

# West Baraboo (Formerly Lyons)

Volume VI "*BARABOO Wisconsin...1850-2010*" is in process as of this writing and is a continuation of Volumes I through V and when available will very likely contain more details you may be searching for.

## About the Founding of Lyons (West Baraboo)

**Village of Lyons**  
from  
**History of Sauk County Wisconsin**  
Printed in 1880 by the  
**Western Historical Company of Chicago**

The first village plat made of any part of the Baraboo Valley was that of Lyons, located just west of Baraboo. It was recorded in April of 1846, and it was confidently believed by those interested that this spot was especially designed by nature for the future metropolis of Sauk County. James Webster built a hotel here in 1843, having become a resident the year previous. Mr. Webster died in 1853. Alexander Crawford came in 1844, and erected a house near Webster's. He also kept a hotel, and accommodated travelers and new-comers; Mr., Crawford departed this life in 1870. Thomas Morehead came in 1850. In this year a school was established in Lyons, which is now [year 1880] School District No. 6. Diligent search and inquiry have failed to unearth the early records of the institution of learning. George Holah, one of the school officers, has furnished documents showing the names of those who have taught school in the district from 1867 to 1876, as follows: Francis Avery, L. M. Park, Delia Odell, Samuel F. Beede, Hannah Holah, Lina A. Flanders, Belle M. Flanders, J. M. Savage, Mrs. A. B. Savage, Mary Perigo, Jennie Dodd, Robert B. Crandall, William Barker, Prof. J. S. Kimball, Bertie Van Sice, Belle Remington, Emma J. Jones, F. T. Twist, G. A. Pabodie, W. B. Sprague, R. DeT. Evans, George A. Gross, Nellie Bacon, and R. R. Remington, Jr.

Mr. Holah came to Lyons in 1856; J. P. Atwood, Robert Lot, and J. W. Aldrich date their settlement early in the fifties. Lyons succumbed to the inevitable, and gave way to the more rapid growth of Baraboo, of which it is now a lively suburb. It is Baraboo what Brooklyn is to New York, and, occupying this position, it must be a consolation to its citizens to know that their village may someday receive the surplus population of Baraboo. The location is

all that could be asked. With the more thorough improvement of its water-power privileges will doubtless come additional population, and with the latter -- well, Lyons, as one of the Wards of Baraboo, would be in a position "not to be sneezed at."

As was stated by Dayl Sorg in his comments at the award ceremony of the Distinguished Service Award to Max Hill Jr.:

"The original plat of the village as surveyed by Harvey Canfield, provided for a square that was to be the site of the Sauk County courthouse. Clinton Square, which Canfield named after Governor DeWitt Clinton of New York...as Canfield named Lyons for his home town of Lyons, New York...Clinton Square, which for many years was a commons in the center of Lyons where cattle grazed... Clinton Square is now the site of West Baraboo's Village Hall, built and dedicated during the village's twenty-fifth year of incorporation. When incorporated by the State of Wisconsin as the Village of West Baraboo, in 1956, the population was about 600 and the village income was \$15,000."



### **West Baraboo Village Hall named after Dayl Sorg**

Community leader Dayl Sorg was honored on Saturday, September 13, 1997 when co-workers, friends and area residents gathered to rededicate the West Baraboo municipal building. The 500 Cedar Street building was renamed the Dayl E. Sorg Memorial Village Hall. Sorg served on the village board of trustees between 1959 and 1973, was village president for seven years and worked hard to develop many of the shopping area and sub-divisions along U. S. Highway 12. Sorg died suddenly in May of 1997 at the age of 71. Speakers included State Senator, Dale Schultz, village attorney, Guy Reynolds, Don Pierce of Pierce's Pick 'n Save, Don Kalscheur of MSA and Dayl's son, Jeff Sorg. Jeff and his mother Carol Sorg announced they were funding an addition to the shelter at Haskin's park, an idea that Dayl had before his untimely death in May.

Sorg operated the A & W Root Beer Stand in the village for more than 20 years.

