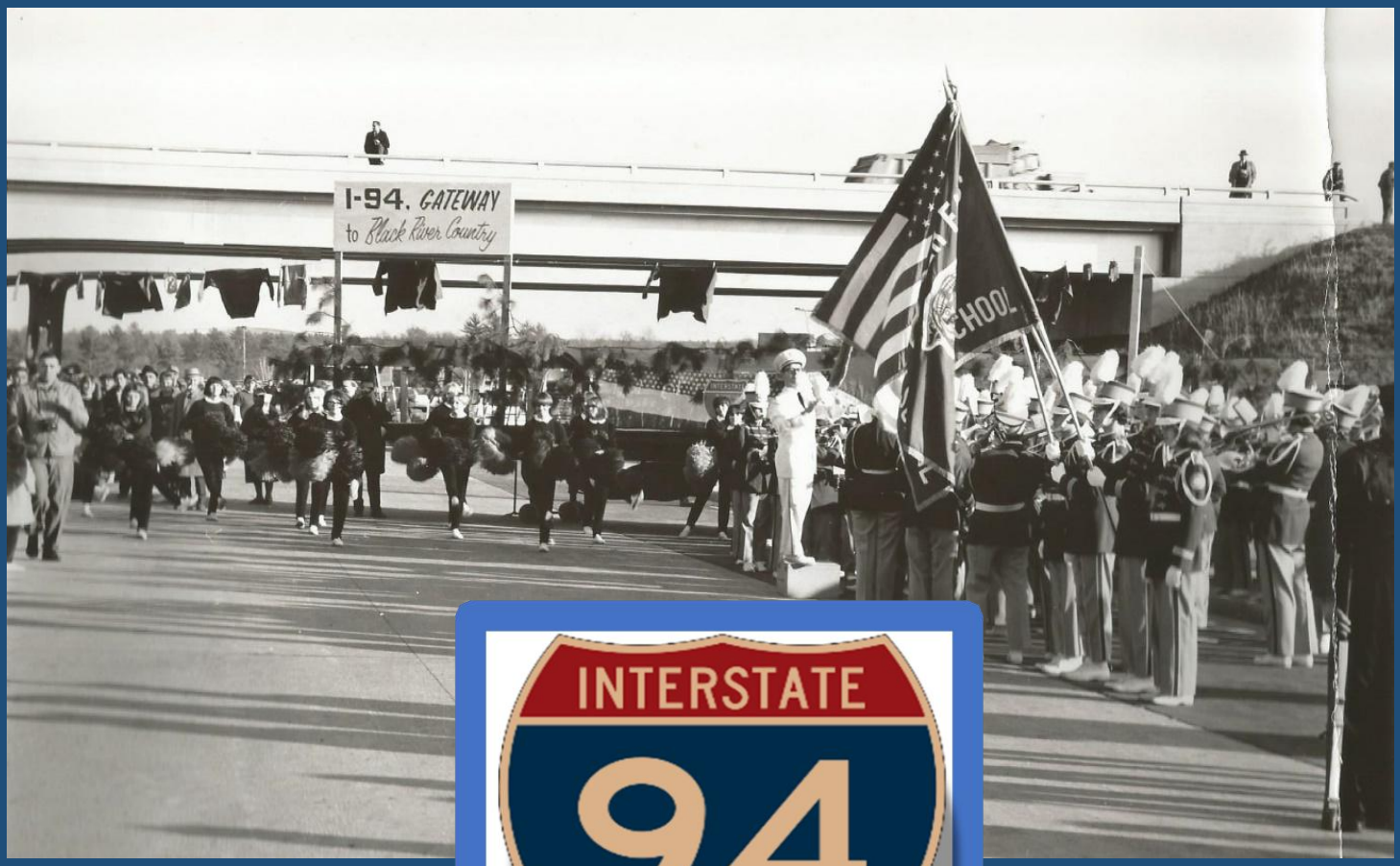
The Falls History Project

The Coming of the Interstate



18th Edition
1919-20

Acknowledgements

From its inception in 1956, the Interstate Highway System forever changed the landscape of the United States. In 2020, the network spans roughly 47,000 miles of roadways. Wisconsin's five primary Interstate Highways and three auxiliary lines comprise nearly 1,100 miles. Our project focuses on I-94, the ribbon of highway that links our region with the wider world. As part of our everyday local reality for more than 50 years, it is easy to take for granted. Historians often pose counterfactuals, and it is certainly thought-provoking to consider what our small city might look like today had we NOT realized that connection in the late 1960s.

