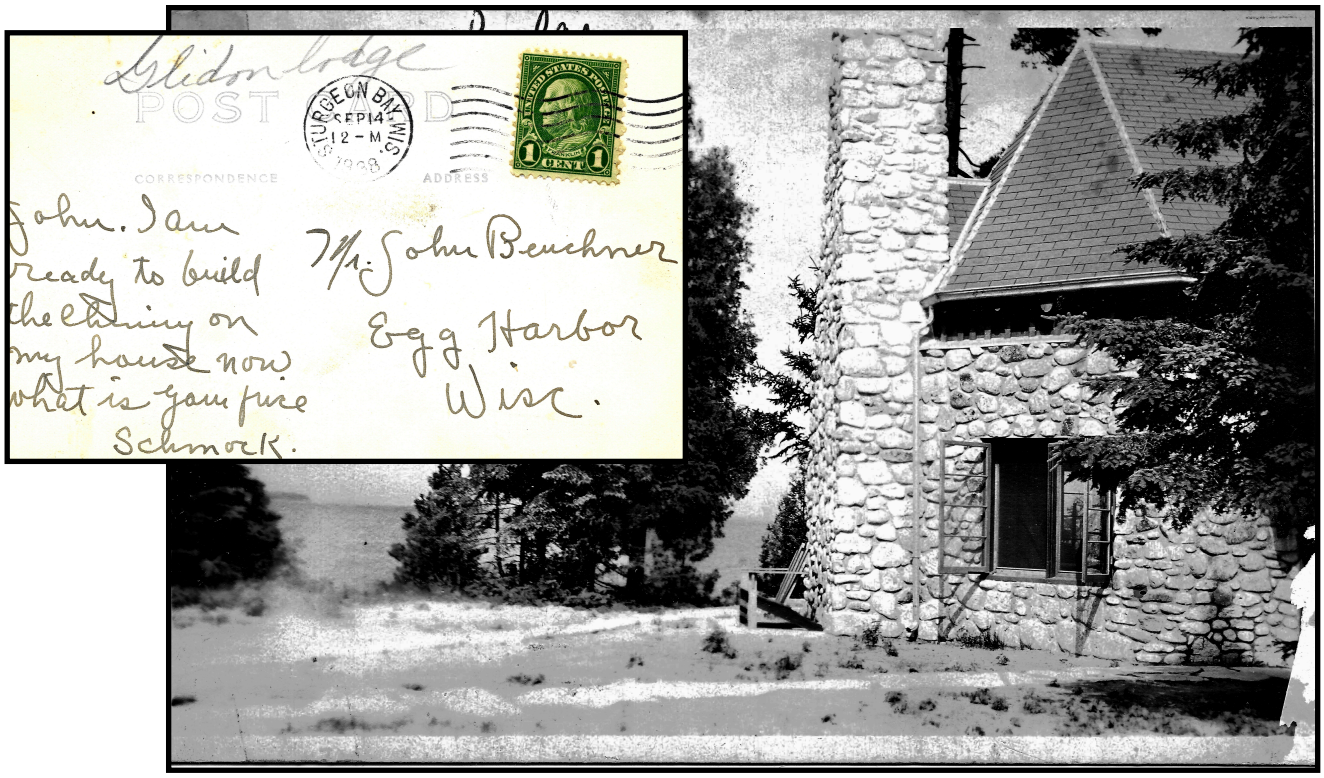
Uncle John was quite a large man and that even provided some excitement after he died. His body was shown at house and when moving the casket with the body inside from the house to the church, the pallbearers broke through the porch of the house.

John Buechner's Stone Mason Story

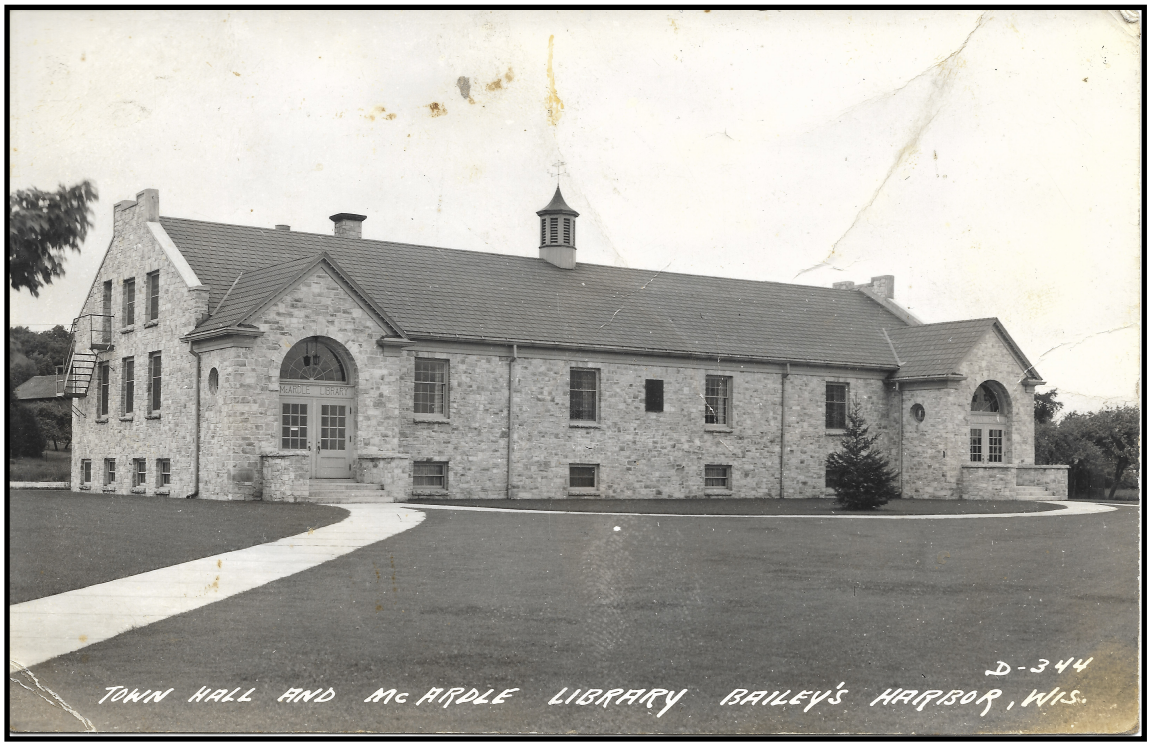
Nine Stone Masonry Projects John Left His Mark On...



