

THE HISTORY OF ARBOR VITAE - WOODRUFF

The towns of Arbor Vitae and Woodruff are considered the, "Crossroads of the North" where Highways 51, 47 and 70 join. Both towns boast a rich logging history. Primitive, roughly constructed dams were built in the mid 1800s to back up water levels on area chains of lakes to form waterways for the conveyance of timber. The Lumberjack era provided colorful history!

Late fall brought the "jacks" to the lumber camps ready for hard work and the constant companionship of fellow lumberjacks. During the fall and cold winter, the jacks had little or no other social interaction. The lumberjack's day began at day break when he heard the call "daylight in the swamp", and knew it was time to rise. The gabriel (dinner horn) blared at 6:00 a.m. announcing breakfast. At once, the jacks raced to the cook shack where they took the same place at the same table every day. As it was considered a waste of time to talk during meals, every meal was quietly devoured. Chewing food was also discouraged, another time consuming activity, so lumberjacks learned to bolt their food rather than chew it. The lumberjacks put in thirteen hour days and earned from \$18.00-\$30.00 per month. During spring when the rivers thawed and the logs were harvested, the lumberjacks left the camps and headed for town. These were truly "party animals." Singing and dancing were other well-loved pastimes of the men and little could stop them from pursuing their fun. When the bar halls lacked enough women for partners, the lumberjacks simply danced with each other.

In 1953 sixteen children in a mathematics class were responsible for the monumental biggest penny in the world. This replica of a 1953 Lincoln penny (made of concrete) is ten feet in diameter, eighteen inches thick and weighs in at 17,452 pounds; it stands on the grounds of the Arbor Vitae-Woodruff School and symbolizes one million, seven hundred thousand pennies. Seventeen thousand dollars wasn't kids stuff in 1953. That is the net contribution collected by the first Million Penny Parade for the building fund of the Lakeland Memorial Hospital. The hospital, located in Woodruff, near the junction with State Highways 47 and 51 was named "Doctor Kate's Hospital." Dr. Kate Newcomb was available summer or winter, sunshine or storm, by auto or on SNOWSHOES. Dr. Kate served everyone, alike. Her pay might have been a check on a city bank or a beaded buckskin garment, a load of cordwood or a sack of potatoes, but she soon had a storehouse full of those treasures. As more and more people frequented the Northwoods, Dr. Kate's expanding practice demanded more use of hospital care. It was this need that demanded the above mentioned hospital.

Woodruff celebrated its Centennial in 1988 and Arbor Vitae celebrated in 1992. Both towns are part of the Northwoods known as the Lakeland Area of Vilas and Oneida Counties. The areas are considered to have one of the largest concentrations of fresh water bodies in the world. Abandoned railroad right-of-ways and many logging roads provide an extensive trail system now used for recreational purposes such as snowmobiling in the winter and hiking and biking during the spring, summer and fall. Approximately 95 percent of the land known as the Town of Woodruff and 82 percent of Arbor Vitae is owned by Federal, State and County interests and is not available for private sale ensuring an enviable recreational environment for all future generations. The natural resources of the area are managed by the Department of Natural Resources for the benefit of public and private enterprise. A significant attraction is the Art Oehmcke State Fish Hatchery in Woodruff -- one of the only hatcheries still operating in Wisconsin responsible for raising muskellunge, walleye and northern pike and restocking lakes throughout the state. The hatchery celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2001!

A wide variety of accommodations -- resorts, cottages, private homes, hotel/motels, bed & breakfasts and campgrounds -- are available, as well as attractions including wildlife parks, dinner cruises, live theatre, and antique shops. Unique shopping, many fine restaurants, golf courses and endless outdoor recreational opportunities offer four season fun in the Northwoods. Woodruff's year-round population is around 1,750, while Arbor Vitae is home to about 2,850 year-round residents -- jumping to many more thousands during the peak summer months.