Interstate 94 is nearly 1,600 miles long and connects the Great Lakes region to the Northern Plains, running from Port Huron, Michigan to Billings, Montana. The Wisconsin portion of I-94 enters at Pleasant Prairie in Kenosha County and runs 341 miles north and west to Hudson in St. Croix County. There were two significant Interstate openings in the history of our community. In November of 1967, the 56 mile stretch between Black River Falls and Eau Claire was completed at a cost of $38.6 million. The second came in October of 1968 with the completion of the 28 mile, $16 million stretch linking Tomah and Black River Falls. Our project focuses on that second opening.

We owe a debt of gratitude to this year's participants: David Hoffman, Larry Lunda, and Keith Brown. All offered invaluable insights and perspectives on that moment of our small city's history, as you will see. Thanks also to senior intern Sam Lund who teamed up with me for the interviews and spent many, many hours transcribing the conversations. Sam is a true student of history and took on the project with enthusiasm from the start. As always, thanks to Mary Woods who directs the Jackson County History Room at our local library. Mary has been with us since 2002 on nearly every project, guiding us with local sources and the projects would have been impossible without her help!

If I may be permitted to personalize a bit, I was 11 years old in 1968 and have a vivid memory of attending the 1968 opening. My family lived in Black River Falls from 1962-1972 and as we listened to our interviewees recount details from those years, I was transported back to those early days. I also cannot resist sharing a bit of oral history involving my father, Thor Rykken, who served for ten years as Senior Pastor at Evangelical Lutheran Church in Black River Falls. He recounted to me more than once how he spoke out against serving free beer at the I-system's opening in 1968, a suggestion made in the planning sessions leading to the

celebration. Prior to his death in 2013, he recalled these events and said he thought serving alcohol at a highway opening sent the wrong message! Sure enough, while going through his papers after he died, I located the text of the sermon he preached ten days prior to the opening in which he clearly stated his objections. "Better ought to be expected of us at a time when Black River Falls has an opportunity to achieve greatness . . . than to make downtown one huge barroom!" Ultimately, no free beer accompanied the venison burgers served at the celebration. Whether his role was decisive at that moment, I will leave to speculation. The fact that he and others viewed the coming of the Interstate as an "opportunity to achieve greatness" caught my attention and highlights a local debate that rumbled through those years. It is clear from the interviews we did, and not surprising, that not everyone was convinced that the advent of the I-System would be a good thing for the community. As always, progress on any front means change and change has its enemies.[1]

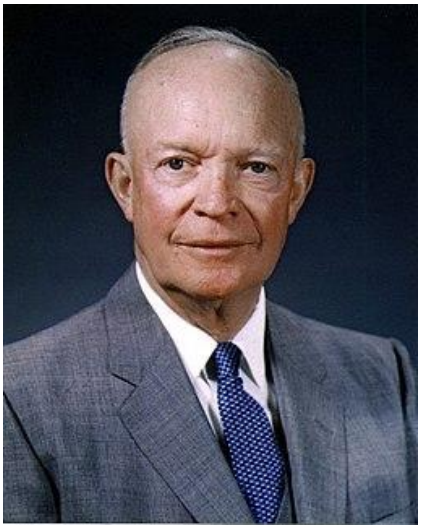
Our 18th project will be my last in the capacity as full-time history teacher at BRFHS, as I am retiring at the conclusion of the school year. 41 years of teaching and coaching, 30 in Black River Falls, has flown. I will continue teaching history, though part time, as an adjunct instructor with UW-Green Bay's Virtual Dual Enrollment Access Academy beginning in the fall of 2020. History colleague Eli Youngthunder will transition to directing the project moving forward, and I suspect we will collaborate in the years ahead. There are many stories yet to tell about our region!

