

This Stream Meanders Through Something Red

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Illustrations by Eric Schiller

For Wisconsin, our home.

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Introduction

“This Stream Meanders Through Something Red” is the true name of this wonderful land that I’ve been lucky enough to call home my entire life. Evolution of the English version of the French version of the Miami version of the name for the Wisconsin River, the title alludes to the waters that carved the red sandstone cliffs of the Wisconsin Dells—waters on which I grew up and drew me to all corners of this state. I wrote this collection of poems dedicated to my home state with the intention of detailing what makes it so great. To do so, I partitioned the state by its 72 counties’ borders, a decision that demoted some dazzling communities into having to share a page in this book with another. I do believe, however, that I was still able to capture the essence of each county in the following 72 poems accompanied by original illustrations by my good friend and fellow lifelong Wisconsinite, Eric Schiller.

I grew up in Adams-Friendship, Wisconsin (coincidentally the first poem of this alphabetized collection) appreciating the rural Wisconsin lifestyle that carved me into the proud Wisconsinite I am today. My formative years were spent swimming in those meandering streams as well as the less meandering lakes and more deliberate rivers of south central Wisconsin and the greater state. I followed my wonder of water to the Mississippi River, studying between the bluffs at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse where I learned to love the variety of landscapes that the state had to offer, sending me to all corners of the state from La Crosse to Eau Claire to Green Bay to Eagle River to Milwaukee to Platteville to Stevens Point and to Madison where I now call my home. Even with all this travel I still missed a tremendous area of the state.

To make a footprint on more of the state that I love, I set out to tour the eastern—and until that point, foreign—coast of the state. I toured the historic downtown of Cedarburg, poured beer in Sheboygan, walked along the beaches of Manitowoc, and looped my way around Door County. However,

even with this deliberate effort to see all of my home state, the vastness of Wisconsin keeps full exploration of the state from my grasp.

In an attempt to alleviate this shortfall, I reached out to everyday folks who call home the places that I was unable to visit. I thank Ceili Shields, Carolyn Myers, Holly Bolig, April Unterberger, Jared Verber, Will Hewett, Zoe Simon, Kristen Olson, Quin Coleman, Brannon Zochart, Allie Hren, Patrick Malchetske, and the numerous other Wisconsinites who have blessed me with stories of their hometowns and gave me ample material to write about their home counties.

I strongly believe that Wisconsin is the best place in the world: with the best communities, the best history, the best food, the best beer, and the best people. I hope to convince you that I am correct with the following 72 poems. I hope to convince you to one day yourself meander throughout the entirety of the state to places you never thought you would: through something red.

Adams: Friendship

Just a mile and a half
Stretches between nowhere and nowhere.
But between,
All walks come together to share
Modest connections
And small-town charms
Between the soybean fields
And cattle farms.
Looking closely, there's a lively town
A print shop, some banks,
Baseball field, a church—
Congregations giving thanks

To the little they have in this ship of friends,
Neighbors, family, teammates, and kin

That have been locked up and bruised
Left in this place, seemingly alone.
Or they are doctors and lawyers
Who now all call home.

And you don't say goodbye to home.



Ashland: Up Nort

Crackling rocks beneath the tires
Skip in every direction across the narrow,
Rocky alley
That leads to the cracker box—
Tinted with mint shutters
And the gaudy red door
That opens to the always-too-hot living room
Where the kids
(Those 3-53 years old)
Wrestle and play
When the rain dances on the sheet metal roof
And lather on sunscreen
When rays skip off the lake
And test the shades resting on our noses
That nearly slip off
When we scoop bass from each cast
That will sit on our stomachs
And soothe us to sleep
In front of the only TV this place
Has ever called its own,
Flashing Scooby and Shaggy
For the hundredth time—
That, for the next 48 hours,
Will serve us well.



Barron: Void

A square county void—
Barren, if you will (but don't)—
Of all less than joy.



Bayfield: Superior

North toward the border
As stars streak 'top my head
And I approach the lonely coast...
Before me lies a black hole
That eats the shore and turns it into fish,
Algae, and other weedy sea things.
This Great Lake constantly chomps at the sand
With waves pushed and pulled by the Moon
Far overhead.

The paddle boat I stole slaps her surface
Pushing forward toward her eye.
Without her blinking
I sit here thinking
Shrinking smaller for a while
Under the galaxies and stars draping the sky
All the while being swallowed
By her darkness.

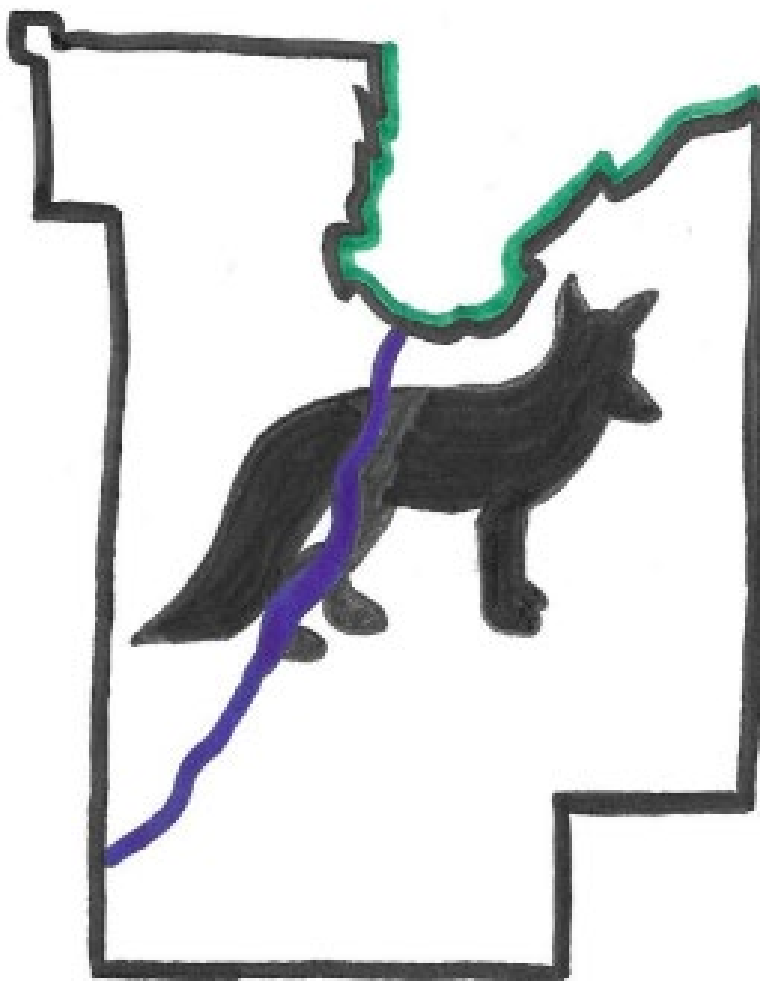
I awaken by the first breath of dawn
Kissing port, and I roll over
To catch the birth of life beneath my boat.
Birth turns to death
And the water to a mirror
As a I lean closer still to see
Who that is beneath
But find it's only me
Before my face kisses the blackened glass
And she takes another victim
Called to her by her beauty.



Brown: Misnomer

A misnomer, the name,
For this place is Green
(And Gold, to be sure),
Where blue jays soak in the sun
Pink skies drape the sunset
Red cardinals sing "Go Pack Go"
And yellow cheese sits atop my head.

But no brown.



Buffalo: The Angel Buck

The rickety stand,
Perched high in an oak,
Is surrounded by dewy leaves
Of the morning
Soaking my sleeves
Of the coat I lugged through the trees
That encase me
In a cocoon of silence.

Burning coffee scorches my throat.
Through muffled gags, a snap
Of what I hope
And see
Is a twig beneath a toe
Of a brown target
Through a window in the leaves.

The scope is slow to reach my eye
But the wait is worth to spy
On the angel buck
300 yards out.

The crosshairs frame this angel's halo,
Sunrise peeking through the tines.
The crosshairs frame this angel's heart,
Trigger and my nail align.

The forest's filled with echoes
Of waves escaping from my barrel
Following close behind the bullet
That kicks up colors up ahead.

No red, only the white
Of his rear end saying goodbye
To bless another with his sight.



Burnett: Below, Above, Before

Below,
 Brownd tires carry us across dirt roads
 Into the heart of Crex Meadows.
 The windows rolled tightly
 To prevent any more foreign dusts
 From pillaging my lungs.
 The cold-blowing A/C pierces the left side of my face
 When I'm looking at her
 And the right side of my face
 When I investigate the deepening meadows
 Paced before me.

Above,
 The clouds crinkle and clamor for my attention,
 Morphing into shapes that only I can see.
 Kingfishers and chickadees often obscure
 The blue canvas stretched taut against the Sky.
 My paintbrush eyes dart down only to find us
 Touching a creek with our balding tires.

Before
 Us sat the landing strip
 For pelicans-a-plenty.
 Eighty sea birds chose to touch down
 On this remote prairie creek
 In this northern, wooden, meek
 Corner of Wisconsin.
 For hours they sat resting,
 Waiting for the moment they'd use all their strength
 To take off from this unassuming bed
 The last of whom tears night from day
 Revealing nascent diamonds
 That speckle the Sky.

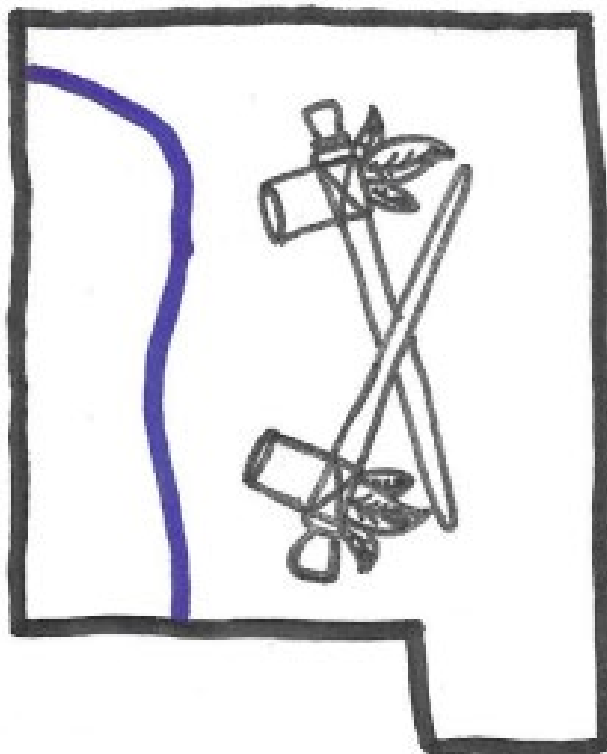


Calumet: High Cliff

Climbing higher up the High Cliffs
 Wind and waves whip at my back
 Finding footholds
 And handholds that
 Were carved from the rock
 By the Winnebago waves
 The Winnebago winds
 And the Winnebago rains

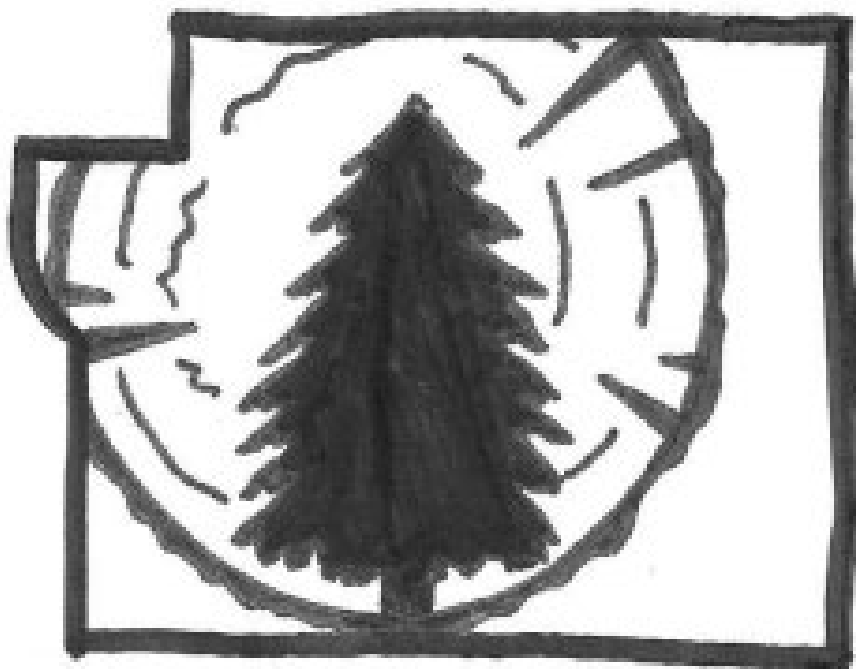
The cliff crumbles as I pull myself over
 The final hold the final ledge
 And I flip myself so my rear end
 Plops down on the edge
 Feet dangling above
 Hawks below me circling
 For field mice skittering this way
 And that. Hurdling
 Toward their demise
 A woodpecker thumps the beat
 Of my heart against a fallen log
 And a red tipped blackbird spots my feet

The rhythm grows and the blackbird sings
 My thoughts about the Winnebago
 Growing louder within me and without me
 Deafening. Until a broken twig says so
 Suddenly that a whitetail is nearby
 A doe. Still
 Flashing her eyes
 And minutes go by
 Before I raise my hand to wave
 And her not-before-seen fawns leap
 From their beds
 And hightail their whitetails from their heap
 Out of view and out of mind
 Only to be replaced by the Lake
 Full of the givings she's given me
 Thanking her for all she gives this place



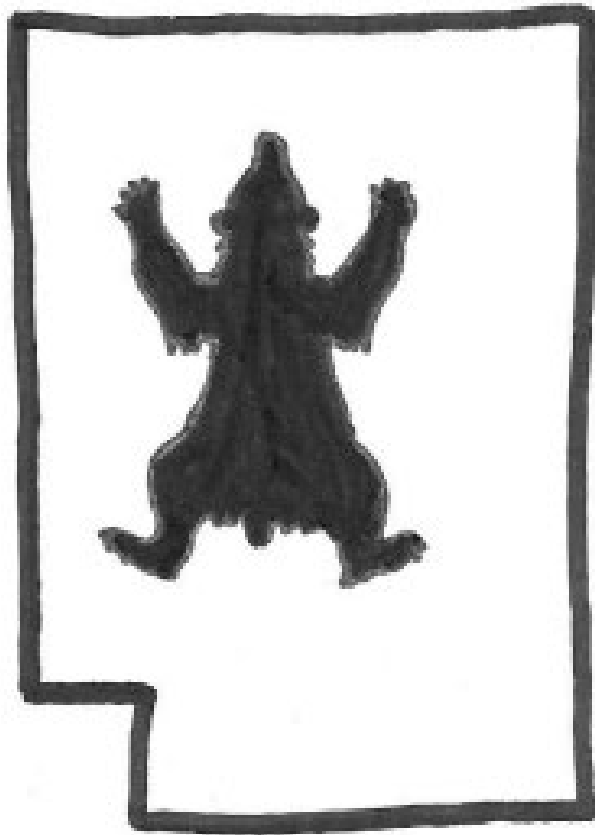
Chippewa: Chip-wuh To You

That's Chip-wuh
To you,
Who
Travelled from away:
All the way from Dunn,
Or Rusk...
Or Dane!
It won't matter you're not from 'round here
And travelled all alone.
'Cause "you're not from here"
Quickly turns to "welcome home".
Soon you become a local:
Pouring our voluminous beer
And eating our fried food.
So next time someone comes 'round here
Tell 'em "that's Chip-wuh to you"



Clark: Trapped

The otters want to make escape,
But I know I can't either.
For there's too many creeks
And too many lakes
That house coyotes and beavers.
This land has given for centuries
To the Dakota and Ho-Chunk people,
Menominee and Chippewa,
Amongst the Dutch and Swedish.
And to this day
I feel trapped
In adoration for my home here
That I made with furs now strapped
Around my waist. Proudly.