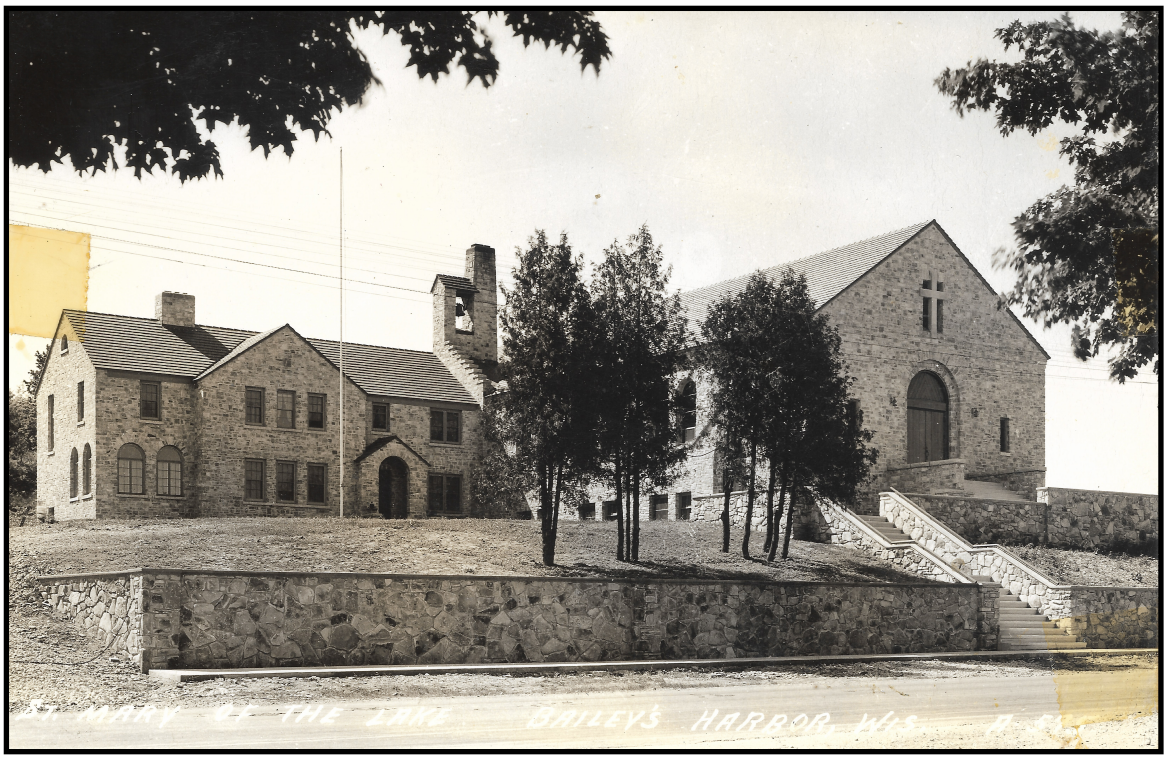
Alpine Resort's fireplaces, chimneys and stone walls
Egg Harbor



Glidden Lodge
Valmy



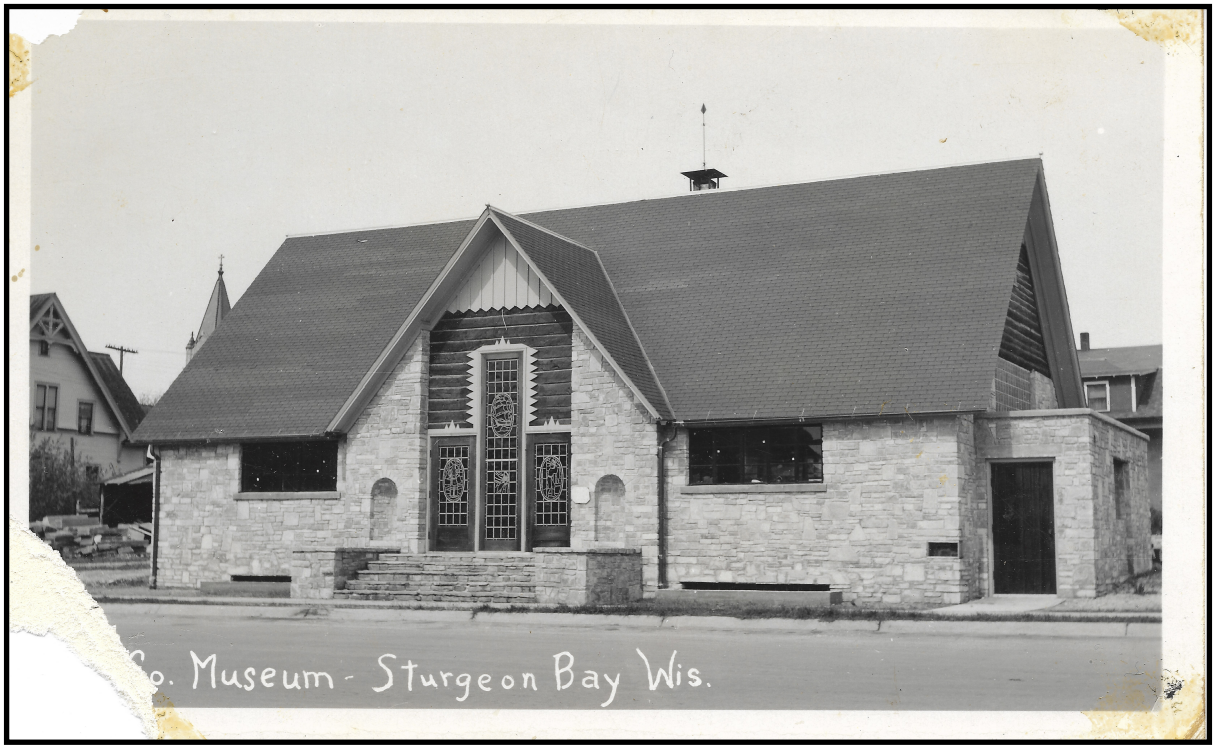
Baileys Harbor Town Hall
McArdle Library



St. Mary's of the Lake Church
Baileys Harbor



Maxwelton Braes
Baileys Harbor



Door County History Museum
Sturgeon Bay



Ephraim Town Hall
Ephraim



Mill Supper Club
Sturgeon Bay



Rock Supper Club (Alexanders)
Fish Creek

Rock Island's Chester Thordarson Estate Project

John Buechner a lead mason on the project.