## **Ben Rotzoll's Wrecker Service**

by  
Brenda Rotzoll

In the years from the Great Depression to 1972 the common reaction of many drivers whose cars or trucks broke down or crashed anywhere near Baraboo was “Call Rotzoll.”

Ben Rotzoll and his big green wrecker could rescue anything that crashed off the road, be it a car, or a semi trailer illegally (for those days) loaded with 50 tons of steel.

He could lift overhead signs onto poles or buildings, help the telephone company remove and replace dozens of miles of poles, right an overturned truck loaded with hot tar, or fish trucks and cars out of lakes and rivers.

When the U.S. 14 bridge at Spring Green collapsed in 1948, dumping cars and a truckload of live chickens into the Wisconsin River, they called Rotzoll. Daddy and Mother and I were eating lunch at the kitchen table when the call came from the highway police. Daddy dashed out of the house, drove the mile to his garage in West Baraboo and put the special high boom on the wrecker. In 30 minutes from the time he pulled out of the garage he was backing onto the remains of the bridge, lowering a cable into the river, with his nephew and only full-time employee, Fred “Shorty” Smith, riding the hook down to check out the situation.

That was a drive of sheer terror in the days when Wisconsin 60 from Sauk City to Spring Green was a mass of snake-like curves, many of them safe only at 25 miles an hour. But there were people in the water, people in trouble. My father rammed the wrecker down the middle of the highway and miraculously had no trouble with oncoming traffic. I’ve always felt God cleared the road.

George Benjamin Rotzoll was born in 1899 on a 40-acre farm two miles east of Lime Ridge in the hills of western Sauk County. The youngest of six children, the family hoped he would be the first one able to attend high school. But when the time came,

his father’s asthma was so bad that young Ben had to stay home on the farm.

In 1918 he was drafted into the Army to serve in World War I. Two days after he reached the training base at Milwaukee the war ended. He and the other new recruits were put back on trains and sent home.

Things were a little better on the farm so he moved to Albert Lea, Minnesota, to stay with his older sister, Emma, and work in a factory as a steam fitter. Soon he contracted typhoid fever. When he was able to ride a train he went home where his loving mother nearly did him in by trying to get him to eat solid foods before his stressed-out digestive tract could cope with them. The county nurse had a terrible time with Grandma.

He was weak and walking with a cane when he took the train to Baraboo to stay with his brother Al. He got a job at the old woolen mill but the lint in the air forced him out after three weeks. He worked part-time for his brother in Al’s Garage in West Baraboo, then called Lyons. Eventually he got on the “extra board” of the Chicago & North Western Railway, which had a large depot and freight yard in Baraboo at the time. That meant he could get called for part-time work when full-time men weren’t available. Eventually he worked up to full time, but also worked for his brother.

In 1924 he got a call one rainy Sunday to help a young woman whose Model A Ford wouldn’t start. He took one look at tall, slim Inez Warner and was bowled over. I think it was the boots that did it. In those days of ugly black gumboots she was wearing the unheard of -- *white* rubber boots. It took four years of courting, but in 1928 they married. He was then a Graham auto dealer building his own garage, and in early 1929 took his young wife with him to the international Graham dealers convention in Detroit.

Some of the European dealers there were wealthy noblemen. Daddy always boasted that Mother was perfectly at home among their elegant wives. Of course she was. She dressed with a sense of fashion, had beautiful manners, and was interested in everything.

## Lyons (West Baraboo) Ben Rotzoll's Wrecker Service

Al Rotzoll's garage was on the north side of 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue (also Wis. 33), just about where the Subway restaurant is now. In those days U.S. 12 ran through downtown Baraboo, turned west onto 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, then jogged north at what today is Connie Lane. My father built his garage on the south side of that jog, a great business location. When the bridge over the Baraboo River was built in the 1930s, Highway 12 ran over the Sauk Hill and across that bridge, passing four blocks west of the Rotzoll garage. It was still a handy location for roaring to the rescue.

