

Shanagolden: Ghost town of the cutover

The great lumbering boom spawned many communities throughout northern Wisconsin. Indeed, there were few early communities in the region that did not have some connection to the lumbering boom. Nineteen lumbering communities have been identified in 12 of the 17 northern counties, many of them company towns. These communities were the locations of major lumbering operations — harvesting and sawing timber into dimensional lumber. Some of these communities were abandoned when lumbering operations ceased, becoming ghost towns.

Eight ghost lumbering towns are located in the 17-county region — Shanagolden and Morse in Ashland County, Knox Mills in Price County, Pestigo Harbor in Marinette County, Heineman and Parrish in Langlade County, Harrison in Lincoln County and Star Lake in Vilas County.

The history of Shanagolden is illustrative of that of other former lumbering communities turned ghost towns. In 1901 Thomas Nash and his sons, along with William Vilas, formed the Nash Lumber Company. The company constructed a sawmill on the east side of the East Fork of the Chippewa River in southern Ashland County. The Glidden and Southwestern Railroad tracks ran adjacent to the mill.

A small village grew up around the mill site, which the company named Shanagolden after a fishing village on the Shanon River in County Limerick in Ireland, the ancestral home of the Nash family. Between the river and First Avenue, to the west, were located a boarding house, store, horse barn and piles of logs. Lining the west side of First Avenue were residences and a community HALL, AND BEHIND THEM A STABLE AND OTHER RESIDENCES, AND A SCHOOL.

In June 1907 the sawmill at Shanagolden was destroyed by fire. When the fire occurred, the mill facilities consisted of eight buildings and 250 men were employed. The village population was 300 to 350. While the Nash Company improved some of its buildings after the fire, the company's operations gradually declined. In November 1907, all but a few employers were discharged. The Mellen Lumber Company took over the mill property, carrying on logging operations and constructing a shingle mill. Shanagolden was briefly revived, with a population of 200 in 1911, but in 1912 the company moved its offices, shops and warehouses to Glidden, and the employees living at Shanagolden moved there. Many houses were moved to Glidden and the post office closed, marking "the passing of a prosperous little village that sprang up like a mushroom a few years ago."

This is the final column by Lars Larson. He grew up in Washburn, graduating from high school with the class of 1947. He graduated from Superior State College in 1951, and after service in the Air Force, received advanced degrees from the University of Minnesota and Cornell University. He worked briefly in industry and government, but most of his career was devoted to university teaching and research. Larson retired from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and is a member of the Emeriti Faculty. He and his wife, Barbara, live in Whitewater.



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