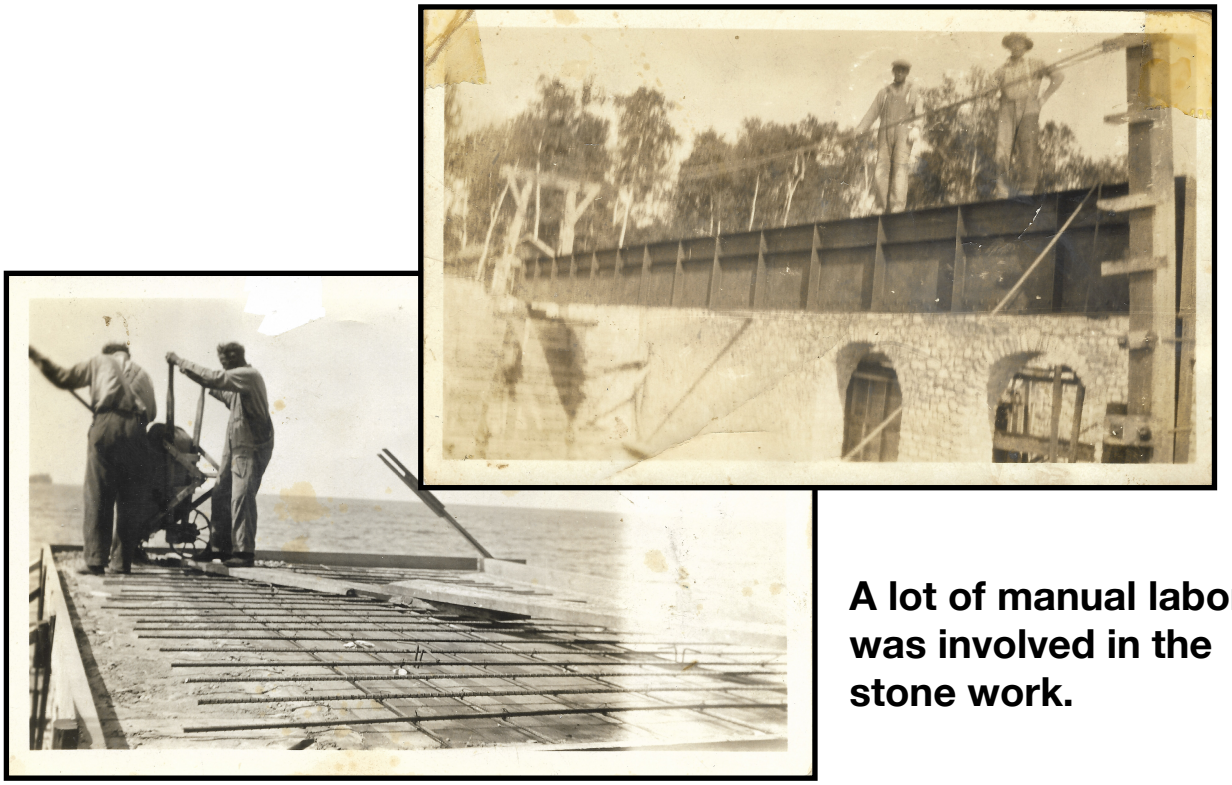


John taking a break with his pal.
The Thordarson Rock Island Estate was the biggest project John worked on.

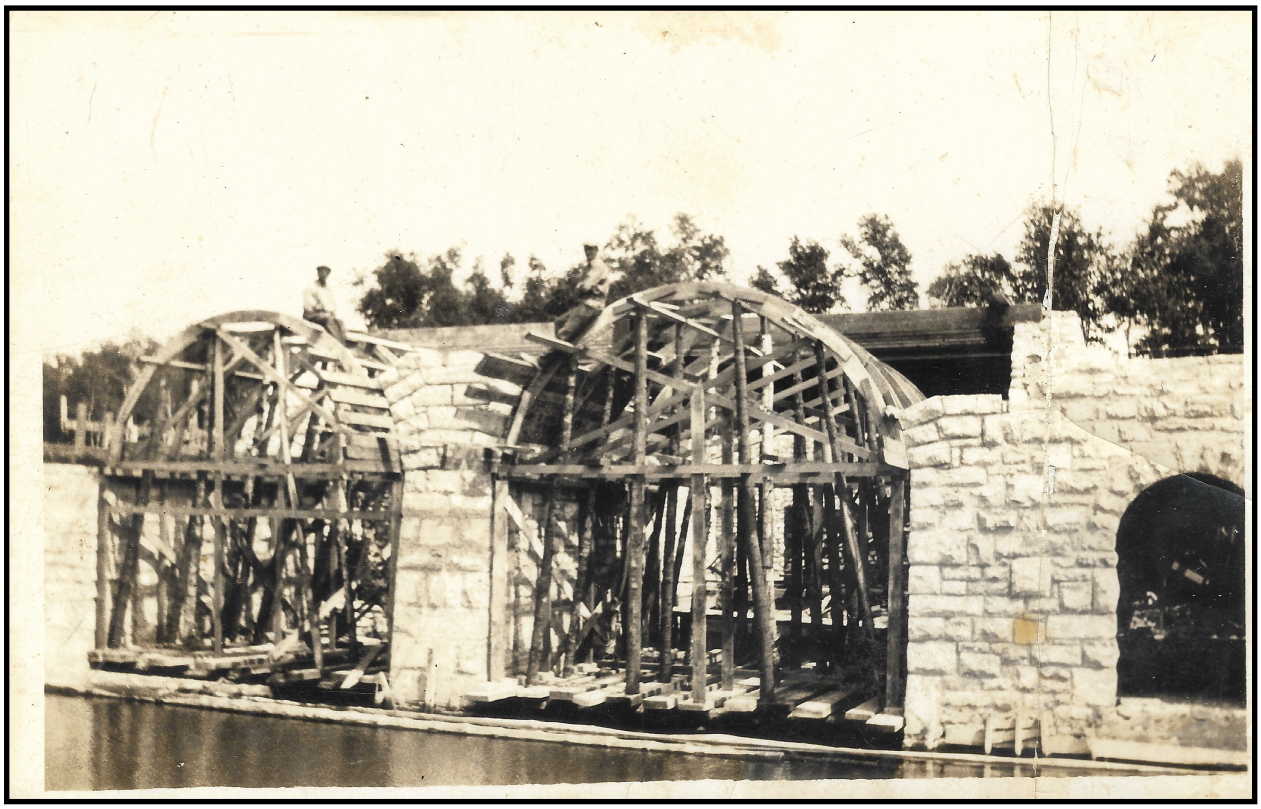
There was little difficulty finding necessary building materials for a stone mason on "Rock Island".