He built the garage himself, helping lay up the concrete blocks shaped to look like cut stone. The window in the office was a big bow-shaped glass that had been a mirror in a fun house on the Ringling Circus midway before it started losing its mercury backing. In the early 1930s he proudly installed that relatively new invention, the pneumatic hoist, so that he didn't have to wriggle under cars on his back to fix their underpinnings.

About that time he decided to quit the railroad and work full time for himself. He could see that promotion from brakeman was unlikely for years, and that much freight traffic was moving from the rails to the highways.

Besides selling Grahams and later Packards, and repairing cars and trucks of any make, he was running a wrecker service.

The first wrecker was red. I barely remember it. About the middle of World War II he was called to pull a car out of the river, where it had plunged in just east of the Broadway bridge. Struggling to get the cars out, the wrecker went into the river, too.

Then he built the wrecker everyone remembers, the big green one. Little was available during wartime. He got an old Reo truck, stripped it to a flatbed back with his cutting torch, welded on a boom – and couldn't find a powerful winch or a big truck motor. He bought a small winch in Madison and mounted that. And he found a Chrysler industrial engine which had no gearing. He had Schilling's Machine Shop on Camp Street built him two sets of gears and installed them.

One set worked with standard floorboard shift, for normal driving (or racing way above the speed limit to big wrecks). The other was operated by a set of three metal levers that curved up from the floorboard like set of pitchfork tines. Pull one and you had a 50-to-1 gear ratio. The next was 200-to-1, and would handle most problems. For the huge loads, there was a 400-to-1 gear.

Daddy would get the wreck lined up and held tight with the winch. Then he'd get in the cab of the wrecker, drop into one of the lowest gears, and let the power of the engine start to pull to wreck slowly out of a ditch or field or river. He would jump out of the wrecker and stand in the road, watching, ready to make minute adjustments if anything wasn't coming straight. The wrecker would move down the road by itself at a slow walking pace. It was a sight that stunned highway cops working with him for the first time.

Most of the calls to deal with wrecks came from the county highway police – now morphed into the sheriff's department. There were several wreckers in town and the dispatcher would rotate calls to keep things fair. But sometimes for a big wreck or a really bad one tying up traffic, the cop at the scene would demand that Rotzoll be called. One night in that pre-cell phone era a dispatcher was balking. The furious cop told him to "Call Rotzoll right now or I'll drive back to town and call him myself."

I could hear many of those calls. My bed in our tiny house wasn't far from the telephone around the corner in the living room, and often I'd hear the dispatcher as well as my father.

When there was a life-threatening crisis Daddy wasted no time. He would yank his work pants on over his pajamas, stick his bare feet into his unlaced shoes, and the door would slam behind him as he ran for the car.

In the days before the Interstate highway system, U.S. 12 from Chicago to Minneapolis was the busiest stretch of truck traffic in the nation. My father was very proud that four of the biggest trucking companies based in the Twin Cities had notes on their dispatchers' boards saying that if their trucks had trouble anywhere within 100 miles of Baraboo, "Call Rotzoll."

He was called many a time to wrecks on the Sauk Hill, or as far away as the Springfield Hill in Dane County on U.S. 12 when it was a terror and not the flattened-out nothing it is today.

Not only could he handle a wreck of any size, if a semi was loaded with goods that had to be kept moving, he's organize a crew to shift the merchandise to another semi. He often was able to hire off-duty policemen, whose paychecks weren't all that huge.

During World War II he hired more staff and kept the garage open 24 hours a day, keeping cars going for the thousands of people at the Badger Ordnance Works at the foot of the Sauk Hill. People were coming from as far as a hundred miles away each day, new cars were unheard of, and parts hard to find. He was always cannibalizing wrecks in the local junkyards.

After the war it was back to just Daddy and Fred Smith. Daddy's normal work hours were 8 a.m. to almost 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday, then back to the garage for a couple of hours after supper. He was on call 24 hours a day, and there were lots of middle-of-the night calls.