Paul S.T. Rykken
Falls History Project Director
June 2020

Introduction and Context
(by Paul Rykken)

"All historical experience must be imagined before it can be understood."
--- Historian David Blight

For nearly two decades we have explored various facets of our region's history with the goal of imagining our community at an earlier time. Several of our projects explore the connection that residents of a small city in the north central region of the nation have to the grander story of the American past. Our current project focuses on such a story, the coming of the Interstate Highway System in the 1950s and 60s. Our individual and collective stories often turn on events that may be crystal clear at the time, or perhaps not so clear. From the vantage point of 50 years later, it is apparent that when those two exits linked Black River Falls to Interstate 94, our city's trajectory forever changed. Appropriately enough, the idea for the research happened while driving back from a 2018 study at American University in Washington, D.C. where for one week I was immersed in the Presidency of Dwight Eisenhower.[2] Eisenhower, of course, is the President most directly connected to the acceleration of the building of the national system of roads. Motivated, in part, from his frustrating experience as a young Lieutenant Colonel in 1919 in the first-ever Army transcontinental motor convoy, Ike learned first-hand of the poor conditions of the nation's roads. For 62 days and more than 3,000 miles, the nearly 300 military personnel endured impassable roads and frequent breakdowns of vehicles as they traversed the country from east to west averaging just under seven miles per hour. The memories endured and 25 years later, while serving as the Supreme Allied Commander during World War II, now General Eisenhower was deeply impressed by the German Autobahn and what it meant for efficient transportation.[3] A decade later, President Eisenhower transmuted his memories into action.



Dwight D. Eisenhower served as 34th President of the United States (1953-61). He received 55% of the popular vote in 1952 and 57% in 1956. Ike had an average approval rating of 65% during his 8 years in office.

The National Story

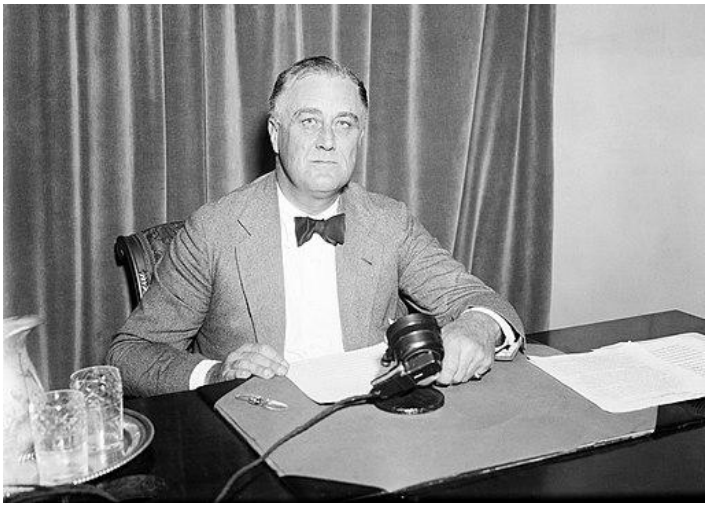
> *A modern, efficient highway system is essential to meet the needs of our growing population, our expanding economy, and our national security. We are accelerating our highway improvement program as rapidly as possible under existing State and Federal laws and authorizations.*[4]
>
> *-- Dwight D. Eisenhower*

Though seemingly mundane, funding, building, and maintaining roads has been an integral feature of our history from the start. From the earliest days of the Republic, efficient roads meant better commerce and connections for people living in what Joseph Ellis calls the "4-mile an hour world."[5] Painfully slow and primitive by modern standards, early roads were vital to the growth of the nation. How to pay for such roads vexed political leaders in those early years – and we know that has not changed. Indeed, the role of the Federal government in funding projects within or between states was a topic of hot debate among the Founders and the generations that succeeded them. Thomas Jefferson, in fact, authorized federal funding for the first National Road in 1806. Built between 1811 and 1837, it connected Cumberland, Maryland to the Ohio River, fulfilling its projected role as a major gateway to the west. By the 1830s, financing and maintenance became a shared federal and state enterprise.[6] Contentious debates over the federal role in funding roads erupted in 1829-30 as Andrew Jackson battled with Congress concerning the Maysville Road.[7] Issuing his first veto as President, Jackson balked at Federal involvement in funding, foreshadowing limited use of federal dollars for interstate projects, and inland waterways improvement.[8]

Photo map courtesy of Fort Necessity National Battlefield.