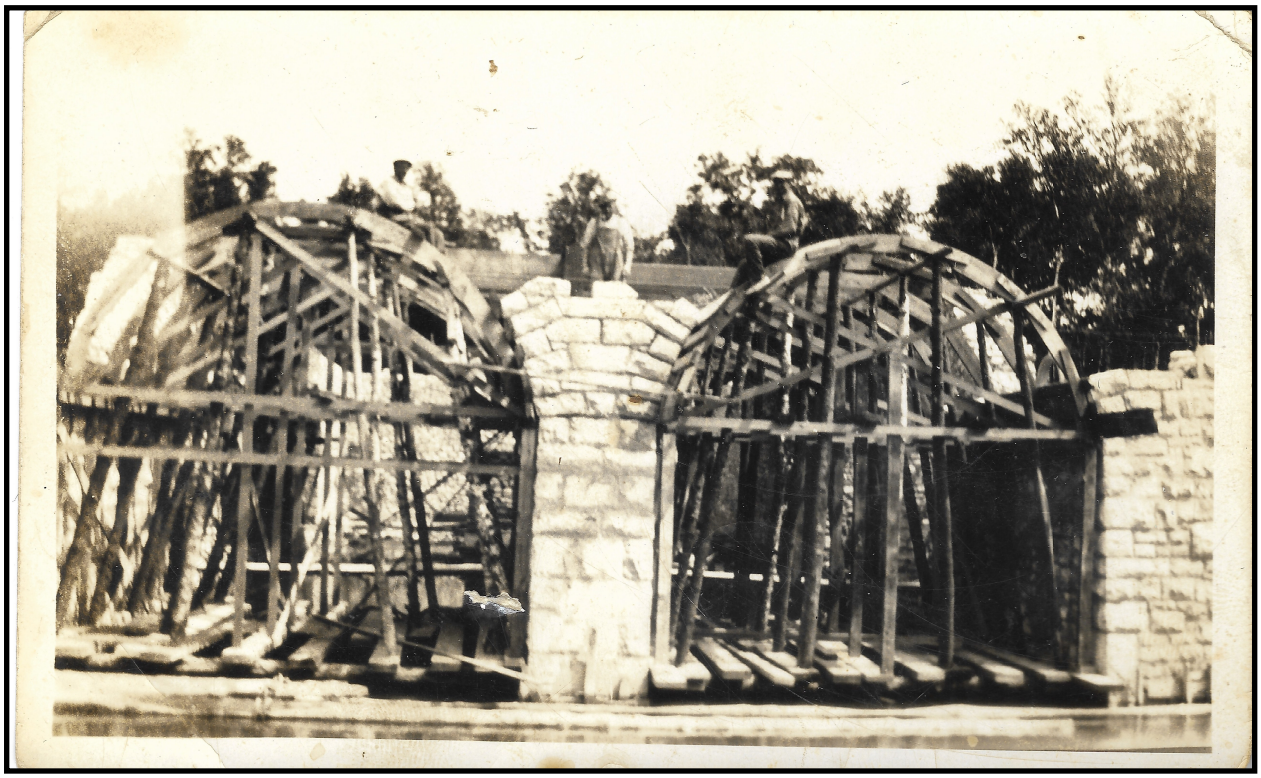
John on the right working on the foundation.



A lot of manual labor was involved in the stone work.