How he kept going with his terrible asthma is a mystery to me. He actually had to stop work for a few months in late 1960 and early 1961 because of it. He'd sit up at night, coughing, wheezing and reading the newspaper. Ed Berkley, the Chevrolet-Cadillac dealer who lived directly across the street, was up at those hours, too. He finally paid to send Daddy to a specialist in Madison. A short time later it was back to Madison by ambulance as Daddy struggled for breath.

I was in my senior year at the University of Wisconsin. My Aunt Mildred had sent me \$5 for my birthday and I celebrated by going downtown to a movie. It had barely begun when the theater manager paged me. I knew what the trouble had to be. I returned to the lobby, saw a policeman, walked up to him, and demanded, "Is my father dead or in the hospital?" The poor cop was a lot more shaken than I was.

Doctors literally cut a hole in the bone behind his nose so that he could breathe even when troubled, as he often was, with polyps. When I went to the hospital to see him, he was smiling with

delight. Not only was he breathing much better. For the first time in 40 years, since that typhoid fever, he had a sense of smell.

The first of the medications for asthma came along about then. He was able to keep going, working full time, until he died in bed of a heart attack in May of 1972.

## Lyons (West Baraboo).....Hill and Rotzoll Buildings



"Web" Berkley Tire and Radiator Shop in the 40's and 50's, Mike's Radiator Shop in the 60's and 70's. Hill's had building razed in 1980 and built the present Subway Sandwich Shop building. May have been Al Rotzoll's Building early on.

DuBois & Sons built the building on the right for a truck repair shop adjacent to original West Baraboo Machine and Supply Co. building. Hill's moved the building to present location (2011) behind rear of present office in 1970's. Area became a parking lot.



## About the Founding of Lyons (West Baraboo)

FR. CAL 4/95

MAX F. HILL + ORA RICH  
PARTNERSHIP 1/1/16

THIS AGREEMENT OF CO-PARTNERSHIP entered into the day of January, 1916, by and between Ora Rich and Max F. Hill, Ora Rich hereinafter known as the party of the first part and Max F. Hill, hereinafter known as the party of the second part, both of Baraboo, Sauk County, Wisconsin.

WHEREAS, Ora Rich is the owner of the business known as "The West Baraboo Machine and Supply Company" and being desirous of forming a co-partnership for the conduct of such business with the said Max F. Hill,

NOW, THEN, in consideration of the sum of Six Hundred and Fifty Dollars (\$650.00) receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, the said first party does sell, assign and convey unto said second party a one-half interest in and to the good will, tools, stock and trade of such business, the said Max F. Hill hereby becoming a co-partner.

IT IS FURTHER AGREED, that each of said parties shall share the profits and expense of said business equally, except that Max F. Hill is to receive as wages, only 75% of whatever sum the said Ora Rich receives as wages.

That the property covered by this agreement is described in an inventory attached hereto and made a part of this agreement.

Each of the parties may draw from the cash of the co-partnership, the following sums, to-wit: Ora Rich, the sum of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ weekly; Max F. Hill, the sum of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ weekly to each his own use; the same to be charged on account and neither of them should take any further sum for his own separate use without the consent of the other in writing.

IT IS FURTHER AGREED, that in case of the death of either co-partner, or either one desiring the dissolution of said co-partnership, either party, in case of a dissolution, or the surviving party and the personal representative, executor or administrator of the deceased co-partner may make in writing

### Max F. Hill & Ora Rich Partnership Jan 1, 1916

an offer to the other party, of the price at which he will buy the interest of the other or sell to the other his own interest and such other party shall, thereupon, within thirty days signify his election -- whether he will buy or sell at the price; or, each of the parties or either party may select one person and the two persons so selected may select a third person, who shall inventory the property of the co-partnership, appraise the same and the parties hereto must either sell or buy at their figures, or consent that the property be sold at public or private sale by the three appraisers within thirty days after their failure to agree.