Emphasis on federally directed road building clearly took a back seat in the era of railroad expansion, another dramatic example of national involvement in transportation infrastructure projects. It was not until the early 20th Century and the emergence of the automobile that intense debates once again ensued over road construction. In 1916, Congress

passed the first federal highway funding law of the 20th Century, the Federal Road Act. Reflecting impulses embodied in the Democratic Party Platform of that year, President Wilson enthusiastically signed the legislation. Providing funding for rural post roads open to the public at no charge, the law devised a plan for federal-state cooperation in road building. World War I unfortunately impeded implementation, though momentum revived with the passage of the Federal Highway Act of 1921.[9] Thomas McDonald who headed the Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) at the time, believed that state highway departments should be strengthened with less federal involvement, an attitude that prevailed until the latter years of the Depression. Franklin Roosevelt promoted constructing interstate highways at federal expense and by 1938 Congress directed the BPR to study the feasibility of building a toll highway network. The resulting 1939 report, "Toll Roads and Free Roads," envisioned 43,000 miles of non-toll highways for the nation, a plan FDR enthusiastically approved and sent to Congress in August of 1939.[10] Once again, however, the needs of the on-coming war effort moved the national road-building plan to the back-burner. In 1944 Congress passed the Federal-Aid Highway Act, the largest such bill up to that time. It authorized a "limited 40,000-mile National System of Interstate Highways, to be selected by the state highway departments, to connect the major metropolitan areas and to serve the national defense."[11] Though the outlines of a grander vision of an inter-connecting system of roads started to be more visible, Congress failed to include adequate funding in the 1944 law. Discussions continued in the post-war period and by 1947, Congress and the Public Roads Administration (successor to the BPR) arrived at a more detailed plan for interstate development and funding. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1952 authorized $25 million for the system, a token amount but a sign of positive momentum.[12]



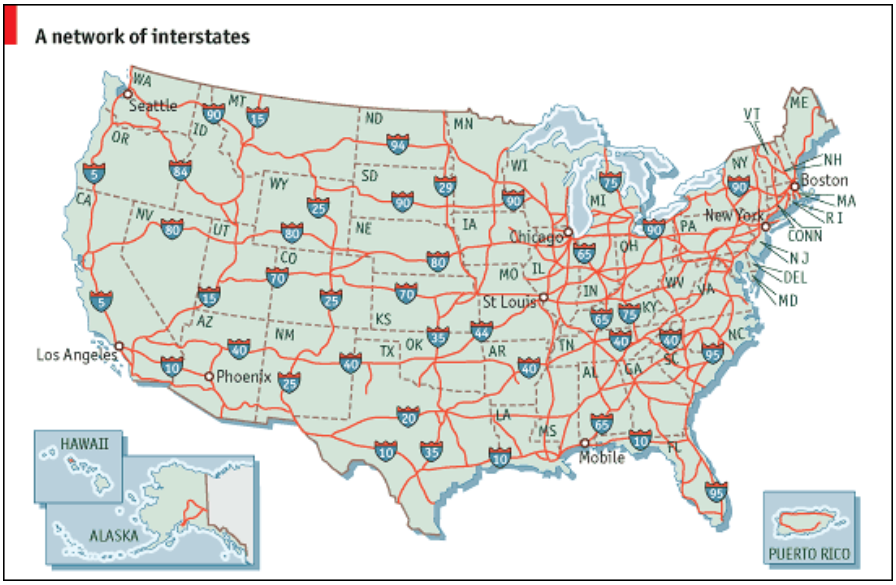
Franklin Roosevelt, 32nd President of the United States, was elected 4 times and served from 1933-1945. Throughout the Depression years, he promoted various infrastructure projects as a means of providing employment and generating economic activity.