Framing up for the laying of stone for the arches

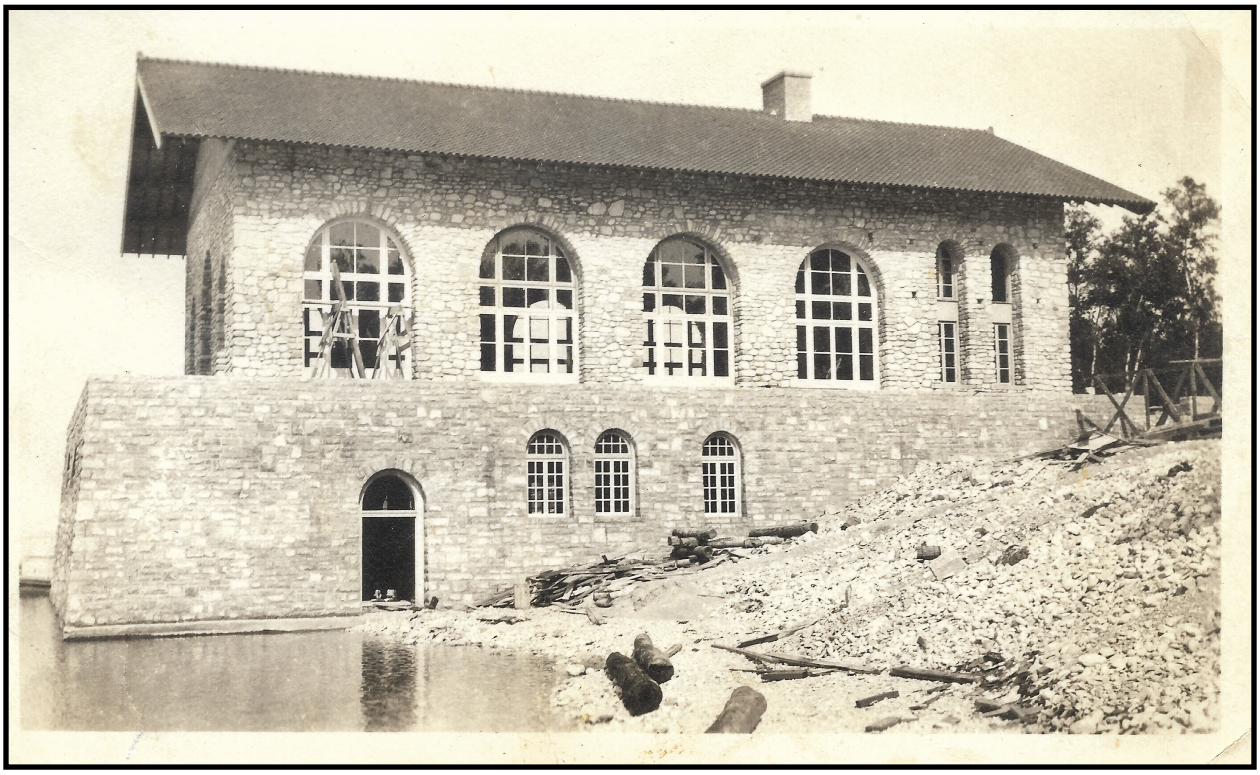




Note the wood structure on the left, temporary housing for workers and storage



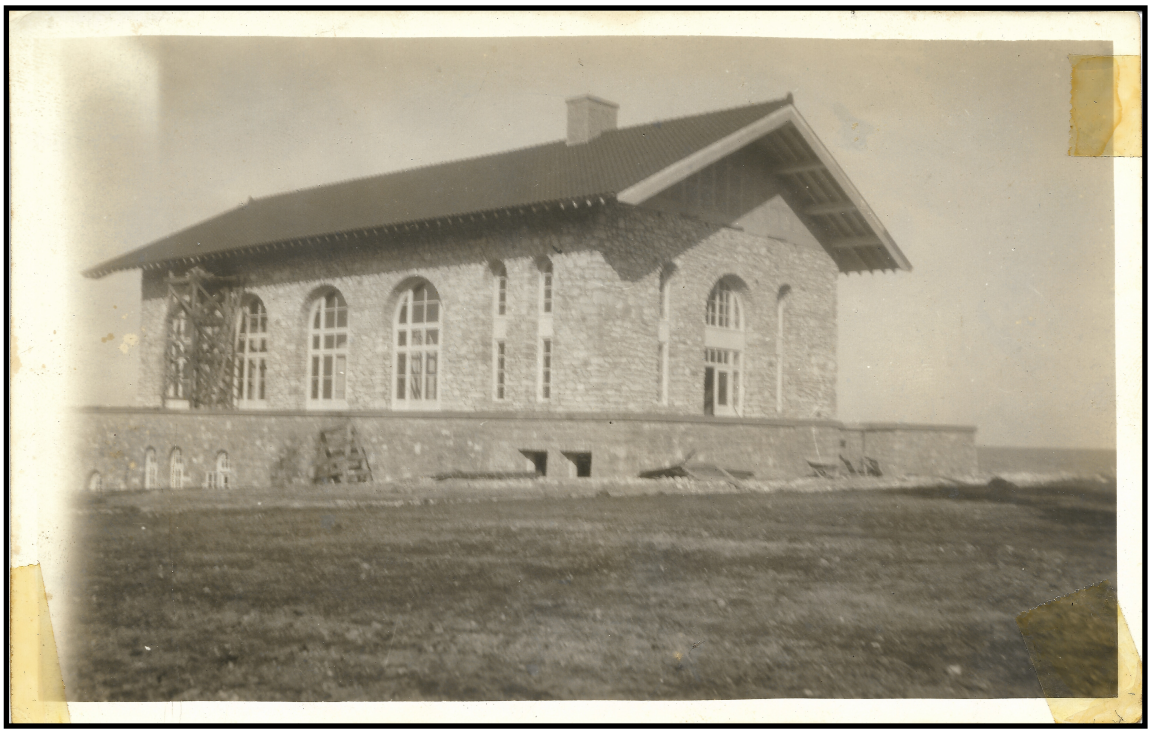
East on shore entry



South facing elevation



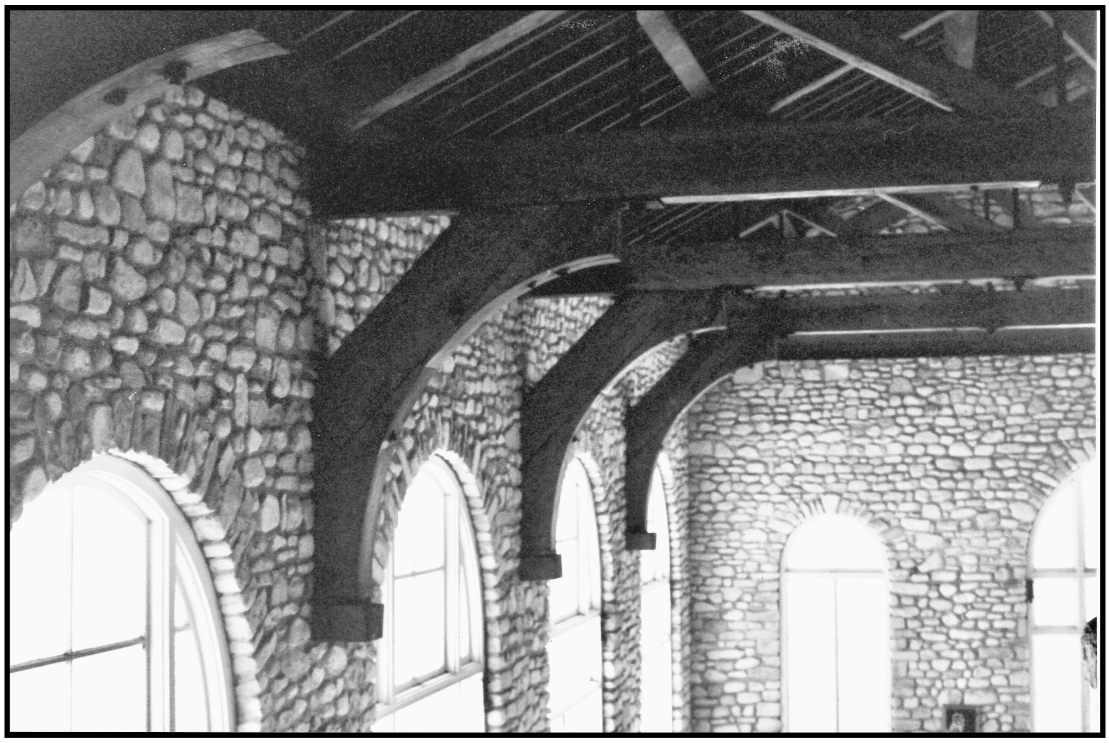