THIS CONSIDERATION shall be binding upon the parties, their personal representatives, executors or administrators.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, each party has hereunto set his hand and affixed his seal this the 1st day of January, 1916.

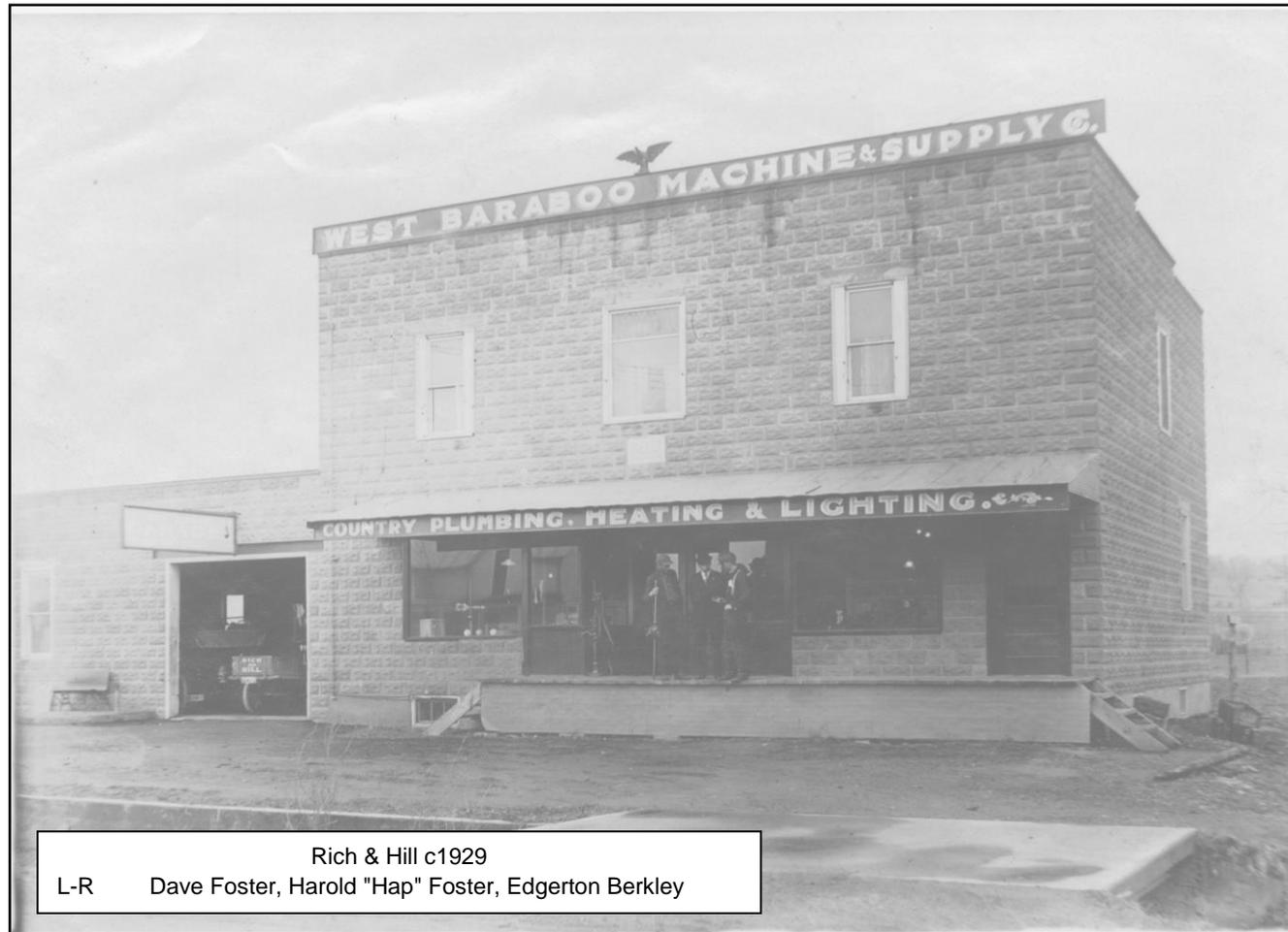
Signed, Sealed and Delivered  
in the presence of:

Bert Bentley  
January 14 1916

Ora Rich (SEAL)

Max F Hill (SEAL)

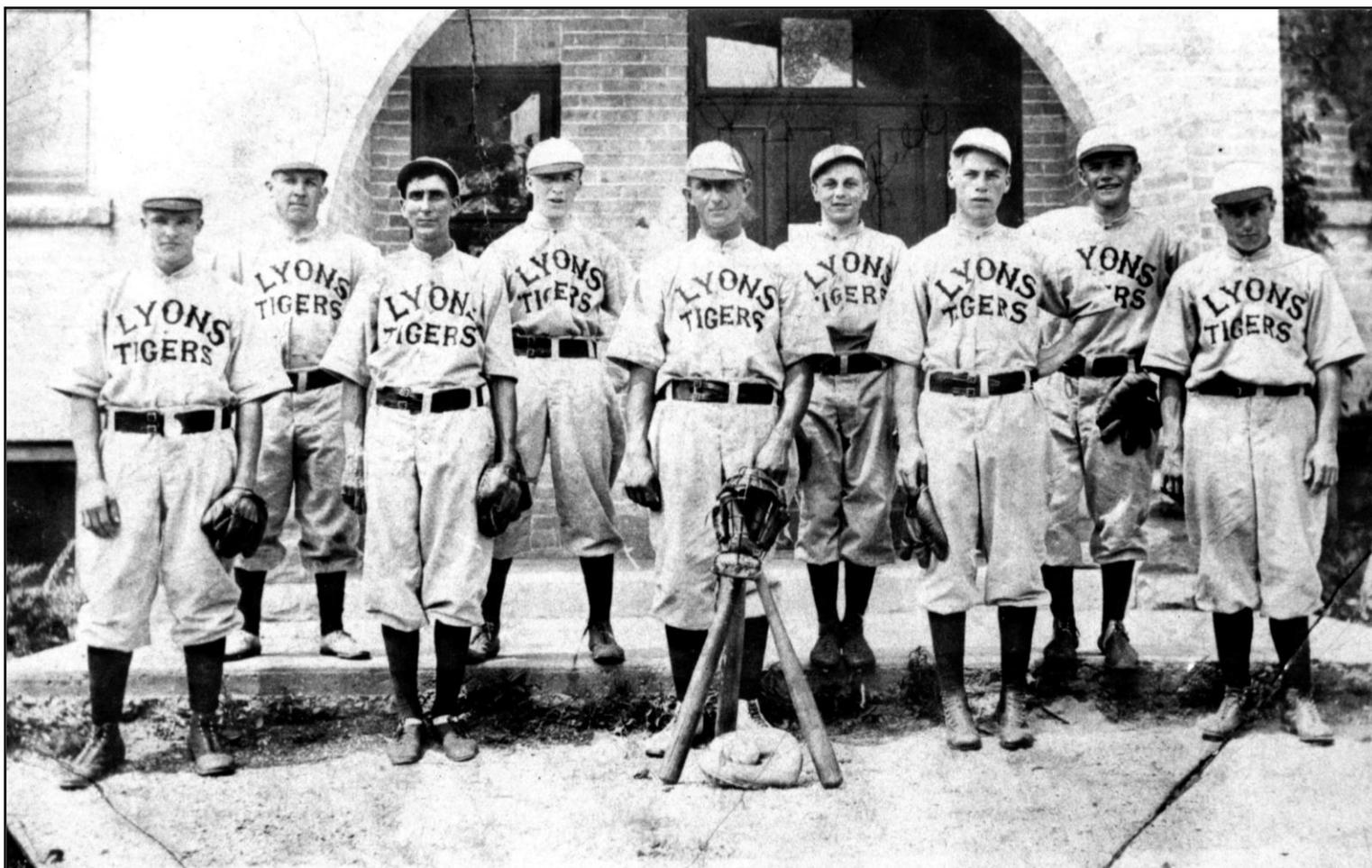
## West Baraboo Machine & Supply



Rich & Hill c1929  
L-R Dave Foster, Harold "Hap" Foster, Edgerton Berkley

West Baraboo Machine Supply  
Country Plumbing, Heating & Lighting

## Lyons' Tigers Ball Team



L-R: Hank Smith, (Robert Hansch or Pat Newsom), Newt Moorehead, Eddie Fitzgerald, (Jay or Guy) Ferrell or Farwell, Bill Berkley, Max Hill Sr., Bill Hattle, John Howard

## Max Hill, Recipient of Distinguished Service Award by Dayl Sorg

Good evening!

11/5/41

When I learned Max was to be recipient of the Distinguished Service Award, my reaction was that he was an obvious choice as he is one with enough relatives to fill this room!

What I said in jest, proves to be fact.

In 1853, a Matthew Hill settled in the Town of Freedom. Matthew, his family, his brothers, sisters, had emigrated from Scotland. This clan created a community long known as Hill's Settlement. One of these settlers was James Hill. James was Max's grandfather. Other family members bore the names of Janet, William, Douglas. Names that are present in today's generation of Hill's.

By 1885, James Hill, his wife Emma, and their family, which eventually numbered eight, were living on thirty-five acres of land described as being 'between Baraboo and Lyons.' The homestead stands, today, behind Culver's restaurant on Eighth Avenue.

Max Hill, Senior, who I am certain, is remembered by many of you present, was one of the eight children of James Hill, and the father of our honoree. Thus, there have been Hill's in Lyons, now West Baraboo, for one-hundred-six years.

Edwardses, too. A daughter of James Hill married Ernest Edwards. Their son, Phil Edwards, cousin to Max...Phil being a man I also trust is well remembered by many present...it was Phil Edwards who promoted the idea that unincorporated Lyons become an incorporated village, an event that occurred in 1956.