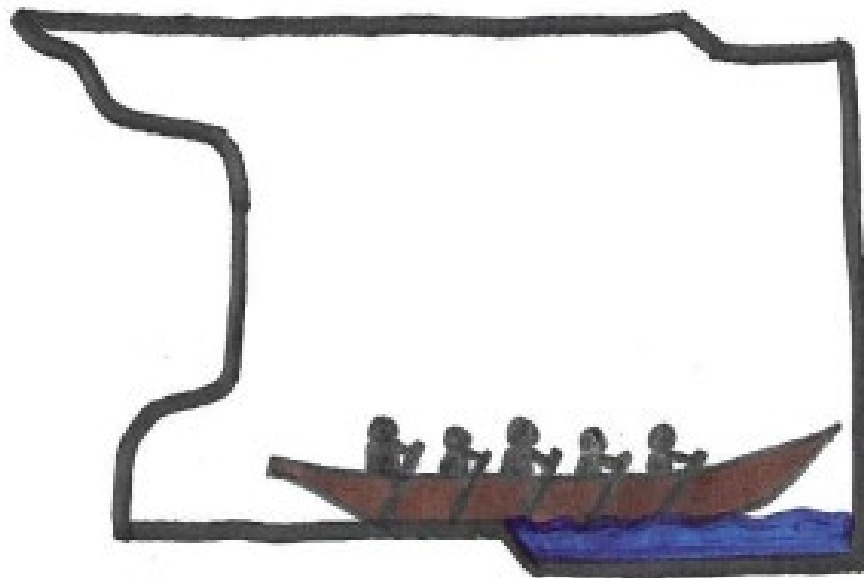


Columbia: A Strip Once Churning

Between these dells that weave
Through the upper left of my body
I feel the dying light
Of a star once burning,
A strip once churning
Full of life and the future.
Alleys and fudge shops that
Bowled and fed
The engorged among us

But now they sit starving

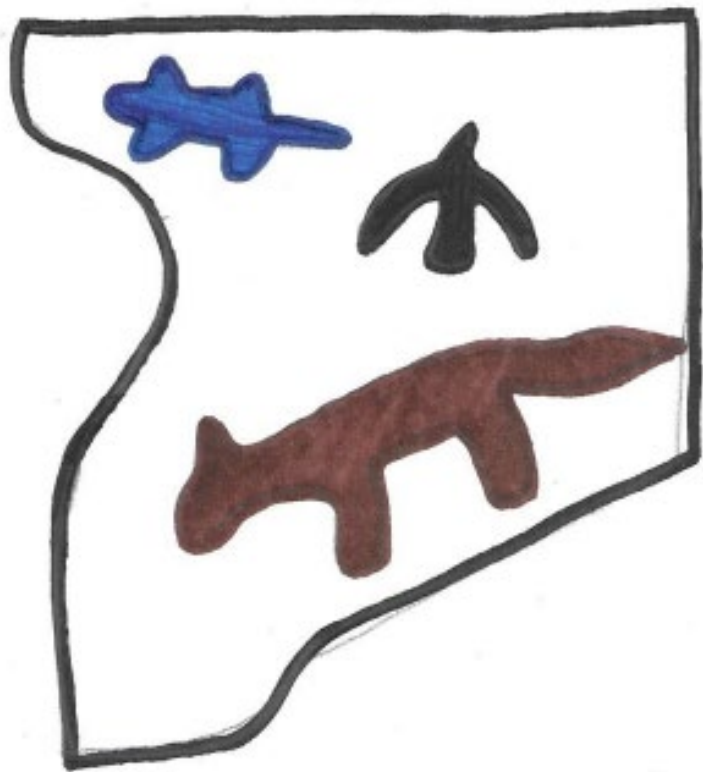
Beneath the Big Sky that once shown a star
But now only plays the closing credits.



Crawford: Praying for the Prairie

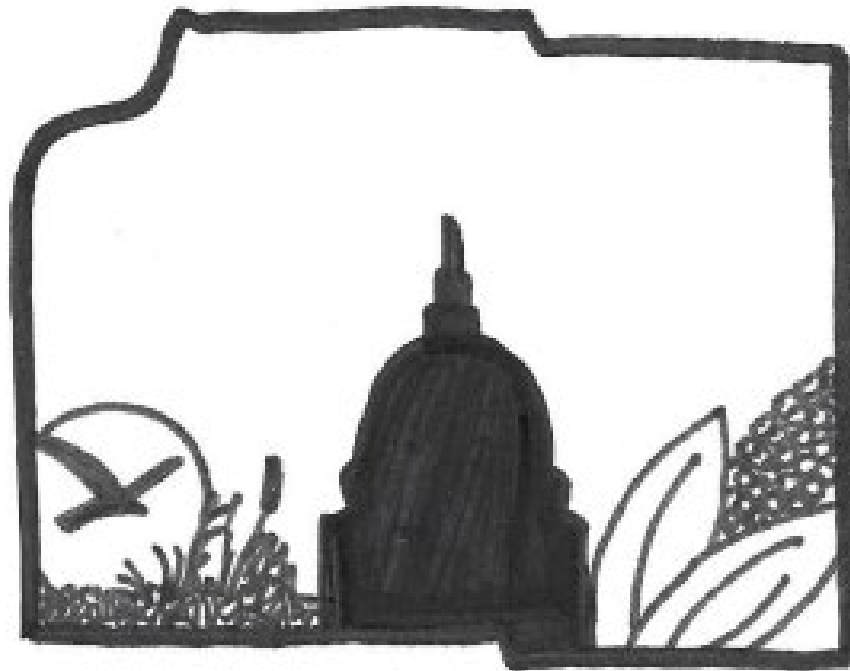
Peering out over the valley,
Near the Prairie of the Dog,
The kids pick crawfish crawling
At the bottom of the river.
One day they'll get the itch
To pack their non-waterproof boots
And shiny rings
Headed for flashy lights
And "bigger" things.

Tomorrow, though,
They'll pack beaten bags
In haste
Headed for the prairie
To pick on crawfish once again.



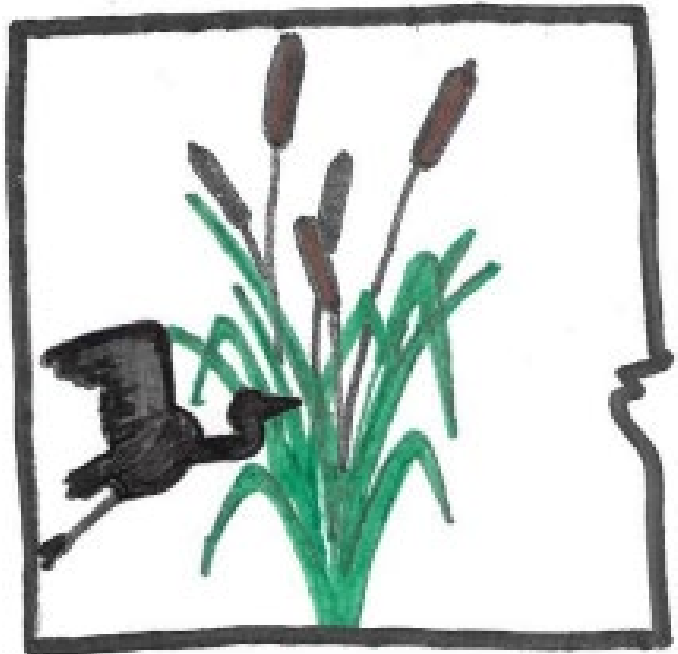
Dane: Sitting with My Lady

Sitting at the top of the world,
Lady Wisconsin at my side,
Dome beneath my feet
Pulling pictures from the pride:
Monona to my left,
And Mendota to my right,
The ants that go a-marchin
Down State past Orpheum lights.
The isthmus concentrates this greatness
To cast reflections in the sky
Of the near mile that sits below
Filled with busy badgers passing by.



Dodge: Flooded

Damn these beavers
Who made this place!
Excitedly eager
To build and replace
What was once glacier,
Plainly grass,
Rolling hills,
Rivers, bass,
Whitetail deer,
(And wolves to hunt them)
Now's gorgeously flooded
With all of that and then some:
Neighbors, friends,
Strangers, and folks
That make up Dodge County
To what it is from what it was.



Door: Heaven at my Fingertip

I've got heaven at my fingertip—
The tip of my thumb, specifically.
The trailhead to this heavenly place—
Of which I speak pontifically—
Begins at Potawatomi
Through Peninsula after the Ice Age
And ends at Newport Beach
Not on Washington (or so I say).

Few outside this place would know
That jagged rock keeps Heaven bound in
The frame of this county so paradise
Never leaves Wisconsin.



Douglas: Boreal

Holly hides amongst the pine trees,
The spruces, and the larches
That fill the forest in which she sits
Cross-legged in the middle of the city.
Nowhere near she'd find this peaceful
Meditation, breathing slow.
Surrounded by the forest
That will never let her go.

Even after leaving
Her meditated state
Holly's hugged by the bark—
Stained with green and smokey gray.
Even plodding down the streets,
Passing by her childhood home,
She's surrounded by the forest
That will never let her go.

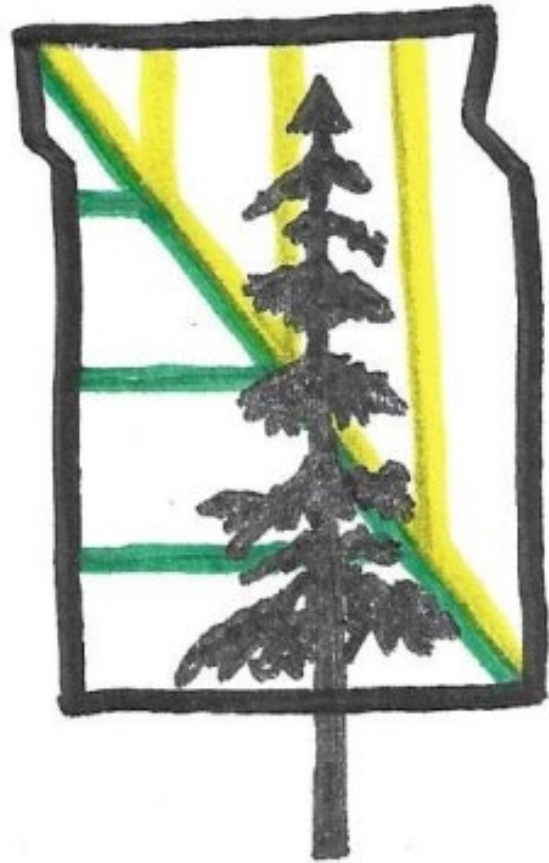
In her room her comforts are plenty:
Lapping water from the Lake,
An orchid candle casting smells,
And Taylor vinyls swiftly play.
The door is locked but even here
She feels the grip of roots on the floor,
Surrounded by the forest
That will never let her go.



Dunn: Lost

Up here we get lost.
For upon every crest of hill
We only see more crests
Waving across the county
Trying to escape,
But never fully leaving.

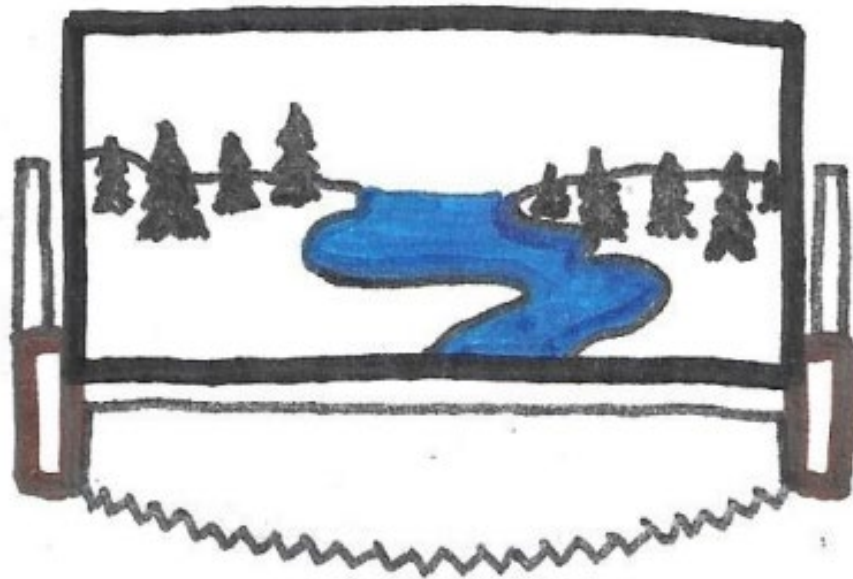
But I'm okay being lost here.



Eau Claire: Clear Water

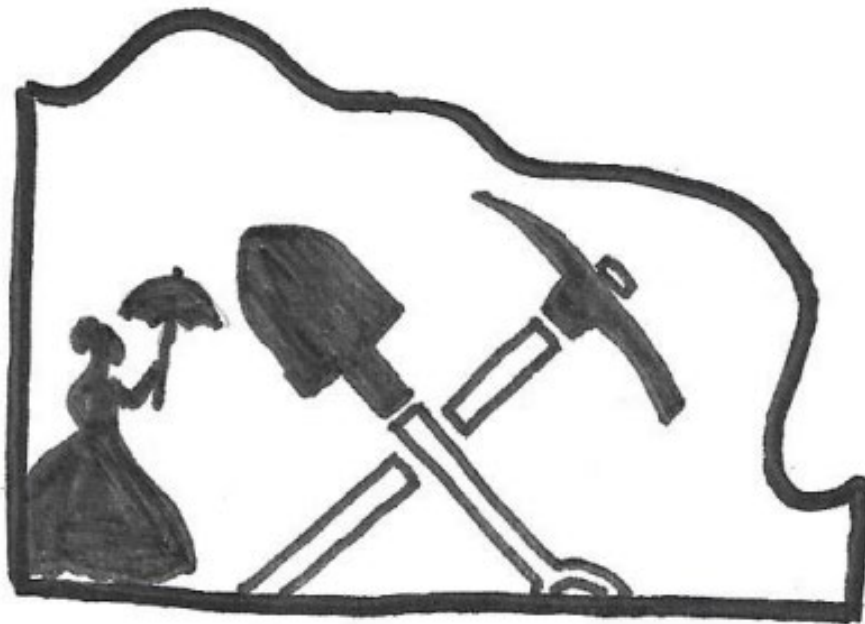
Roaming amongst the farmers,
The urbanites, and
Everyone in between
Under the pitched windows
Hovering overhead.
Springing daises stop me dead,
But the trumpets keep me cruising
Toward the sunflower
At the end,
Poking its head
Amongst its brothers.

He comes with me to greet the Chippewa
That rushes past my feet.
I find a bench to rest,
Watching life fly by below the surface.
The wind whips a petal from the sunny
Dragging it to the water
Where it will kiss the banks
Ad infinitum.