North facing elevation

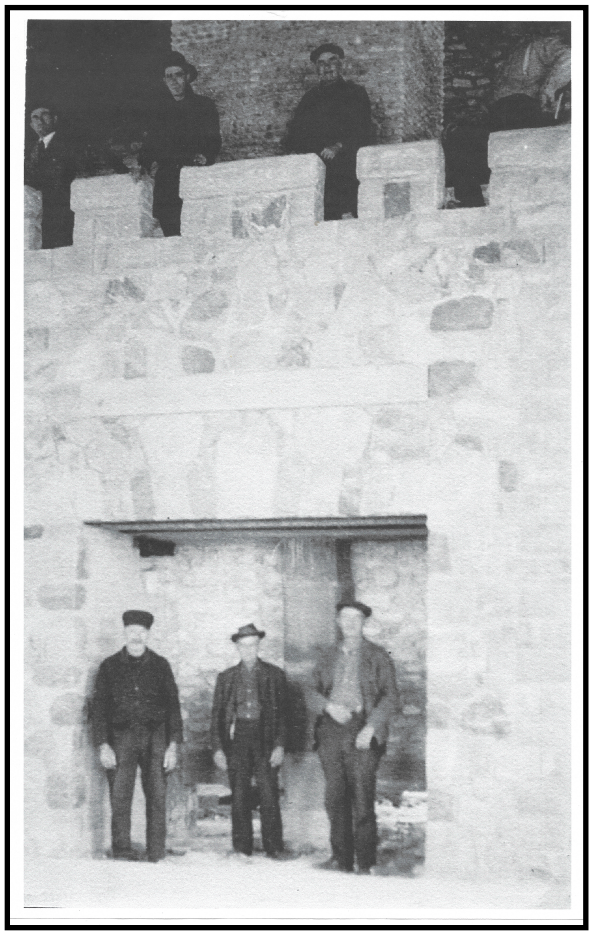


Southeast on shore corner

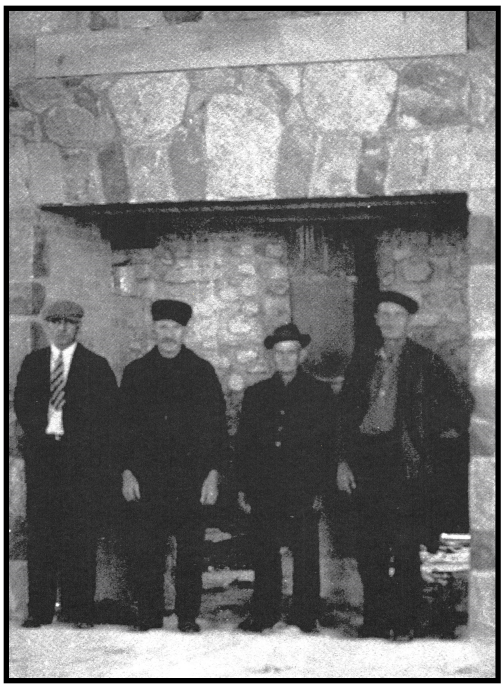


Dock and lake entry to boathouse





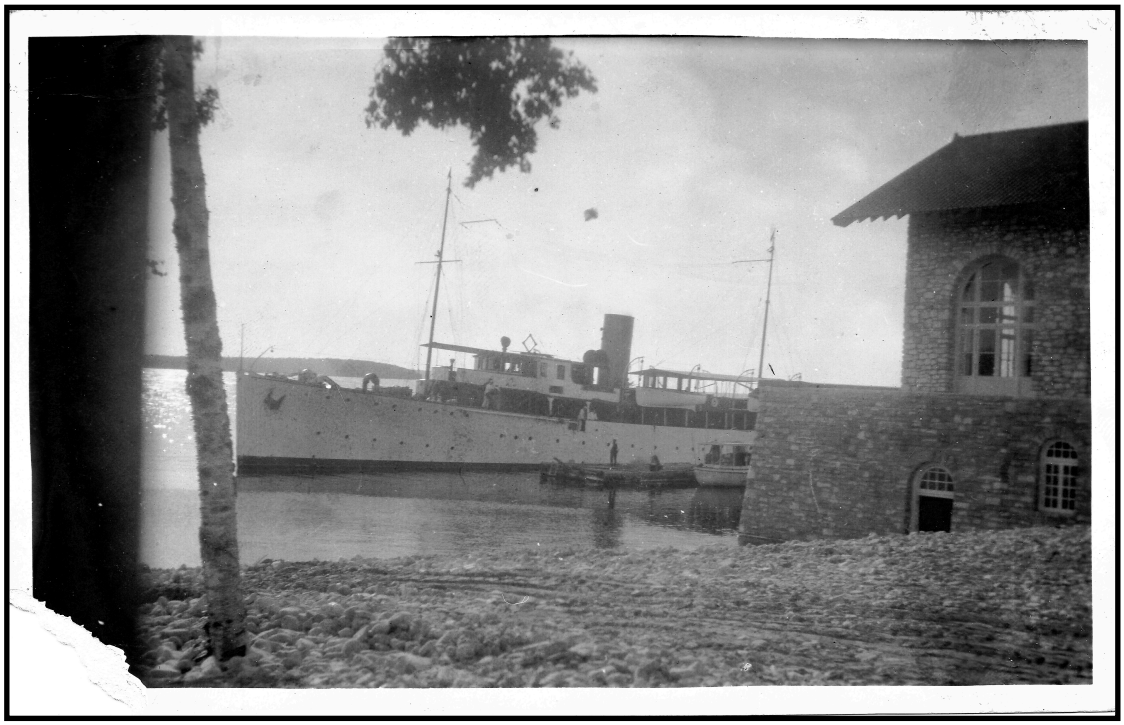
Interior stonework, wood arches, and fireplace for four. There's a balcony above and behind the fireplace.