Until 1956, however, Lyons had been Lyons for one-hundred-ten years. It was the first village platted in the Baraboo Valley, and was the site of the first tavern in the Valley. I don't know how important or influential the tavern site may have been, but the original plat of the village, as surveyed by Harvey Canfield, provided for a square that was to be the site of the courthouse for Sauk County. Somehow, this provision never worked out. Then. Now, with all the commotion and uncertainty attending the present day courthouse, perhaps Harvey Canfield's dream

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will yet be the destiny of West Baraboo.

Meanwhile, Clinton Square, which Canfield named for Governor DeWitt Clinton of New York...as Canfield named Lyons for his hometown of Lyons, New York...Clinton Square, which for many years was a commons in the center of Lyons where cattle grazed...Clinton Square is now the site of West Baraboo's Village Hall, built and dedicated during the Village's twenty-fifth year of incorporation. A year when Max Hill was serving his eighth year as president of the Village. 1981.

When incorporated as the Village of West Baraboo, in 1956, the population was about 600 and the annual village income was \$15,000. The subsequent growth and development of the village was enhanced and augmented by members of the Hill family who were ever a part of the positive changes necessary for that growth and development.

Max is the fifth president of the Village and has served nineteen years. During his tenure he has witnessed replacement of the mill bridge at Second Avenue, the building of the Village Hall, the establishment of Haskins Park, the phenomenal changes on Highway Twelve from north to the south limits of the Village, a population increase to the number of 1023, an increased annual Village income that reached more than \$356,000 in 1989. Today, the number of businesses in West Baraboo exceeds forty.

From 1885 forward, there has been a family of Hill in the Village, contributing time, labor, interest, concern, to aid the Village not only to survive, but to thrive. Probably the Village should've been named Hillville. Max and I even thought of Hilldayl...but we have a veterinarian in the Village whose professional office is Hilldale. In no way does this mean the Village is going to the dogs...not so long as popular Max presides as President.