Florence: Unincorporated I

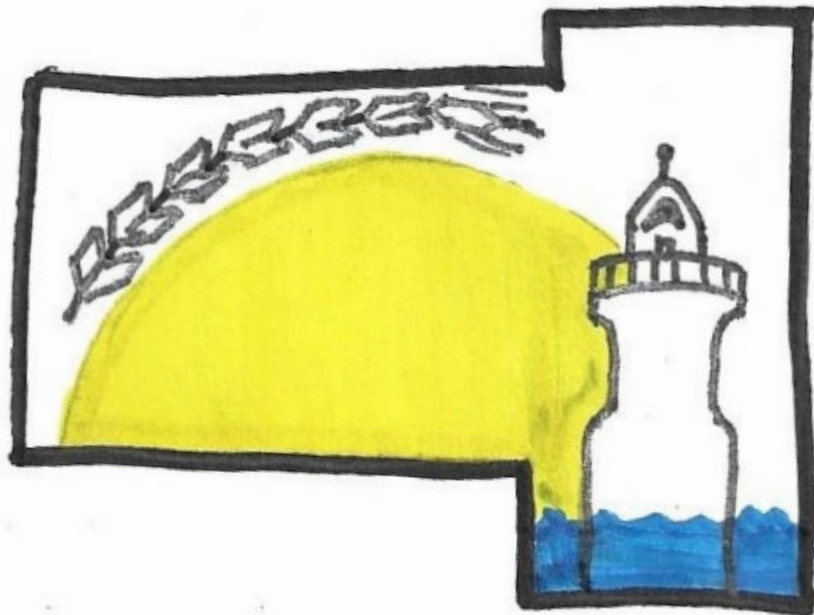
Here you'll find no slickers
Only miners
With blackened face
Hurried to get to working
Pulling graphite from the clay
Working for the company
From which we pull our name
But up here we don't find many
In Aurora or Long lake
Really only loggers
Or maybe miners
With blackened face.



Fond du Lac: Farthest End of the Lake, Closest to Your Heart

At the bottom of the lake
You'll find weeds and junk we
Toss and refuse to take stake;
Plants whose skunky,
Offending odor relates
The distorted world
The drunks see;
And the memories of late
Dreams abruptly
Abandoned in the lake.

But there you'll also find my heart
In downtown Fondy,
At the farthest end of the lake.



Forest: For the Trees

Through the thick of the thistles
Y'all see through
To the U.P.
But take a minute,
Take a breath,
And see Forest County.

It's more than trees. It's more than bark.
It's more than leaves.
Where do I start?
It's my home: these twigs and branches.
Leave the woods,
And you'll find ranches.
It's classic cars
And Fall cash raffles,
Bowling alleys,
And lumber castles.

Anything you'd want or need,
You'd find in Forest
If not for the trees.



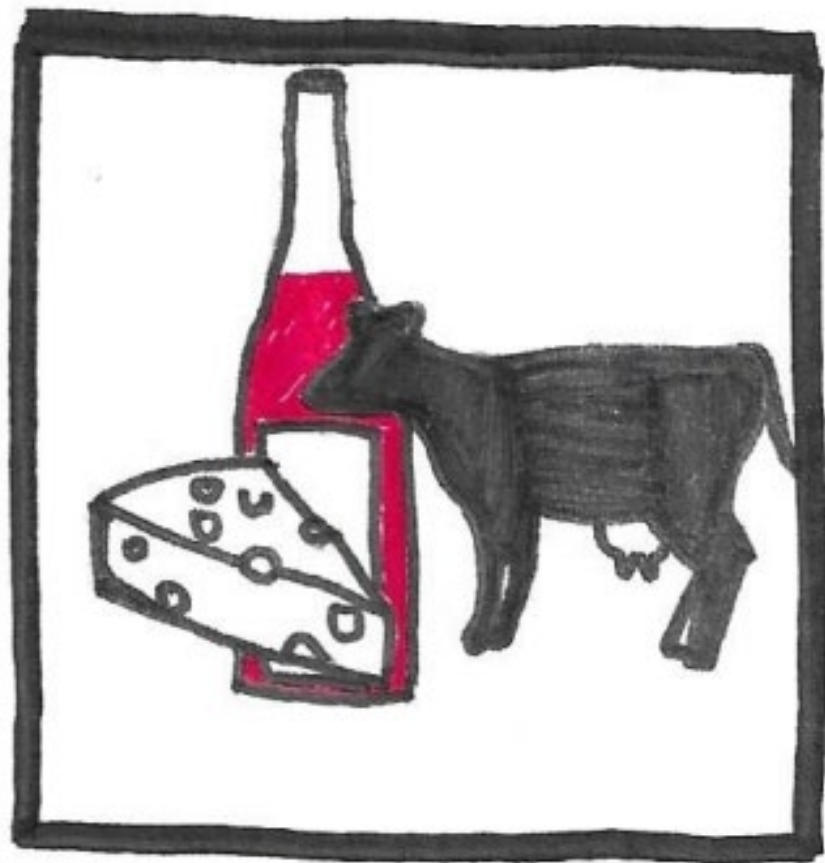
Grant: Flow

It's only by the Grant
That the Mississippi
Flows strong.
The walleye leave
Only to yearn
For the Grant River song.
The cranes nest
And feed the Grant
And the Grant feeds forth
Toward the Big River.
The canoes not knowing
Where the water was born.



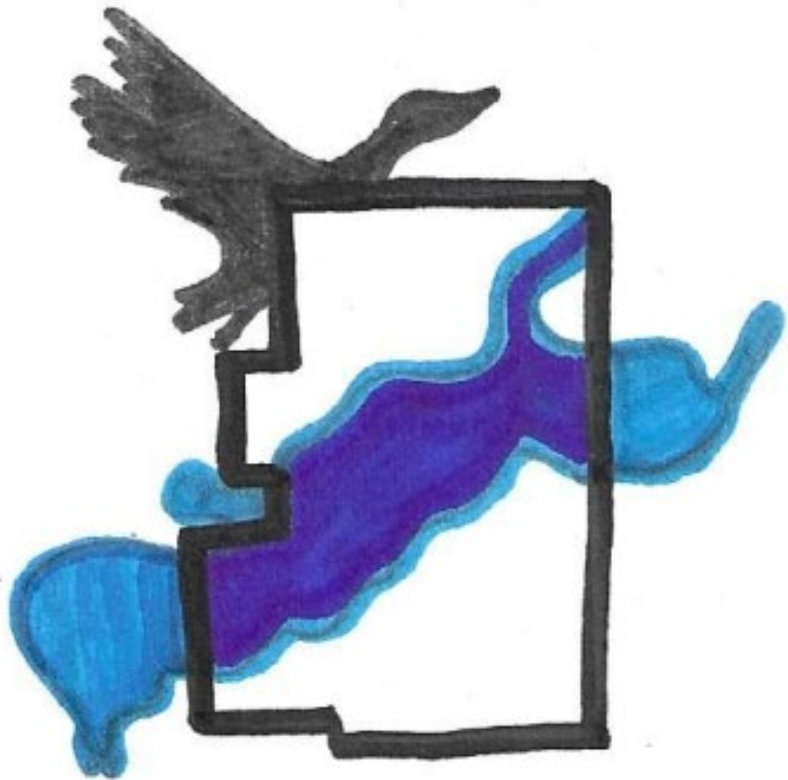
Green: Fill Me with Spotted Cow

The Havarti and Brick,
Gouda and Cheddar,
Limburger, Swiss,
Go better together
With a mouthful of beer
From the neck of brew fairest.
So, tie me to the rear of a milk truck
Heading North to New Glarus.



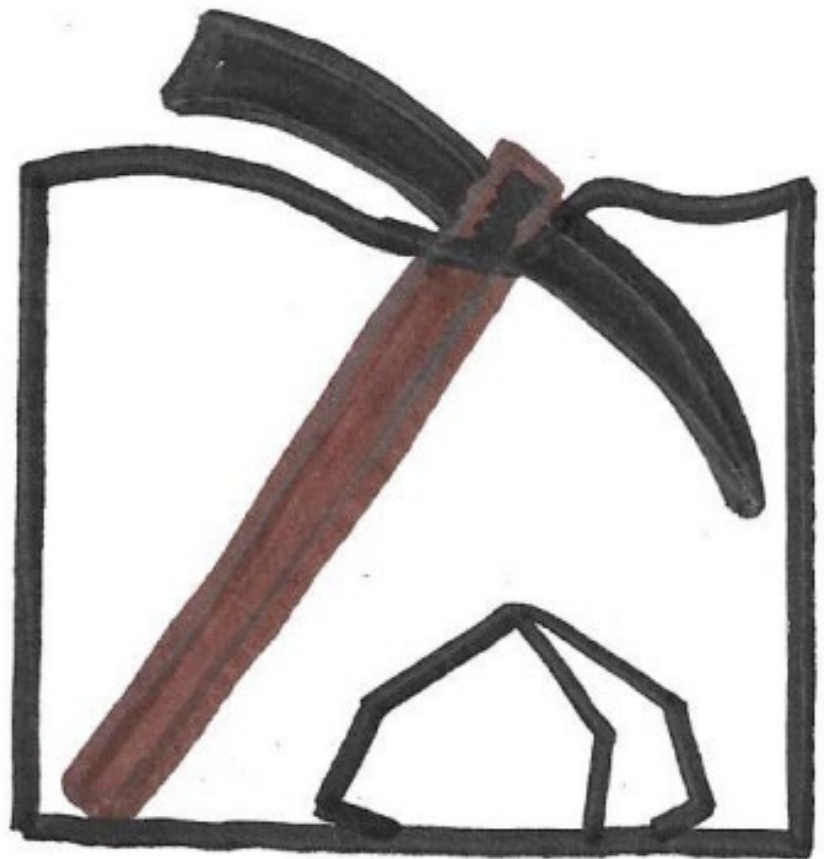
Green Lake: Blue Water

The misnomer became apparent
When my eyes lifted from the beach.
They call it Green Lake,
But it sparkles blue to me.
And when the sun becomes bashful
And clouds take reign of sky
I can look into the rivers
And see trout swimming by.
The people here know it
And I've come to learn it, too:
Besides the pines and shrubby things,
Green Lake ain't green, it's blue.



Iowa: Loyalty

Oh,
The sweetcorn across the border,
Through Grant,
tempts me
so.
Spotting Hawkeyes
and Cyclones.
I can see the tall pins in the distance
Marking steeples in Dubuque,
And west banks of the River
Glisten.
Beauty without refute.
But my home holds me here
In the emerald hills
Of the driftless southwestern
Nook of Wisconsin.



Iron: Heaven, North of Here

The compass points due north

To heaven:

Iron County.

The path is laced

With villas and pricey counties

But beyond you will find the

Bad, winding river

That may distract,

But don't lose pace

For the magnet in your hand

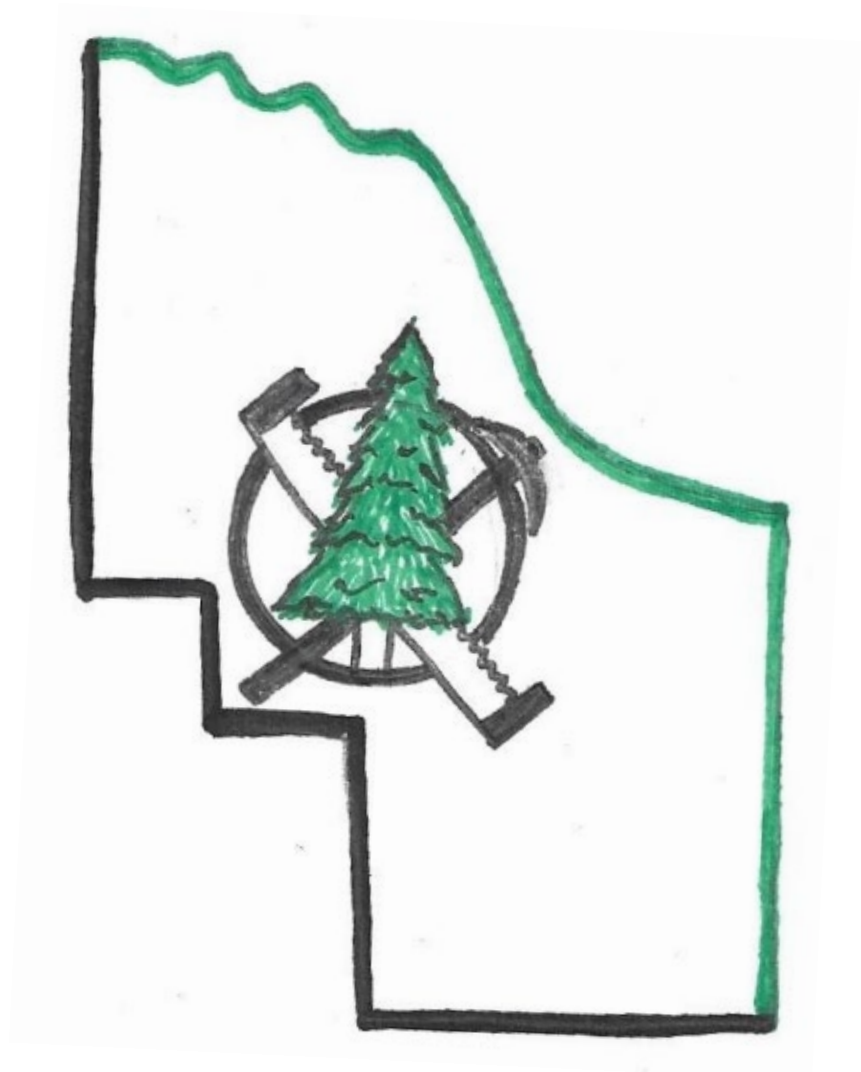
Will guide you northward

Toward the gates.

And you'll find it:

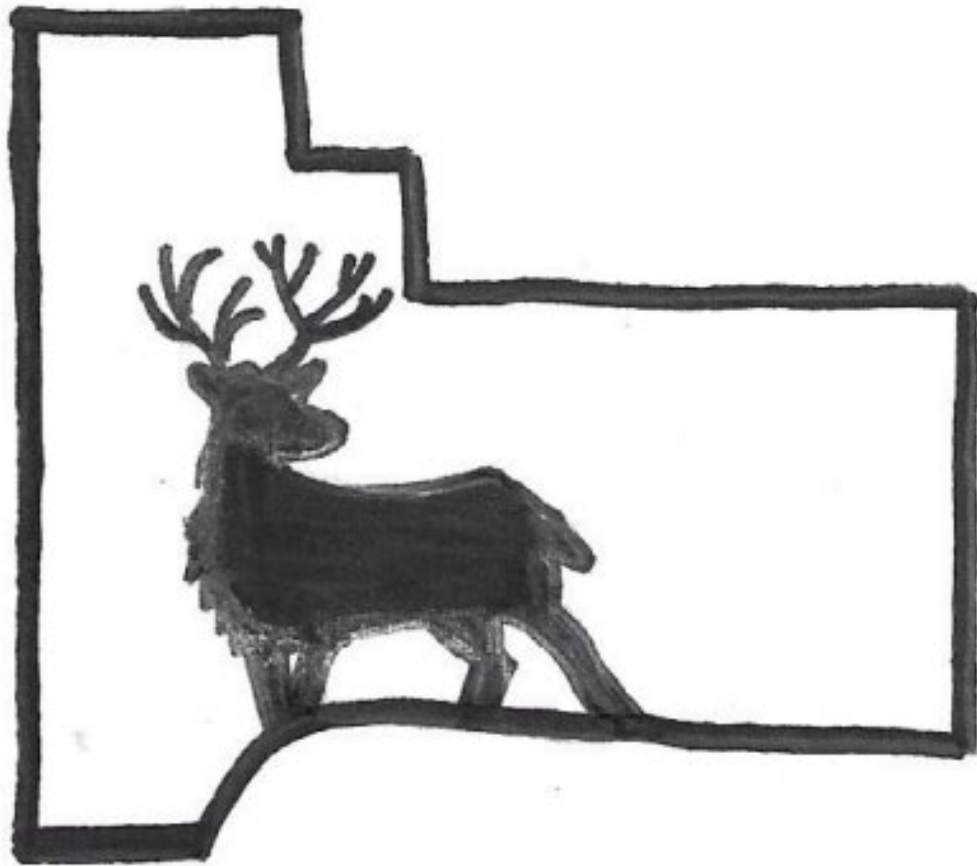
Heaven,

North of here.