The Election of 1952 and Changing Priorities

Dwight Eisenhower's resounding victory in 1952 coincided with a surging economy, booming automobile sales, suburban growth, and Cold War tensions. These factors converged to foster enthusiasm and the political will to devise and fund the largest infrastructure project in our history. In 1954, Ike appointed his former Deputy from the war years, retired General Lucius Clay to head the President's Advisory Committee on the National Highway System. Clay was tasked to work with the nation's Governors in formulating a plan for a "vast system of interconnected highways." In a message to Congress in February of 1955, the President enunciated his rationale for such a system:

> *Our unity as a nation is sustained by free communication of thought and by easy transportation of people and goods. The ceaseless flow of information throughout the Republic is matched by individual and commercial movement over a vast system of interconnected highways crisscrossing the Country and joining at our national borders with friendly neighbors to the north and south. Together, the uniting forces of our communication and transportation systems are dynamic elements in the very name we bear--United States. Without them, we would be a mere alliance of many separate parts.*[13]

Specifically, Eisenhower spelled out four reasons for improving the nation's roads: traffic safety, the costs of deficient roads on vehicle maintenance, the need for quick mobilization and evacuation abilities in case of atomic attack, and planning for the future growth of the nation.[14]



This map from 1956 illustrates the proposed Interstate System with route numbers. Black River Falls would become part of the I-94 development across the northern tier connecting the Great Lakes region to the northern Great Plains. Connecting Billings, Montana to Detroit, Michigan, I-94 is 1,585 miles long.

The Clay Committee's recommendations became the basis for the

National Interstate and Defense Highways Act (Public Law 84-627), signed into law by Ike in June of 1956. Congress authorized $25 billion for fiscal years 1957 through 1969 and expanded the interstate system to 41,000 miles. Eisenhower signed the law with little fanfare from his hospital bed at Walter Reed Army Medical Center while recovering from a minor illness.[15]

From the start, the construction of the Interstate Highway System was to be a joint federal-state operation, with the federal government shouldering 90% of the cost. Cooperation between the Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) and the American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHO) was critical. Design standards were established for urban and rural areas and states began bidding work for the myriad of federal road projects. The complexity of the ongoing story of interstate highway construction cannot be overstated, and not surprisingly, resistance grew as projects expanded, particularly in urban areas. The demolition of businesses and homes to make way for construction garnered intense opposition across the country. Daniel P. Moynihan, an academic soon to be influential Senator from New York, summarized the attitude of many, describing the emerging system as "A vast program thrown together, imperfectly conceived and grossly mismanaged, and in due course becoming a veritable playground for extravagance, waste, and corruption."[16] Moynihan's objections reflected larger debates concerning urban planning in general and the need for updated mass-transit systems. It is clear, however, that by the end of the Eisenhower Administration in January of 1961, the momentum for the Interstate Highway System was unstoppable. Roughly 25% of the 41,000-mile system had been built and was open to traffic.[17]

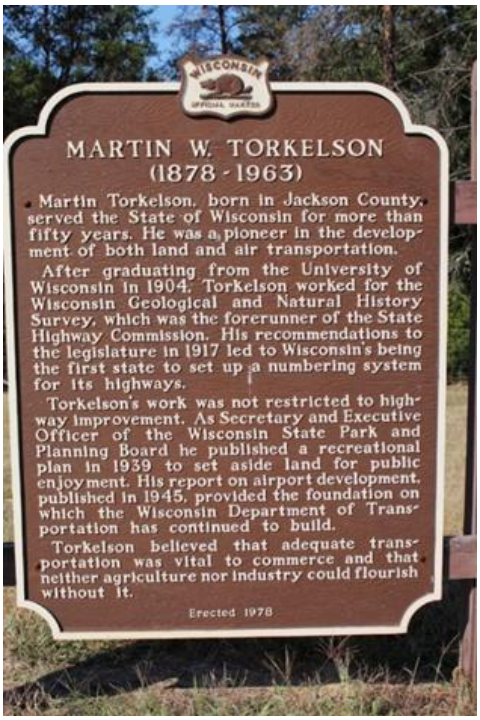
The Wisconsin Story

> *These ribbons of concrete are corridors of commerce – pathways of progress, and tourism is an important ingredient.*[18]
>
> *-- Governor Warren Knowles*