Thordarson's Rock Island wood frame home. It was destroyed with all of the other wood structures when the State purchased the property in 1965 feeling wood structures would be too expensive to maintain.





Visiting yacht docked at the boathouse
Chicago's Mayor, 'Big' Bill Thomas was a frequent guest



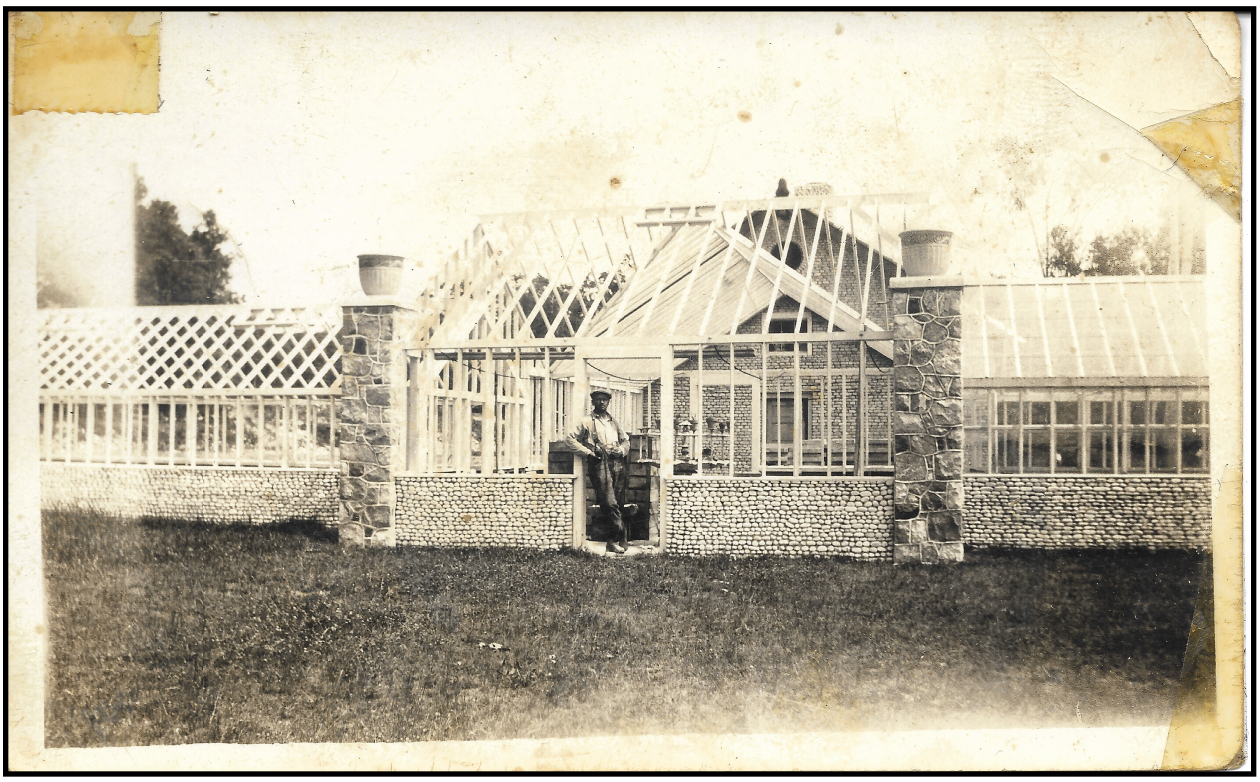
Work crew and machinery



Auxiliary buildings and gateway



Greenhouse complex





The Greenhouse

The green house with the best in research technology made it possible to experiment with plant life year round. The grounds at Thordarson's Rock Island retreat included stone fences and gates in its landscaping, many still remain. With plenty of rocks available there were numerous rock gardens.

Experiments were conducted on decorative plans, vegetables and fruits.





Thordarson's stone structures built during the 1920s are his most lasting legacy in Door County. Many think the estate was an attempt to recreate a part of his Icelandic home. A water tower *(on the east side of the island)*, guesthouse, reservoir, greenhouse building, pantry, and pavilion (also known as the pagoda) were built using dolomite limestone quarried or collected from Rock Island.

The casino, said to have been modeled after the Althing, Iceland's parliament building, commands visitors' attention. More commonly referred to as the boathouse, also the great hall, assembly hall, or Viking hall. Frederick P. Dinkelberg, a Chicago architect, designed this impressive structure in 1926. According to Helga Thordarson Charest, the millionaire inventor's daughter- in-law, his private name for this immense boathouse was "The Jewel House of Art and Nature." Charest, who spent thirty-eight summers on Rock Island, explained, "The name only applied to the upper level. That's where he kept his collection of rare books."

Thordarson and Dinkelberg created an architectural wonder combining beauty and strength. Stonemasons put a lot of time and toil into this beautiful, sturdy monolith anchored to the bedrock 7 feet below the surface of Lake Michigan. Two of those skilled craftsmen were Peter Urdahl and his brother from Sturgeon Bay. Although the brothers had never built a base in deep water, they were experienced stone workers and confident they could do the job. Thordarson sought the help of other notable Door County stonemasons, **including John Buechner of Egg Harbor Township.**

A newspaper clipping reported: “Twenty men are employed in building a $40,000 boat house for C.H. Thordarson on his Rock Island estate.
Thordarson died in 1945 at the age of 78. Rock Island remain-ed under the ownership of his heirs until 1964, when the island was sold to the state of Wisconsin for $175,000.