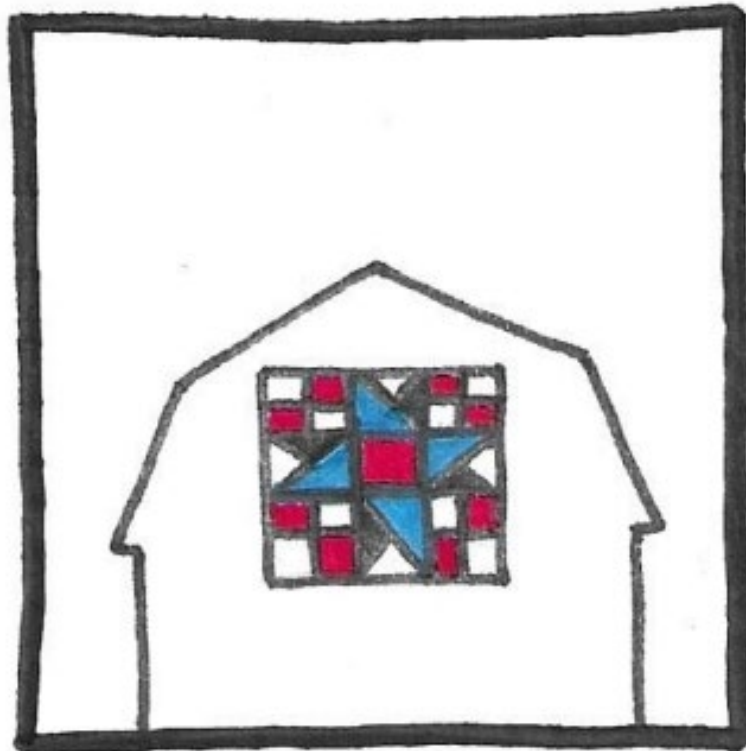
Jackson: Unpresidential

This Jackson
Is not the Jackson you know.
Not the driver
Of generational sorrow,
But the driver of livings
For the people
Who now spit in the face
Of the name.



Jefferson: Manifest

Often forgotten—
Passed over by planes and trains—
Lies the gateway to the West.
Through pastures and plains
Cars take for granted
The outposts placed here
By mothers before them,
Often steering clear
Of the road signs and door signs
Calling them to stay
In the communities built
Along the once unforgiving way.
But now it seems that Jefferson
Did little for the State
Besides blazing trails and laying rails
To get from place to place.

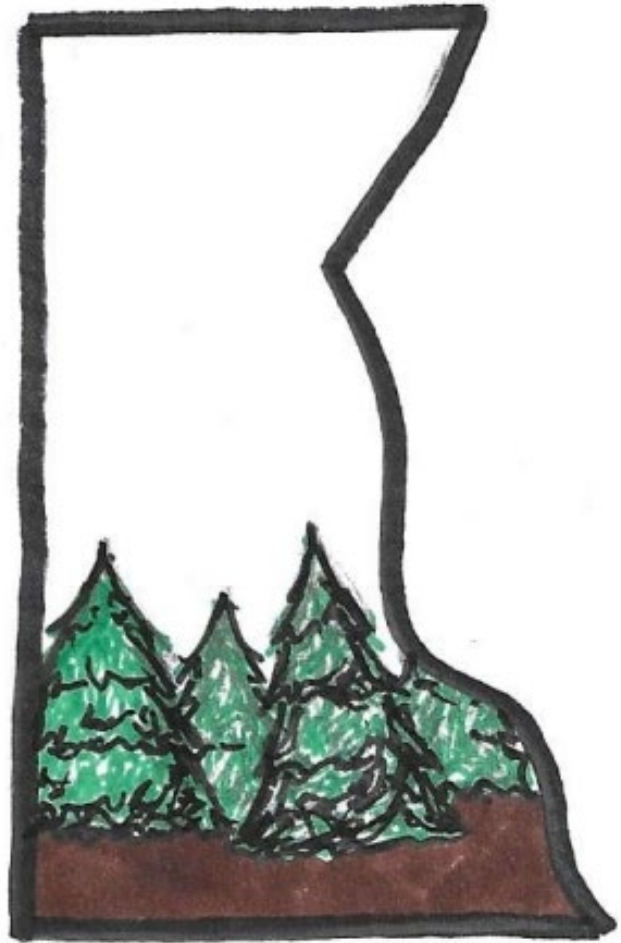


Juneau: The Brothers Juneau

Here in Alaska,
We have gold!
And all the fish
You've been told
Of in this last frontier.
Do let me be bold:
The *best* Juneau
Is named after Joe.

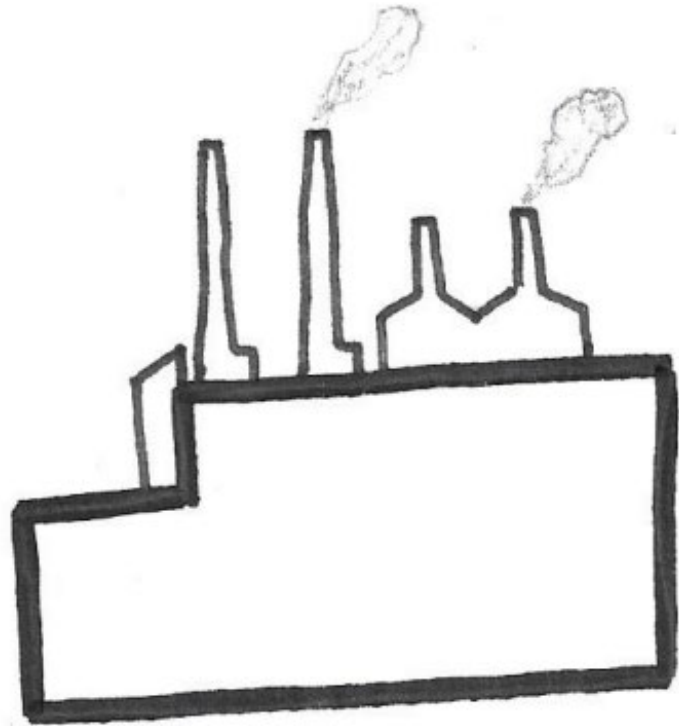
Maybe!
But here in Dodge County,
We have it all!
Concerts and beer
And farms that sprawl
Across the county
So let me recall:
The *best* Juneau
Is named after Paul.

I see,
But here along the Wisconsin River
We have openness:
Pastures to prance through
And general hopefulness
So, gentlemen,
I tell you with solemnness:
The *BEST* Juneau
Is named after Solomon.



Kenosha: Inflamed

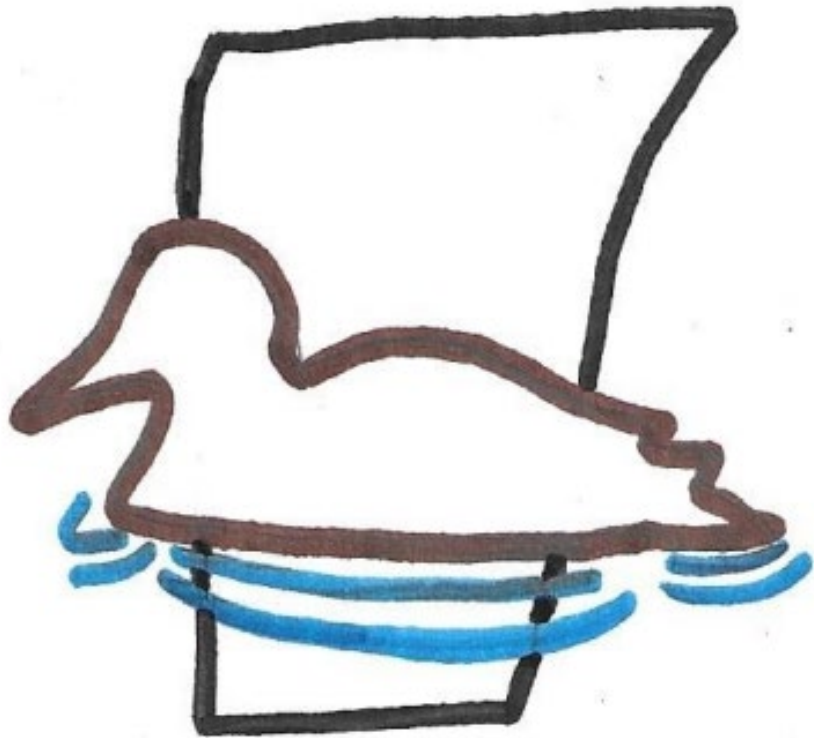
Ripping through the riotous
Protests and pleas
For unalienable rights
And dignity
Is a speck of lead
Just a tiny speck
Instigating
By pulling flesh
From bone and bone
And meat from meat.
From separate homes,
But here they meet
Demanding change
As organs
Of the city beat
Inflaming the site of trauma:
The city streets.



Kewaunee: Frozen

The river's frozen over.
Bits wincing beneath Will's feet
As he trudges toward the center
Of Kewaunee's muddied deep.
He scrapes away the powdered snow
To reveal the contents buried
Beneath the window to the world
Where time is frozen nearly
As much as the ice that froze it there.
There's garbage, but in it: beauty.
A wristwatch where the second hand
Doesn't do its duty.
It's stuck at five, the hour twelve,
And the minute mute at thirty.

Blessed here
In the middle
Of the river, Kewaunee.



La Crosse: From Atop Grandad's Bluff

This view from Grandad's
 Is grand as
 I've ever seen.
 Lights from campus
 pass
 and double back in a drunken stumble,
 Humbled by their slurs and
 ignorance to the world they're just now seeing.
 The flashing strobes from 3rd
 Drag with them booming beats
 Of dancing, yelling,
 cheering
 For everything that wasn't left in the dorms.
 The homes flicker,
 Warmed by their fireplaces
 Whose flames escape and meet us
 Atop Grandad's Bluff,
 Sharing the care
 And warmth
 They had seen in their honest homes.

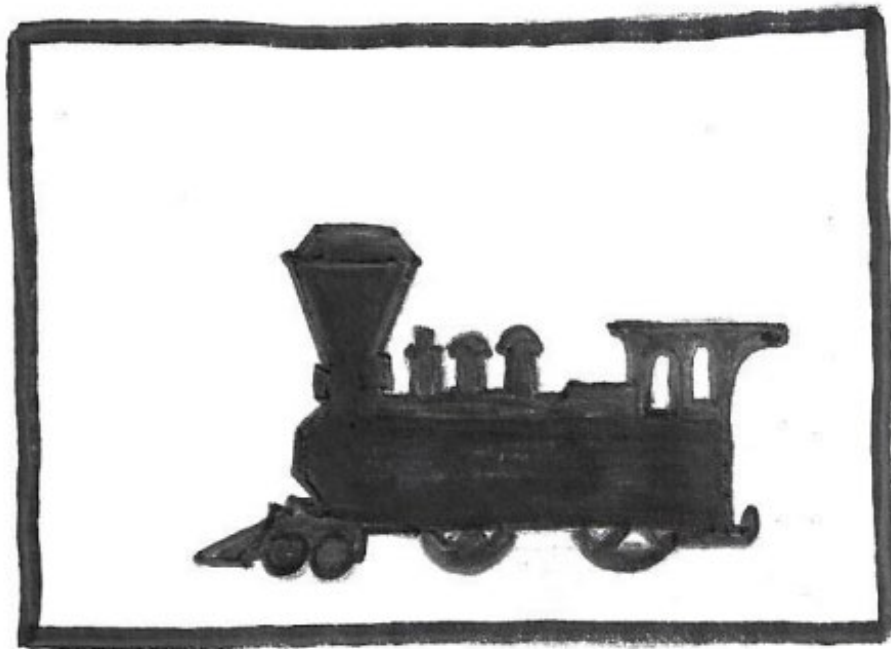
The black that is the River
 is painted by the fish
 Plotting to feed the city
 And
 The black that is the marshes
 Is encumbered by groans
 And snaps of crickets
 And frogs
 Calling for the light.



Lafayette: A Savior

A broken plateau
Littered with the conflicts
Between nations
Lays hopelessly
In the South
Resting in the West
Envisioning a savior
That sweeps the dreams to streams.

A horseback Frenchman
Pulls them from the muck
Of the rivers once gilded
With the soils many riches.



Langlade: Go, Gone, Went

Antigo

To the lake.

Dip your head below the water.

Find fish,

Pull back,

Find this,

Find that,

Just below the water.

Antigone

Is the sun

From the lakeside days

Now only drifting away

In the rearview mirror.

Antiwent

By the hours

That we never really taste

While we're there

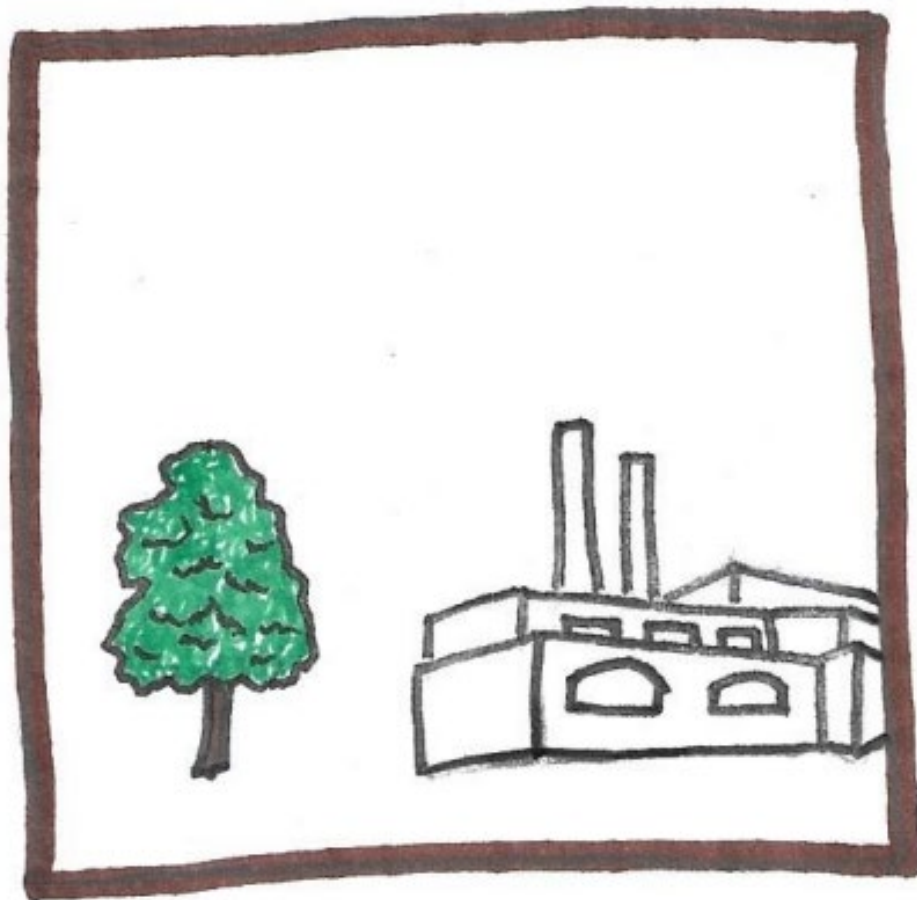
Sitting by the lake.



Lincoln: Liberated

Liberating Northwoods
Form a near-perfect square
Of freedom
Enshrined by the namesake
Of this land
That is streaked
With people of the same ilk:

Warriors of liberty
And bastions of the Republic.



Manitowoc: Reflection Across the Abyss

The smell of malts fills the air
That is reflected off the Michigan waves
Back to the shoreline
To our noses.
The first toes to sand are startled
By squawking seagulls overhead
Who are excited about the sweaty six-pack that's pulled from my bag.
We've travelled far from the smokestacks
To this beach that is shadowed by the resting sun:
Through two rivers and
Miles of anticipation.

Our warming beers and
Our warming backs
Contrast the cool air
Attacking our faces
From the seeming abyss
That spans the horizon
Giving birth to a land
So distant, yet
So similar.

The next caps are pried off
As we both wonder
Whether across the abyss
Two lifelong friends
Are looking back at us.



