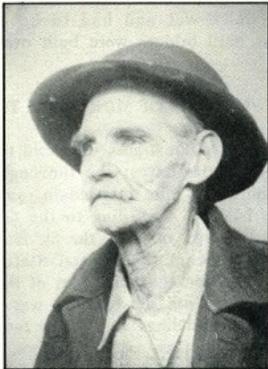


How Minocqua Got its Name

by Fred (Fritz) Hennig

The C. M. & St. P. Railroad, like most other early railroad ventures, acquired land grants wherever rail lines were built. Spurs were often built off main lines. Railroads also made money by plotting out town sites and encouraging settlers (read: future customers) to move into these areas served by the railroad. Under these circumstances, Minocqua was born.

Stiles W. "Cap" Ray, my maternal grandfather, wrote to the Minocqua Times in 1929 stating that on the first day of May of 1887, he and A.D. Schulenburg landed on the island of what is now Minocqua and met the Ojibwes living there. Cap stated that, "I afterward became well acquainted with their Chief, whose name was Nacwib, but who was later spoken of by whites as "Chief Minocqua".



"Cap" Ray, circa 1935

Below is an excerpt from Cap's "Early Days of Minocqua – A Statement of Fact," that was printed in the Lakeland Times in the late 1940s.

"The Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul railroad tracks reached the island in early December of 1887, somewhere around the time the surveyors came to plat the town. The surveyors completed their task in late January 1888 and the first postmaster was appointed a month later, in February."

Cap continues: *"I was in the depot [a modified caboose] when the town was selected for a post office. Several were there, discussing a name. One of these was Francis Speas, a missionary among the Indians. He knew the Indian language, had it written and published in book form. He said "no-qua" means "woman". There was some talk and they agreed on "Minocqua"..."*

It has also been written that the name of the village meant "bad woman", "fair maiden" or "good woman". But why was Chief Nacwib also known as Chief Minocqua? Well, since he was the village Chief, he presented himself to whites as the Chief of Minocqua. This is a slight misunderstanding. Minocqua was the name of the village.

Gus Nolan came to Minocqua in May 1887 as a government surveyor and again in December 1887 with the townsite survey crew. He insisted the name of the village was Nin-Oco-Qua, meaning "noon-day" or "mid-day", because it was halfway between the Wisconsin and Flambeau rivers. I researched the Ojibwe language via numerous interpreters and, after tracing the network of trails, portages and water routes, Nolan's theory does not, shall we say, hold water.

Only since the late 1800s has Ojibwe been written. When querying several experts in the language, these definitions were offered:

- min-i-qua to drink or she drinks
- min-o-qua good woman
- maan-o-qua bad woman
- naa-wi-qua mid-day or noon
- min-o-naa-qua good afternoon

Most agree that Minocqua means “good woman”, which was accepted by the State of Wisconsin Historical Society in 1939. However, some folks still believe otherwise. Minocqua Clawson was the first white woman born in town. Certainly she could be nothing but good.

Perhaps Cap Ray summed it up best: *“Finally the group agreed to call the place Minocqua, which means some kind of woman anyway.”*