(From Chester Thordarson's Rock Island by Tim Sweet)

Rock Island's
Chester H. Thordarson

Born - May 12, 1867 - in Iceland
Died - January 6, 1945 (age 78)
Burial place - Rock Island, Wisconsin
Education - dropped out of 7th grade at age 20
Career - Electrical engineer
Projects - Alternating current: high-voltage, high frequency power experiments, transformer design, transformer manufacturing
Significant design - Power grid

Thordarson immigrated to the United States from Iceland in 1873 with his parents Gudrun Grimsdotter and Thordur Arnason. In 1887, Thordarson took a job in Chicago, Illinois working for Chicago Edison Co. In 1895, he founded the Thordarson Electric Manufacturing Company, a manufacturing company in Chicago that produced industrial and commercial transformers.

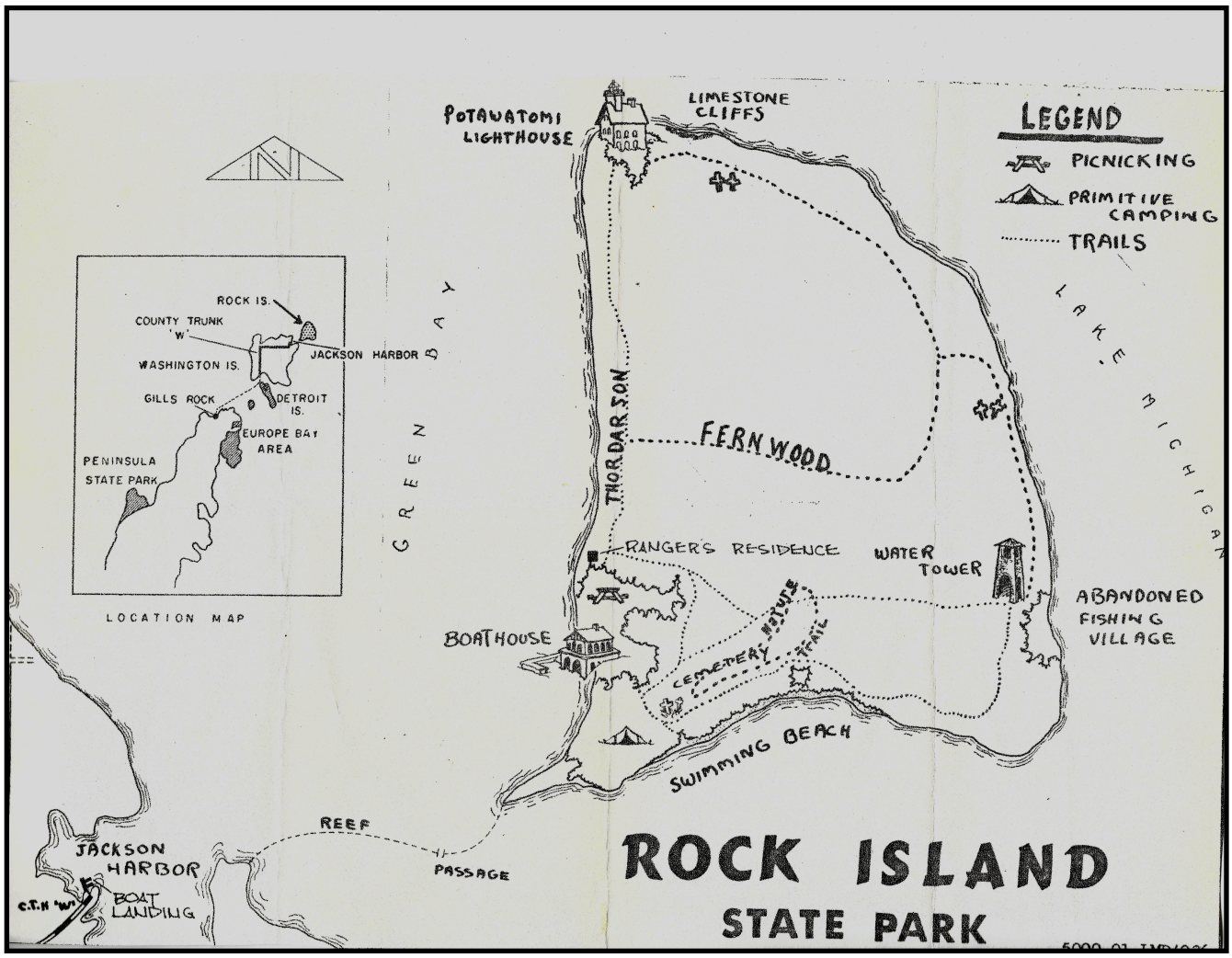
He was instrumental in the development of the modern energy transmission grid with his work in transformers. He achieved his first distinction at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis, where for the Purdue University exhibit he designed and built the first million-volt transformer. For his efforts he won the fair's gold medal.

Rock Island

In 1910, Thordarson began purchasing property on Rock Island, an island off the tip Wisconsin's Door Peninsula. Thordarson established a private vacation retreat on Rock Island. He was intensely interested in preserving the island’s natural beauty. In 1965 the state of Wisconsin purchased Rock Island from his heirs. Thordarson's former estate has been designated

Rock Island State Park. His buildings, including the water tower, were added to the National Register of Historic Places as the Thordarson Estate Historic District during 1985. *(Wikipedia)*

Thordarson's Rock Island has been a State Park since 1965 with the remaining stone buildings, fences, etc. available for the public to enjoy. There is no transportation on the island, walking trails only. The restored Potawatomi Lighthouse is located on the far side of the island and is open



for touring. It was the first lighthouse built on Lake Michigan (1836). Access to the island can be had by passenger ferry from Jackson Harbor on Washington Island.