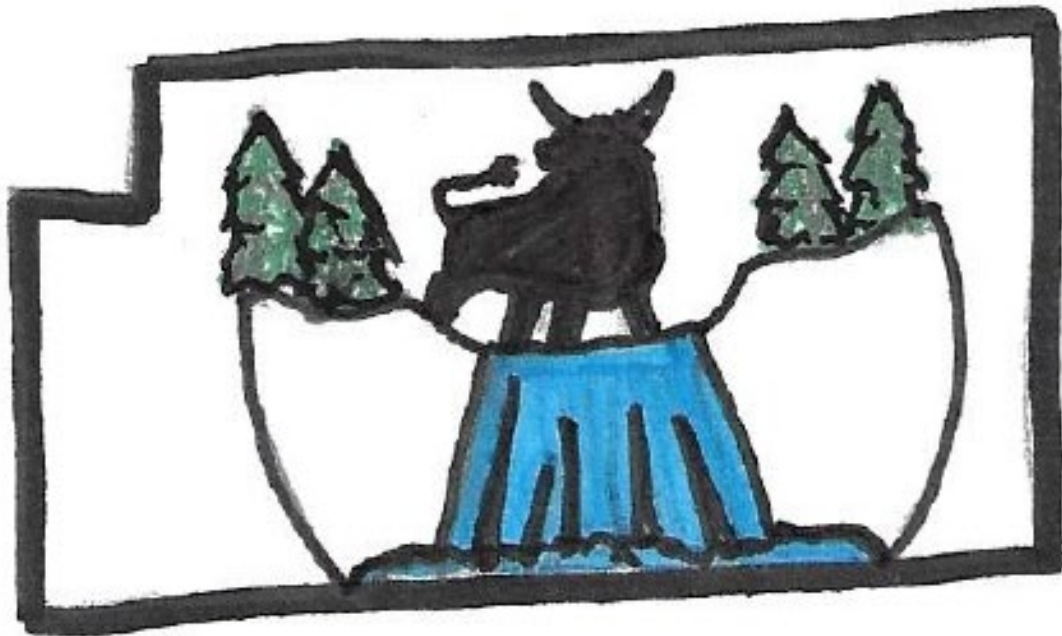
Marathon: Trek

Each step closed
The 26.2-mile gap
That separated me
From my home in Wausau.

This trek took its toll
As I'd seen nothing but trees
Towering over
All the beauty I saw:

Homes full of families
Living amongst the hills
Not fancy, not gaudy,
And not bourgeois.

No, the trek toured the hillside
Of homes warmed by wood stoves
That neighbored my mother's
At my home in Wausau.



Marinette: Just Across a River

Just across a river—
Not too large
But still too far—
Lies another state.
The same as me
And yet,
So very much
An alien place
Full of yoopers and pasties,
And 'Ganders (those nasty
Wolverines that bite and claw
When you tell them they talk funny
Kind of like us,
But we
Are sophisticated
Down here
South of the river
Where fires roar
But we endure,
Where we live free
From fields to shore,
Where we call home:
South of the river).



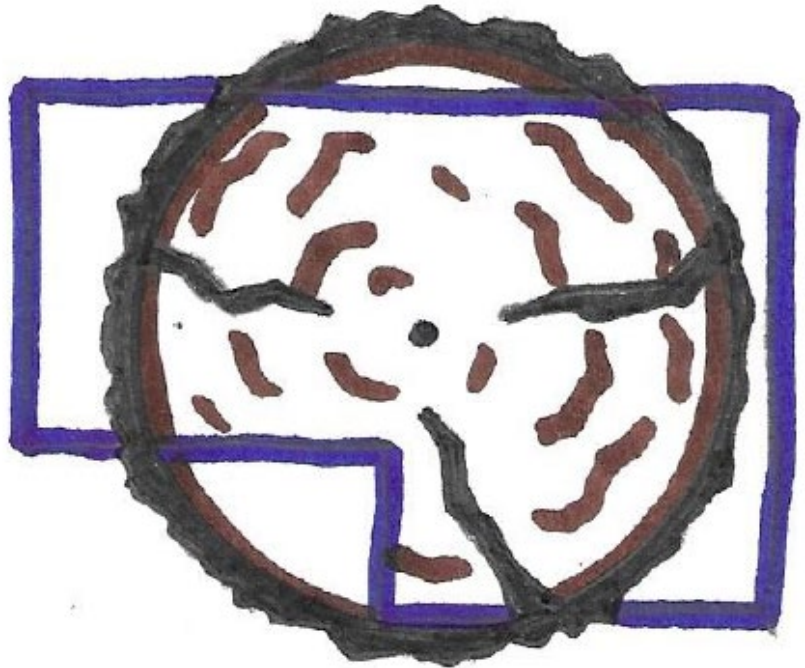
Marquette: At This Pace

Who owns this land
But the people
To whom it was bestowed?
Who can take it from them
But themselves
Who want it forever
But dare not remember
That it's most fragile?
At this pace
Grandsons and daughters
Won't deal with the blood.
Rather they would
Pity those who do:
The ones who own the land.



Menominee: Unincorporated II

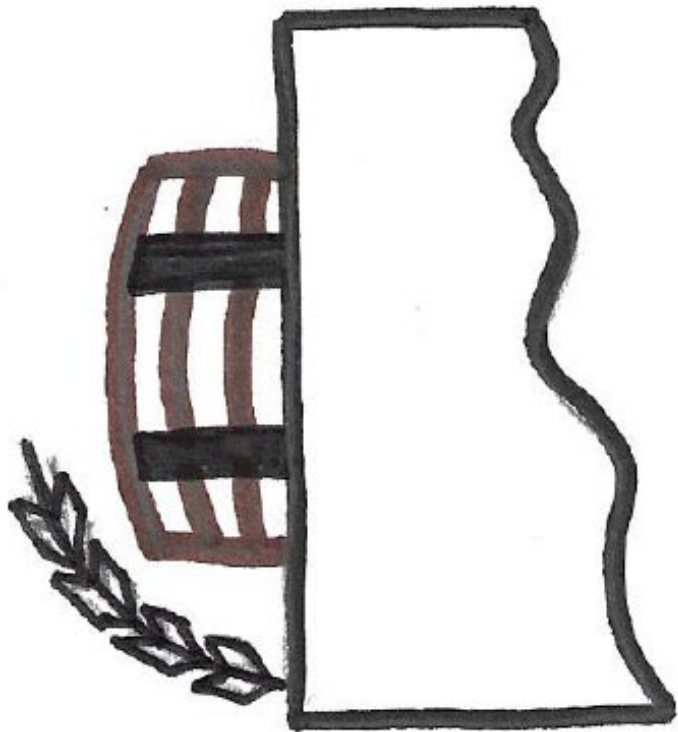
Here you'll find no Devastation
Only Wild Rice
Floating in the Waters
Once destined
To be inherited by a Great People
Led by Oshkosh in the West
And Ada in the East
Here we Reserve
This little Piece
Set out for Us
By Not Us
From all of Ours
To just this little Piece
Of Wild Rice
Floating in the Waters



Milwaukee: Brewer of Beer (And More!)

The City is rich with history:
Brewing beer and baseball,
Wades and Seligs,
Harleys and Les Pauls,
Liberaces, Houdinis,
And mother to Ingalls,
And brewing beer!
(Did I mention that all?)

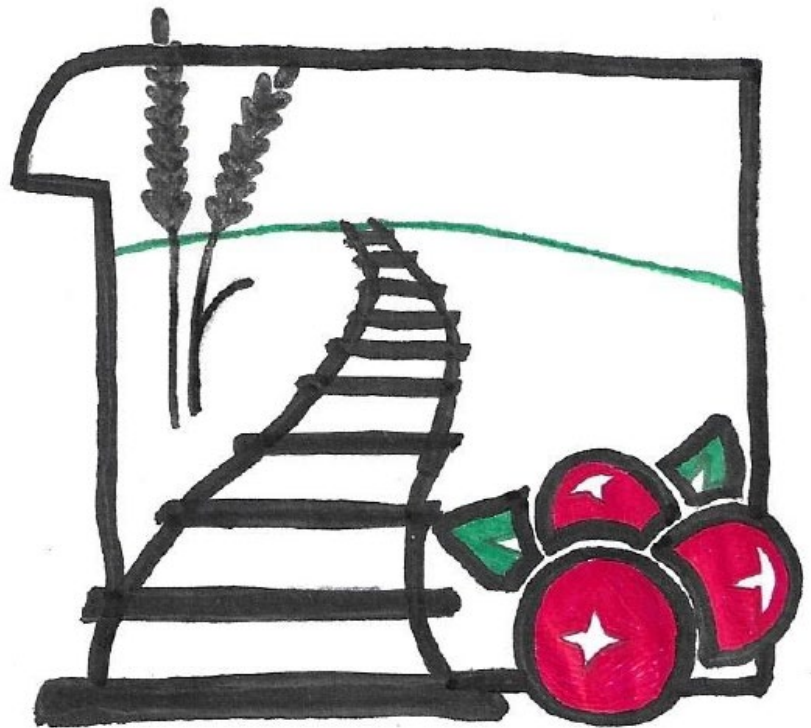
The City likes its breweries.
Only in the water this is hidden.
The City sure doesn't regret
Sloppily kissing the Michigan.
The Brewers won the World Series!
(Even if you claim they didn't)
We're all winners in Milwaukee
For Bucks in 6 is winning.



Monroe: This Is Monroe!

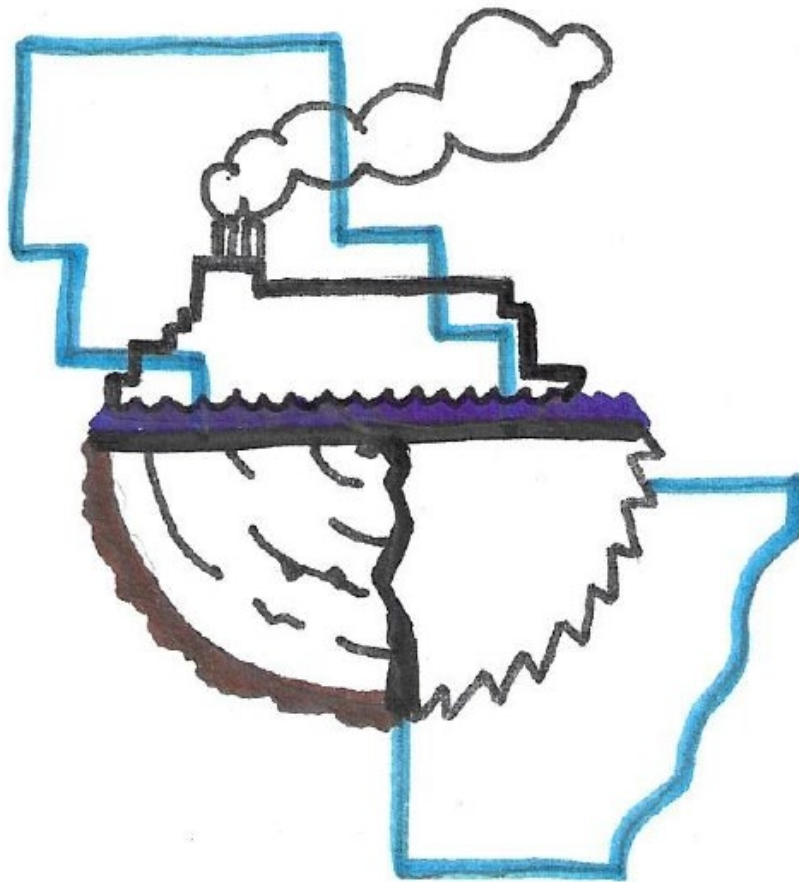
...I mean Sparta.
(Or was it Tomah?)
I know I should be smarter,
So sit down let me tell ya:
These are silly games we play,
Naming places after
The Greeks and the Romans.
Nowhere near Troy,
But somehow we're still Trojans...?

I love it here.
Though it isn't Greece or Rome,
This place is something special:
This is Monroe!



Oconto: Alluring

She kisses the bay—
Smooth as the seas,
Glossed with algae-green,
Molded by waves from the sun—
And comes back with green lips—
Cracked and speckled,
Moist and supple,
Tinted and curved
Matching her rolling backside.



Oneida: All the Water

"Land of 10,000 Lakes."

Psh. Give me a break.

I'm here in Oneida

And I can't even hide

From all the water:

Rivers (filled with otters),

Lakes, Creeks, Ponds

(Of which I'm particularly fond),

Oceans, seemingly!

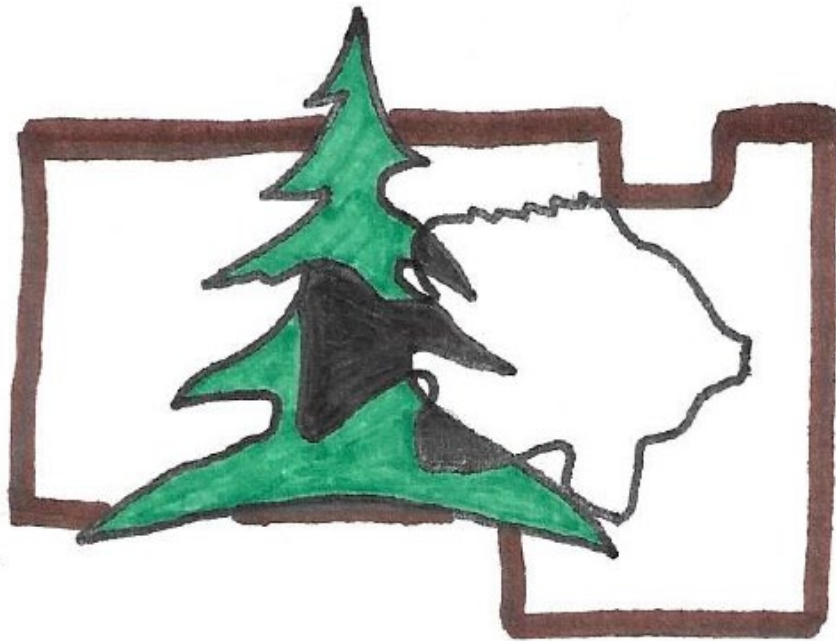
I say that gleamingly,

Because there are just Great Lakes

That don't seem to break

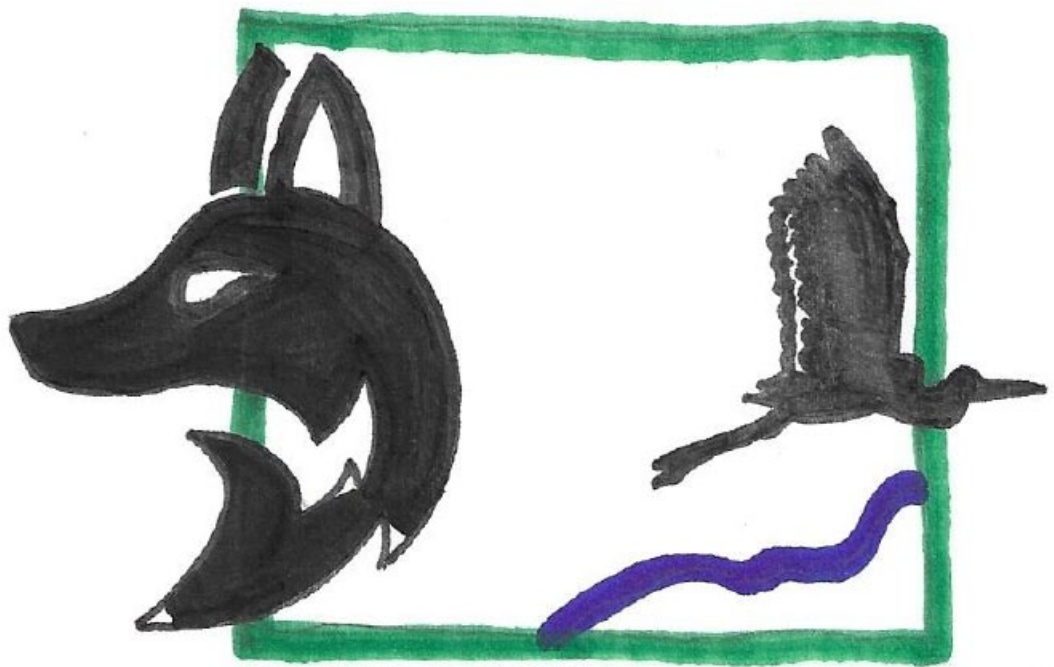
Even here, all the way outta

The way, in Oneida.



Outagamie: Everyone is Welcome!

Filled with Grand Chutes and Little Chutes,
Kimberlys and Kaukanas.
Center in center
And Chicago at Corners.
Villed with Stephens and Macks,
Hortons and Greens,
Bear Creeks and Black Creeks
And all in between.
Tons of Apples,
For all to eat and see.
Everyone is welcome
In Outagamie!

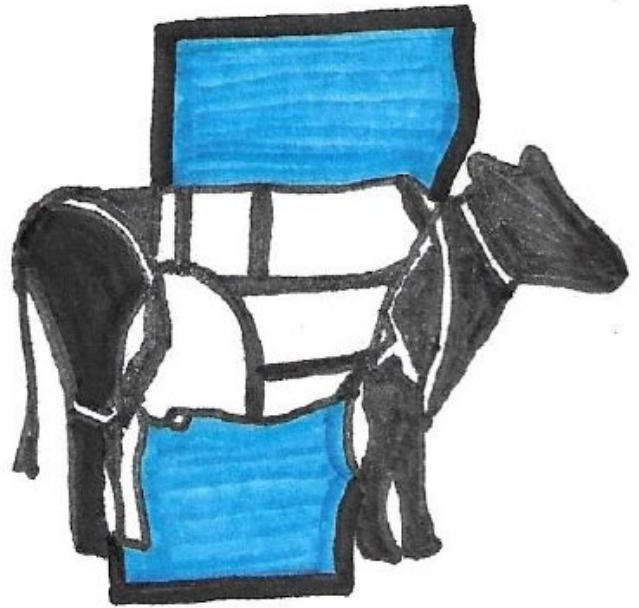


Ozaukee: Strawberry Fest, Forever

The warm town of Cedarburg—
 Where City Hall reads “High School”,
 Where boutiques line the streets,
 Where moonshine’s clear haze
 Is distilled only neat,
 Where ice cream is eaten with pigs,
 And a park that tilts and leans
 Overencumbered by kids and teens—

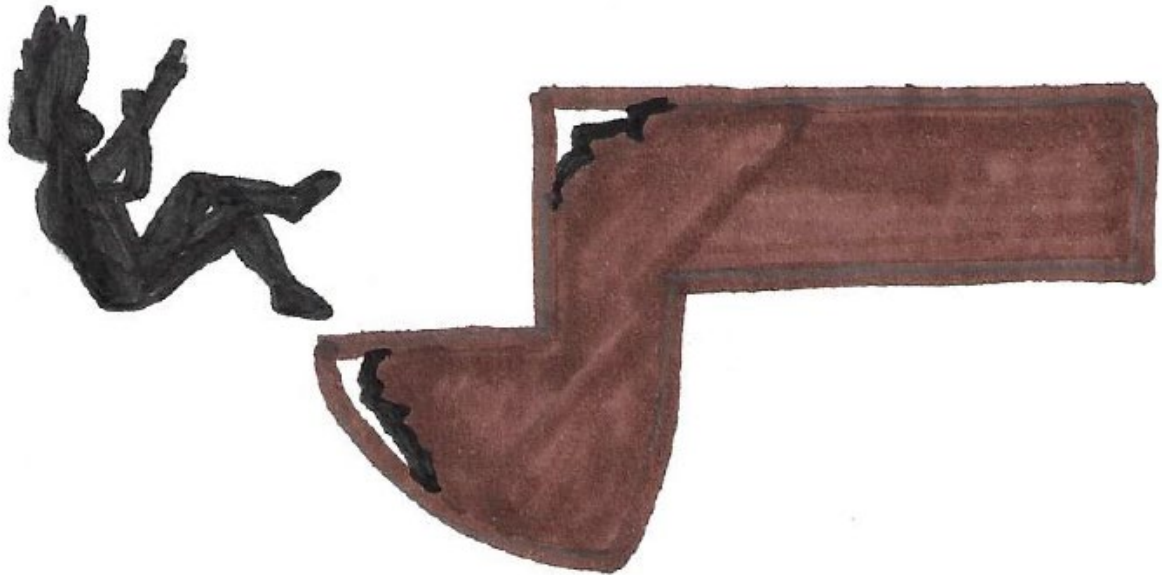
Is swarmed by species from the globe—
 Strawberries and berry berries,
 Bees and boys,
 Those who like cinnamon,
 And those who do not
 But prefer turkey legs instead,
 Those who can
 (And will)
 Drink their weight in infused blends of alcohol and fruits
 While dancing to bands
 They’ve never heard
 And with friends
 They’ve never met,
 Those who watch their daughters timidly approach a goat
 Intended for petting
 While their sons sit atop a camel,
 Those drunks who dress up as a strawberry
 So people don’t push him away
 But instead grip him with a hug
 And ask for a picture.

Here in the warm town of Cedarburg.



Pepin: Unordinary

An unordinary shape
For unordinary people
With pep in their step
And nowhere near feeble.
For they may be weird
But they're damn sure proud of it.
In fact, prepare your ears
Cuz you'll surely hear 'bout it.
Whether you have a farm in the East
Or live on the river out West,
We're all Pepin people!
The certified best!

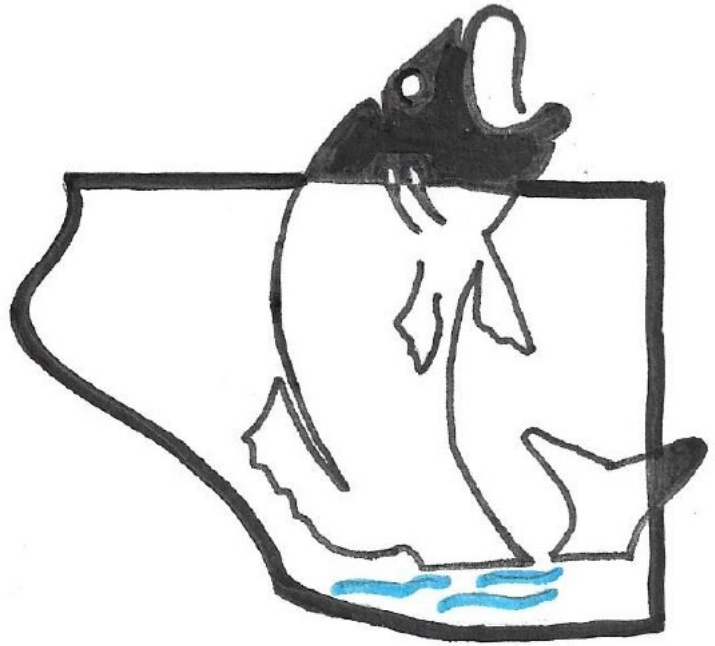


Pierce: Through the Surface

At eye level, the breaking waves
Reveal squawking hawks
Reeling for cod
That lurk beneath
Above the reefs.

Below the foamy surface
Shy turtles dance with the weeds
And crawdads weave sunny threads,
But even more magic lies beneath.

Even further,
Crystals live
In a cave far down below,
Hidden from the thieving eyes
Belonging to the unenrolled.



Polk: Falling Waters

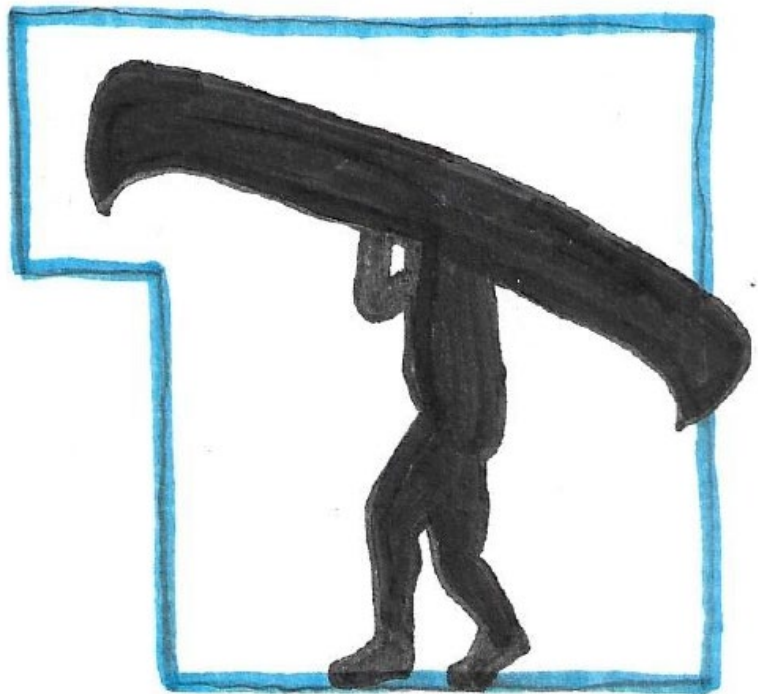
Even the rivers
Can't stand
This close to heaven.
Their currents fall
Toward the core
Bruising and smoothing
Rock along the way,
Testing roots' strength,
And pounding
The hardened earth
Below.
Always rushing,
These falling waters,
Toward their lower home.



Portage: Here on the Square

Here on the square
We run circles
In play
Bouncing from bar to bar
And place to place.
Losing ourselves,
We kick our feet
If to say:
“We have nowhere to be
Except for here,
Today.”

After piles of pretzels
And barrels of beer,
We cap our tough day
With a mind clear
Intent on relaxing
After our tough day—
Finding ourselves at Rusty’s
To push our cares away
From our tough day on the square.



Price: Frozen in Concrete

Frozen in concrete
Is life
And art
Forever confined
To a box
In northern Wisconsin.
Come
Witness
Frogs frozen
And encased elephant thrills,
Dogs' paws paused
And banners waving still.
All these wonders,
Never to leave.

But you must come here
And risk
Being frozen here, too.



Racine: Just a Kid from Racine

Born to a mom
(But barely a mom)
Raised by her mom
Protected from
The failures of blood.

Soon lost
In chemicals
Seminal
To leaving
But quickly gated
In detention for youth

Where a kid from Racine found
(And gripped tightly)
A semi-orange sphere
That could pull him from here

To Maine or Connecticut,
All over the league,
Finally at rest in South Beach,
Far from his state but
Not far from Racine.



Richland: Golden Soil

The wheels' weight rolling atop
The surface
Pushes through the grass
Into the soil
Exposing riches underneath.

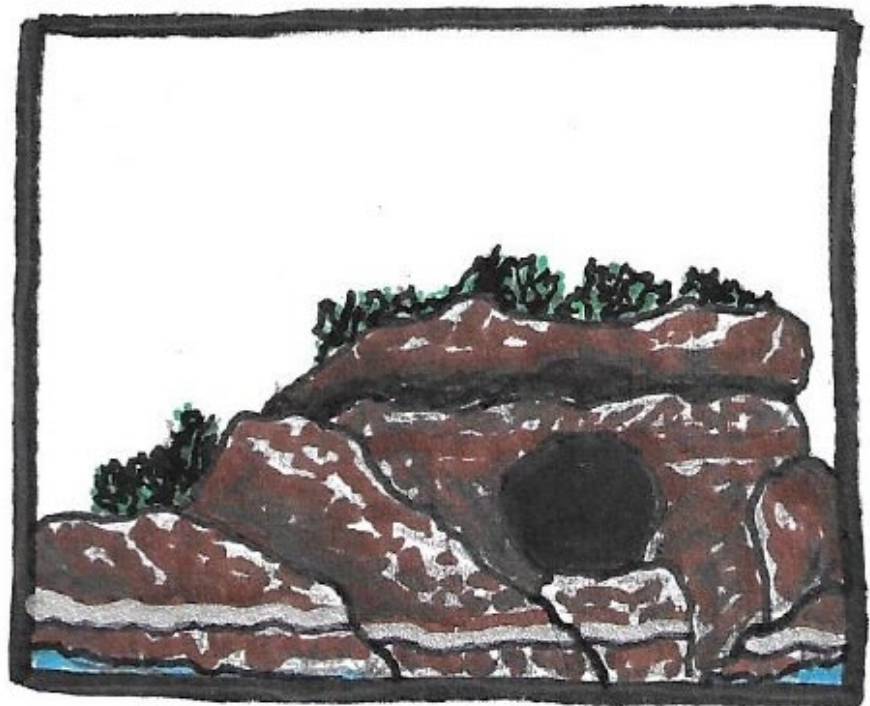
Feet—
Trampling on future plants, trees,
Floors, and homes—
Pay no mind to the damage done to treasure.

This rich soil brought them here
And will keep them here forever.



Rock: Layers

The layers
Building up this body
Of land
Are made of
Sandstone
And limestone,
Orthoquartzitic
And exquisite,
Giving rise
To the three-dimensional
Parties raging
On the surface
That do more than live and die.
They grow and thrive,
Play baseball and drink beer.
For there are layers to this land.



Rusk: The Sun Poking Through the Canopy

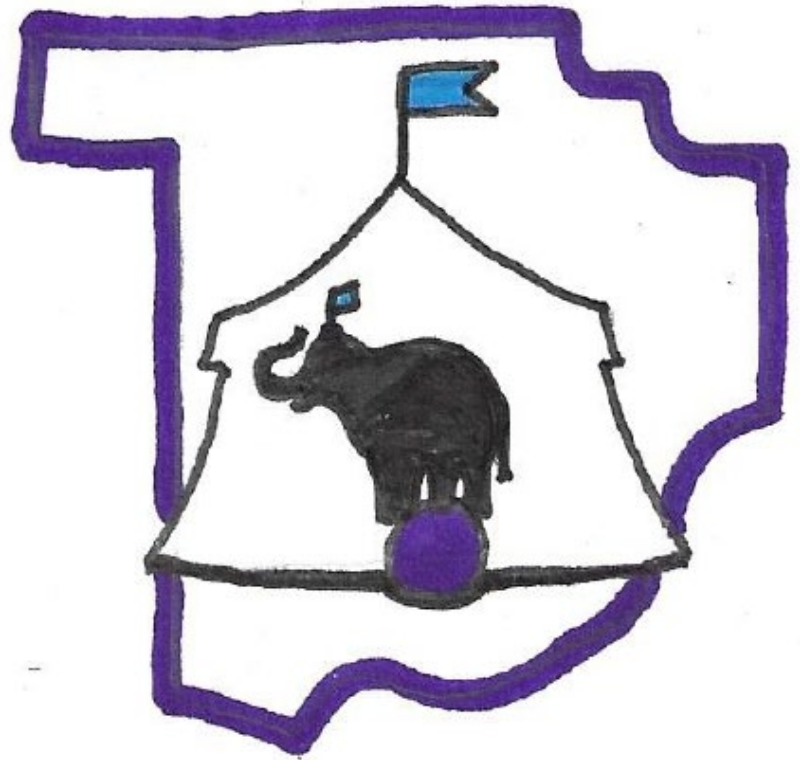
The army of beards and flannel
March in step toward the tree line
To combat the wooden menace,
Leaving ladies and lookers behind.
The loggers line the limited plain
Between themselves and the trunks
Where tooth by tooth they'll top the trees
To expose the sky far up above.
As limbs and branches crash to Earth
The ceiling starts to expand.
The sun that once was blotted out
Now bathes this unknown land.



Sauk: A Circus For Sure!

"A circus for sure!"
That's what the yankees say
As they trample our homes
With frolic and play,
Like elephants trumpeting
All around the ring,
But they have no Ringlings
On which to place blame.

We may be a circus
But that comes from our roots.
We're lions and tigers
(But not Bears,
That's just rude).
We may be hoopers, magicians,
Musicians, and clowns,
But our big top still stands
At the center of town.



Sawyer: Winter Incarnate

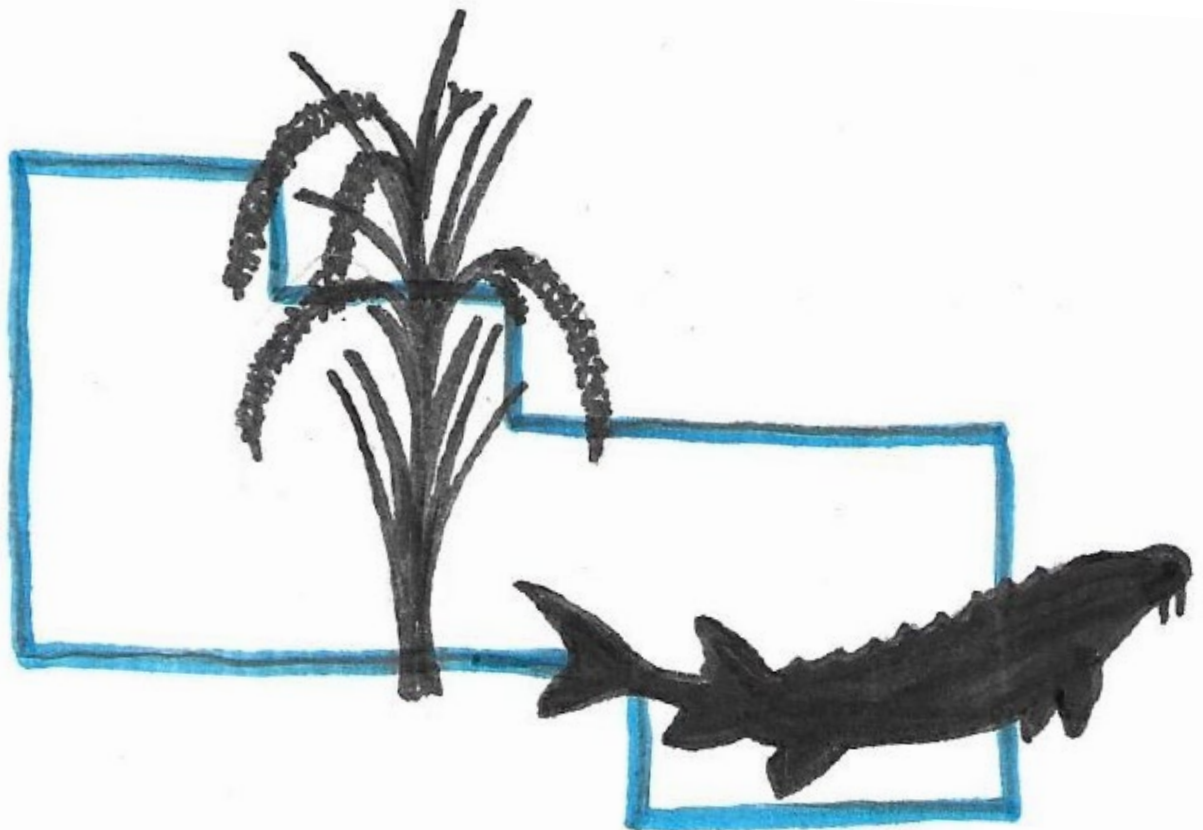
The cold weather embraces you,
And you embrace the cold.
The shivers shake and often quake,
And the chattering teeth grow old.
The wind, it sings,
Can even howl,
And at worse it slaps your face
To make you wonder why you left
The sun for this cold place.

But then you see
Just up ahead
A fire roaring loud,
Circled by friends huddled together,
Keeping warm for they are proud
To withstand the weather others can't
And brag their skin is thicker, too
For they have not quit
On Winter Incarnate,
And it will not quit on you.



Shawano: The Prince of Shawano

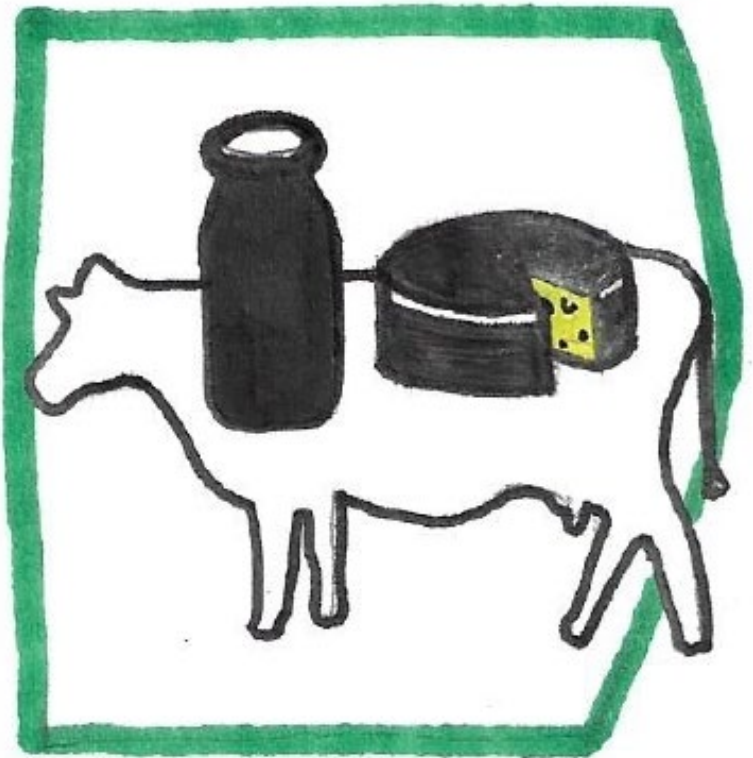
The Prince of Shawano
Is burnt by the sun in the fields
But more by the sun on the lakes.
He's surrounded by friends that he buys
And those that he makes.
He bathes in Sun Drop
That he drinks by the bottle.
He sits on his throne
As the Crown Prince of Shawano.



Sheboygan: Dunes

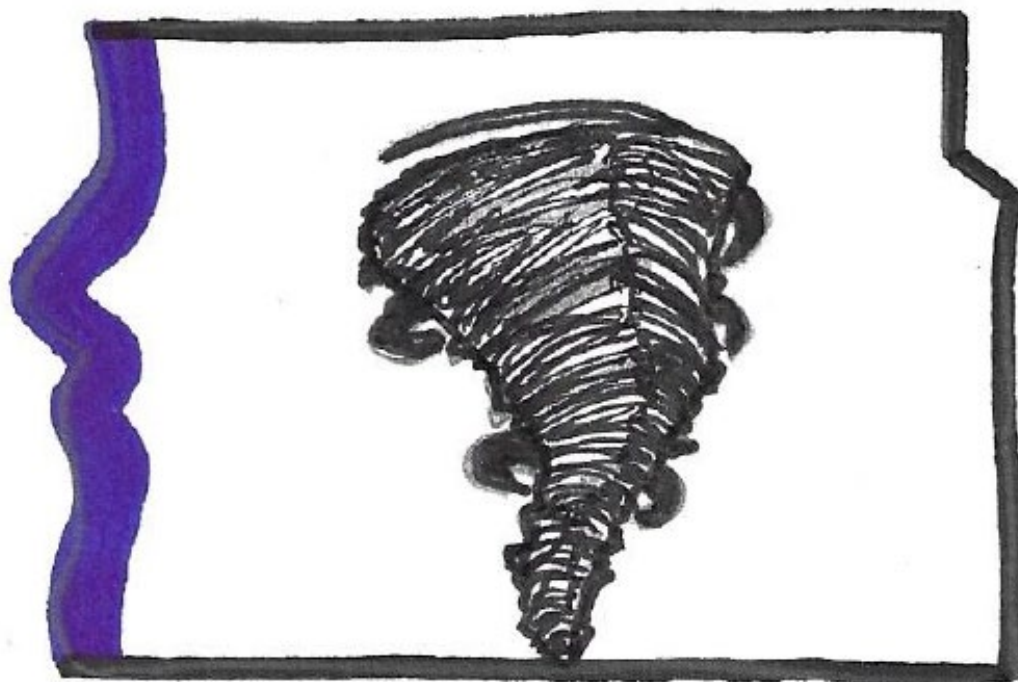
Waving to Lake Michigan,
The dunes,
Piling years of sand
And earth
And history,
Mark the port of entry
For the Irish and German
Wanderers
Stepping into a place
They'll give to their kids
And their kids' kids
And their heirs who share
The same love for pilsner
So strong that
They'll breed 3 sheep
Just to tap the keg.

Those dunes split just enough
To give them enough passage
To settle this lakefront land
Not far from their boats.



St. Croix: Bubbly

The flowing
Bubbly
River
Weaves from horizon
To horizon
All the while
Bubbling
In the face
Of its older brother
To the West.



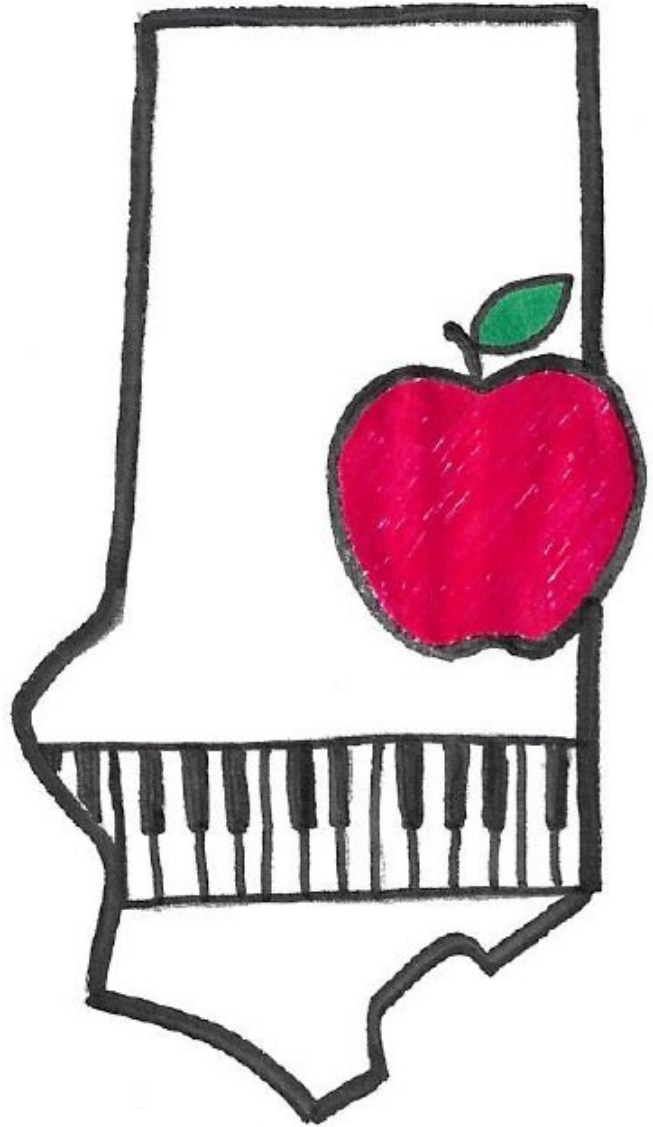
Taylor: No Sound but the Gusts

It's quieter here
In this simple place
Where we stare at the sky
And count the rabbits
Fluffing their tails.
The grass grows greener
When it's neighed at,
Not honked.
The rhythms of scratches
Of dead leaves dancing
Across the lonely road
Stretching between
Gilman and Medford
Must give hints to the wind
Of deafening snow.
We'll settle here in silence,
By and by.



Trempealeau: So Foreign to This Place

You sit in the heart of Arcadia
With tongue not native to this land.
In Tortas y Tacos New Sunrise
Saying words most don't understand.
But the owners, they speak your language
Here on the Oeste side of the state
Where the Tamarack grows
And the river is young
In its march toward its fate
To the gulf of your home far from here
This Norte portion of River.
Even in this place where any hope
Seems little more than a glimmer,
It may not look it—but trust me—we like
Your unexpected face
To more than me,
You seem to be
So foreign to this place.

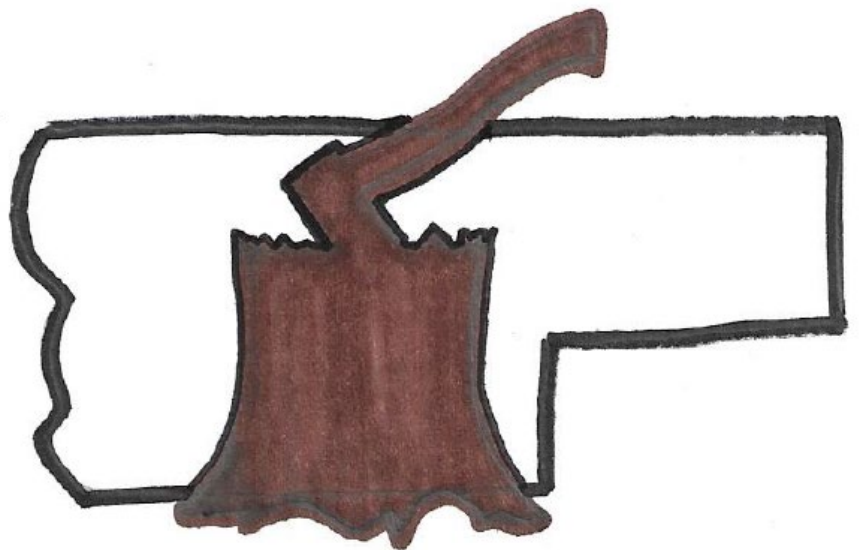


Vernon: Peak of the Bluff

Legs pumping. Breaths come quick.
Sweaty, blurry eyes.
Nearly sick.
The bluffs are built with pines and oaks
That are passed by with every stroke
Of swiping hand up this land
That curves toward the sky.

At the peak
Passing bikes
Litter the trails
Designated for quick appreciation
Of the mountainous bluffs.
The cycling tires
Swipe berries from their branches
Sending them to the forest floor
Waiting to be found and
swallowed whole.
Outside the canopy
The river winks in the distance
Enticing hikers
Down.

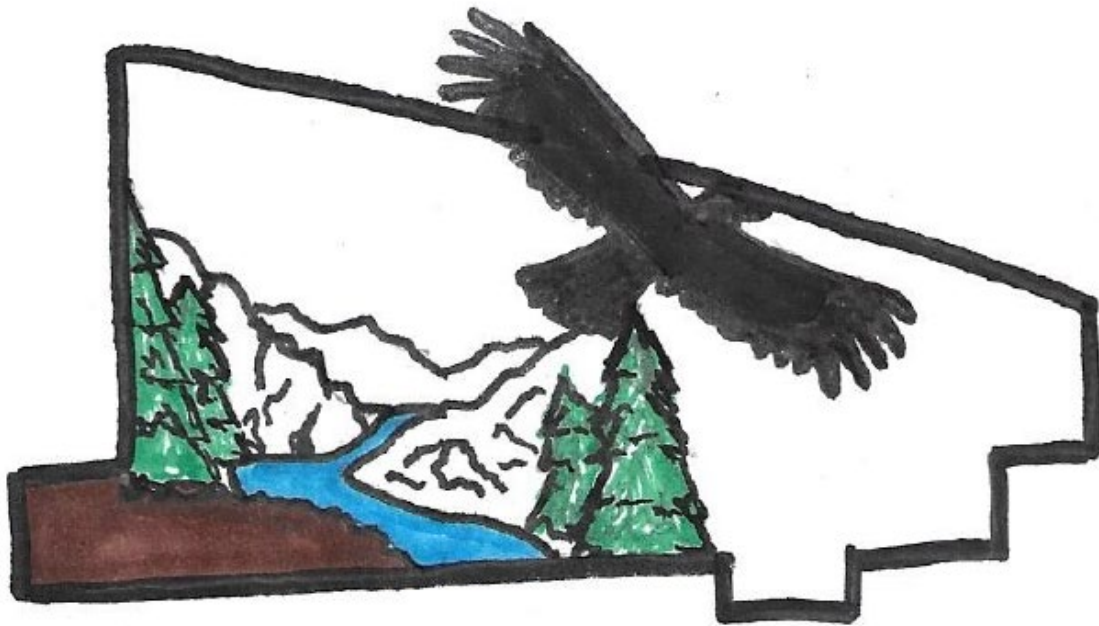
Increasing speed
Toward the bowl
Is soon deemed
Out of control.
Runs turn into falls
And falls turn into rolls.
Rolls turn into bleeding
From legs, back, and elbows.
But the running, rolling, bleeding
Comes to a stop down below
The peak of the bluff.
Swallowed by the bowl.



Vilas: Derby

Intoxicating fumes
From the 87-octane
Spilling from my Ski-Doo
Only heighten my senses
That had already peaked
Around that last corner
That throws me into
The final,
Deafening
Stretch that is checkered in black and white.

Before I even tear the tape
I lift my hand in victory
Ignoring the dusted snow
Blinding me
To the competition
That I didn't even know was there.



Walworth: Where Time Lays Still

As we step our first steps
Onto the first brick of Main Street,
I stop to reflect
On the times laid behind me:

The wooden panels glistened
On the Lake Geneva seas
That held me and my skis
Aloft with blinding speed.
The laughter and lounging
Out on that lake
Was only temporarily ruined
By one glaring mistake:
The loss of my sunnies
That now lay at rest on the sand,
Forever enjoying the warming waves
Rippling overhead.

Now the light red darkens deeper
From drips of Geneva flowing down leg,
Like a fleshy waterfall,
Onto the brick now dark red.

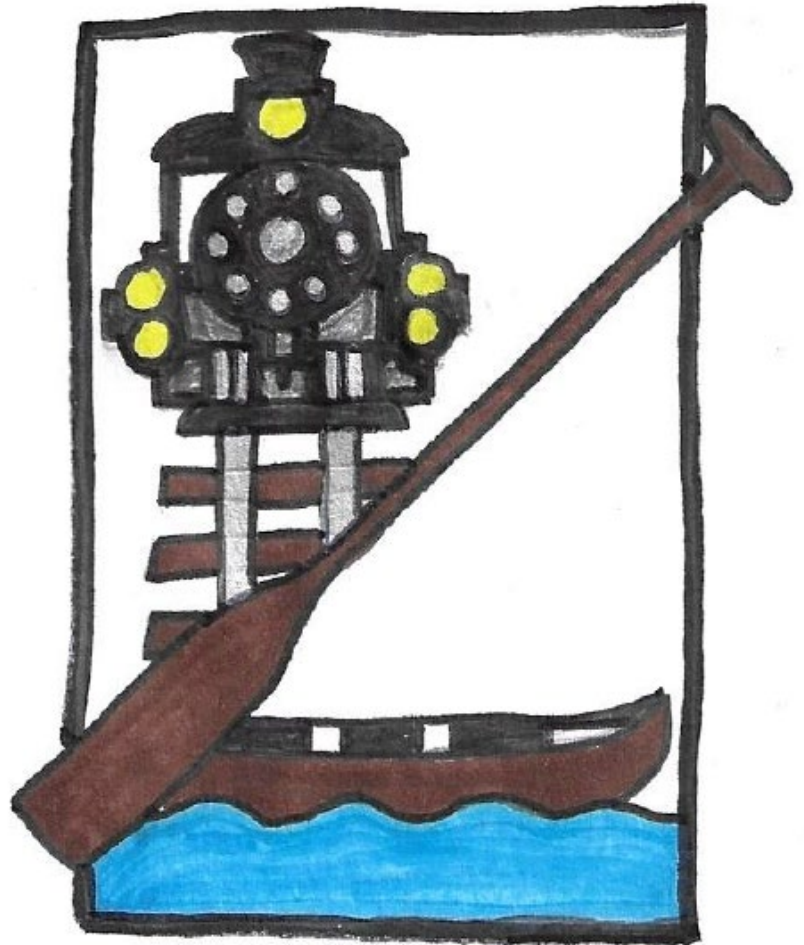
The times lying before me
Are sprinkled with ice cream and fudge,
Or singing and dancing
(Hopefully all the above).
But who knows?
The plans could change wildly!
A pretty girl, for example,
Just winked at me mildly.
It doesn't matter,
'Cause if you can, then you will
On the land in Lake Geneva,
Time lays down still.



Washburn: Of the Same Bark

Among these maples and oaks,
Owls creep
And ravens think,
Beetles shuffle up and down
And scitterish squirrels quietly shrink,
Caterpillars make their homes
Between the branches of the birches,
At daybreak the hawks awaken
And predatory birds begin their searches
Through the thicket of the foliage
For the field mice and the shrews
Scurrying along the forest floor
Finding grubs nibbling on the roots

Shared amongst these maples and oaks.



Washington: Not Far From here

Stuck in traffic,
But I'm okay.
Got cut off,
But I'm okay.
My radio's broken,
But I'm okay.
It starts to rain,
But I'm okay.

Because even in this car
I'm close to the trail
That leads me to Out Of The City:
The Ice age Trail
That takes me back in time
To a world long lost
To the footsteps of concrete,
Noise, and Smog.
The trail's guidance winds
In escape from the encroachment
That I myself need to break.

My foot touches down on the softened dirt,
And now I'm okay.



Waukesha: Egged

Four boys
 (No good, no doubt)
 Sat in the garage,
 Figuring out,
 Just what to do
 With their Saturday night.
 "Let's egg some place!"
 Brad said with some might.
 They carefully planned it:
 The egging of 412 Silver.
 Todd would go to the Kroger
 And soon would deliver
 Four dozen eggs
 (Free range, of course).
 They were led by Art
 (Who they called the worst).
 Then the four of them
 (Derek in back)
 Crept up to 412 Silver
 And quickly attacked.
 Whistling missiles
 Of unfertilized chickens
 Littered the siding and windows.
 And so it was written:
 The floodlights exposed them,
 And they ran for the house.
 Galloping gayly
 Laughter shot out their mouths.
 Back at the garage
 They gathered their breaths.
 Three—no, not four—
 Were all that was left.
 Todd was here,
 Art and Brad made it three.
 Derek was missing!
 (He'd gone back for his keys.)
 The three boys all went home then
 Not sharing a thought

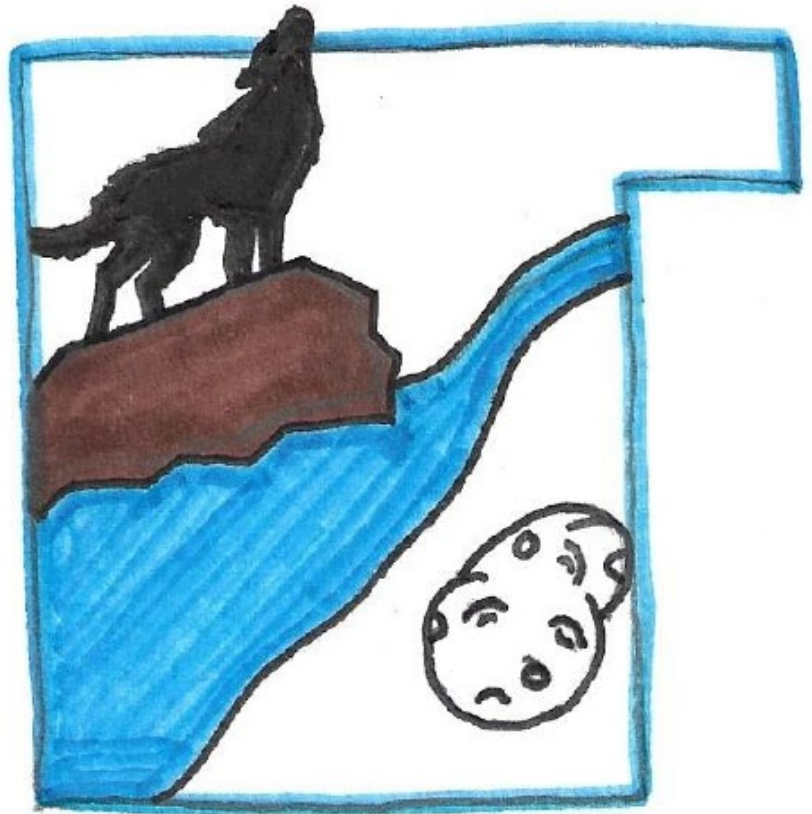


About what had just happened
 And prayed to their God.
 The next day at school,
 To their surprise,
 Todd, Brad, and Art
 Found Derek alive!
 Beaten and bruised,
 He recounted his night:
 Going back for his keys
 The homeowners caught him in flight.
 They bound him and beat him,
 Tied him with rope to a chair,
 Poked him with needles,
 And yanked at his hair.
 After hours of this
 Improv interrogation
 The captors called the police
 And proudly launched their confession.
 It didn't take long
 For the cops to arrive
 To find a teenager smiling
 Because he'd known he survived.
 Moreover, he smiled because
 He knew (and believe me, he flaunted)
 That he could sue this couple
 For that new bike he had wanted.
 Right there in school
 The four all agreed:
 No more egging houses
 (Unless bikes were guaranteed).

Waupaca: Chained

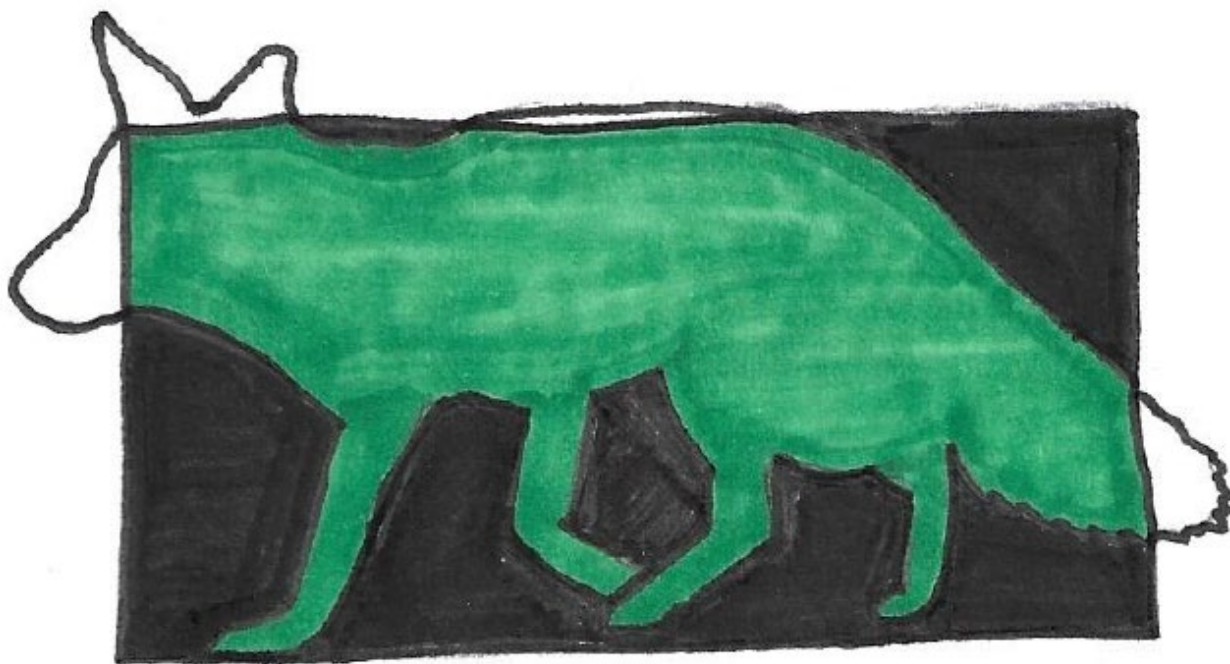
Lakes chained together make for fun trips and sunny skies!
The first toe of the day gets dipped around 8
Into the pale water fitted with a white sand bottom.
The minnows scatter at the breaking of reflections
With boats and tubes
And all sorts of inflatable toys.
Speeding Sea-Doos skip across the surface—
That once was soft and now is concrete—
Towing tubes of fun and games.
A child dunks his head to spy for fish,
But the real fun's up top.

The Sun bakes these memories into hardened treasures.
For when the snow commandeers this place
They will only be totems of laughs long past
And hopes for a summer to come.



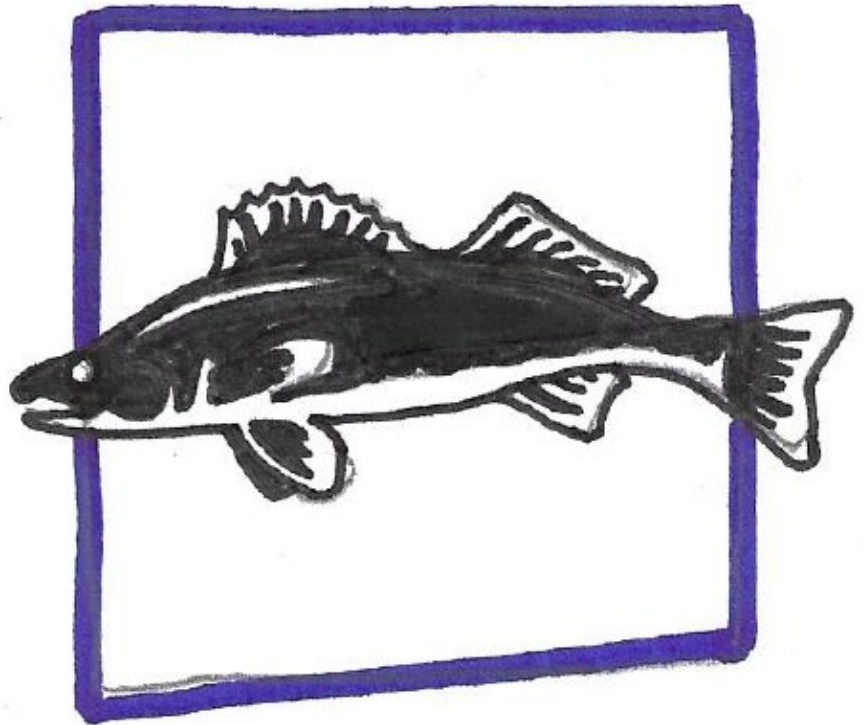
Wauhara: Gem

I'm frantically searching
...but what am I searching for?...
That hidden gem,
That last piece of untouched land
That defines this place.
The last frontier – barely explored.
The last dirt road – often ignored.
The last virgin land – pure to the touch.
The last piece of home. There's no thing as such
A hidden gem:
One I'd love to find,
But I've been swimming in it
All this time.



Winnebago: Calling Foxes

Pointed noses pointing east
Toward the Bago we tread to feast
Along the slippery (almost greased)
Banks littered with fish and geese.
Our energies, they will deplete
Unless we reach Omro, at the least.
Where we can lay our heads and stress release,
Though that will not help the ones deceased.
After nights and nights, we reach our peak:
The mouth of the Bago,
Where we'll rest in peace.



Wood: The Waters of Central Wisconsin

The running, rabid water
Rushed rapidly through
The Rapids of central Wisconsin.

They pushed northward to Marshes
But not before marching
Through the paper mills of Nekoosa.

All the while they adopted aroma
Distinct to central Wisconsin:

That some find repugnant
But I find relieving

For nowhere more centered am I in Wisconsin.