Commerce and transportation networks are integral to Wisconsin's history. In 2020, the state has 8 Interstate Highways, 14 U.S. Highways, and 158 State Trunk Highways. In addition, each of the 72 counties maintains a system of roads.[19] Precursors to the various networks predated European settlement. Native American trails often connected important landmarks and villages and served as trade routes and future highways.[20] In the early territorial days, the US Military often maintained such routes for movements of troops and supplies. Until the end of the 19th Century, however, extensive road development remained sporadic and decentralized as

railroad lines became the central mode of transport for people and commerce. The situation dramatically changed with the advent of the automobile in the early years of the 20th Century. The establishment of the Wisconsin Highway Commission in 1911 signaled important changes and foreshadowed growth of the state's roadways.

Following passage of the Federal Highway Law in 1916, Wisconsin became the first state to establish a system of numbered "trunk" highways in 1917. Trunk highways, a term first used in Britain, connected county seats and cities with populations of 5,000 or more and provided a strategic infrastructure (or trunk) for future roadways. Jackson County born Martin W. Torkelson is credited with the original numbering and marking system in Wisconsin, later replicated in other states. Trunk roads, as in the case of Wisconsin Highway 12 (later US Highway 12) were important and future interstate lines often followed original trunk lines within the states.[21] By 1924, the numbered US Highway System was established at the Federal level and the nation's roads and highways continued to expand exponentially. Driven by the Great Depression and resulting New Deal legislation of the 1930s, Wisconsin launched multiple public works projects leading to a massive expansion of the state system.



This roadside historical marker is located 5 miles south of Black River Falls on Highway 27. Torkelson's work during those early years was certainly significant and largely forgotten today.

As noted earlier, the push for an interconnected and efficient system of roadways in the United States gained early momentum in January of 1944 during that latter stages of World War II. By 1945, the Wisconsin State Highway Engineer submitted tentative route designations for Wisconsin and preliminary planning began in earnest, continuing for the next decade. In addition, the Turnpike Commission, established in 1953, analyzed the feasibility of using toll-roads in Wisconsin, like neighboring states to the south and east. Ultimately, Wisconsin officials decided not to go that direction for funding.[22] Without question, early planning proved to be complex and filled with stops and starts, particularly in the southeastern corridors of the state. The state's first expressway was opened in September of 1958 and in the following decade, more than 75% of the state system was completed. By 1969, Wisconsin, in fact, was among the national leaders in road development, completing its initial rural I-System lines.

Wisconsin's first expressway, a seven-mile stretch of I-94 in Waukesha County, was dedicated in September of 1958. Governor Vernon Thomson is holding the scissors. "Miss Concrete" and "Miss Blacktop" were also present that day, as was future governor Warren Knowles!

The Interstate Arrives in Black River Country

> *The citizens of Black River Falls and contiguous area will in the next few years observe a great amount of development. We will be living in a period of adventure.*[23]
>
> *-- Mayor Oswald Johnson, Black River Falls*

Small river communities owe their development to strategic location. This is clearly the case with Black River Falls. The indigenous people of the region, village dwellers who moved seasonally with the rhythms of nature, utilized rivers for commerce, trapping, and fishing, and referred to the place as *N'įoxawanį eeja* -- "where the water disappears."[24] The second-wave New Englanders who established the village as future site of the growing community in 1838, came into the valley seeking the tall pines of the forest, and the falls powered the earliest sawmills. The fast-flowing Black River carried logs to LaCrosse and the Mississippi.[25] Thus it was natural that the city became a crossroads of sorts with increasing commercial development. The formation of Jackson County in 1853 as an offshoot of LaCrosse County, accelerated the

process as Black River Falls was designated as the County Seat. In the post-Civil War period, William T. Price, brought the Western Wisconsin Railroad to the river city and rail travel became the dominant mode of transportation into the early years of the 20th Century.[26] With the advent of greater automobile traffic in the early 1900s, the development of more sophisticated roads and by 1920, Black River Falls had three major highways dissecting the community – U.S. Highway 12, and Wisconsin Highways 54 and 27 as noted on this contemporary map of the area.

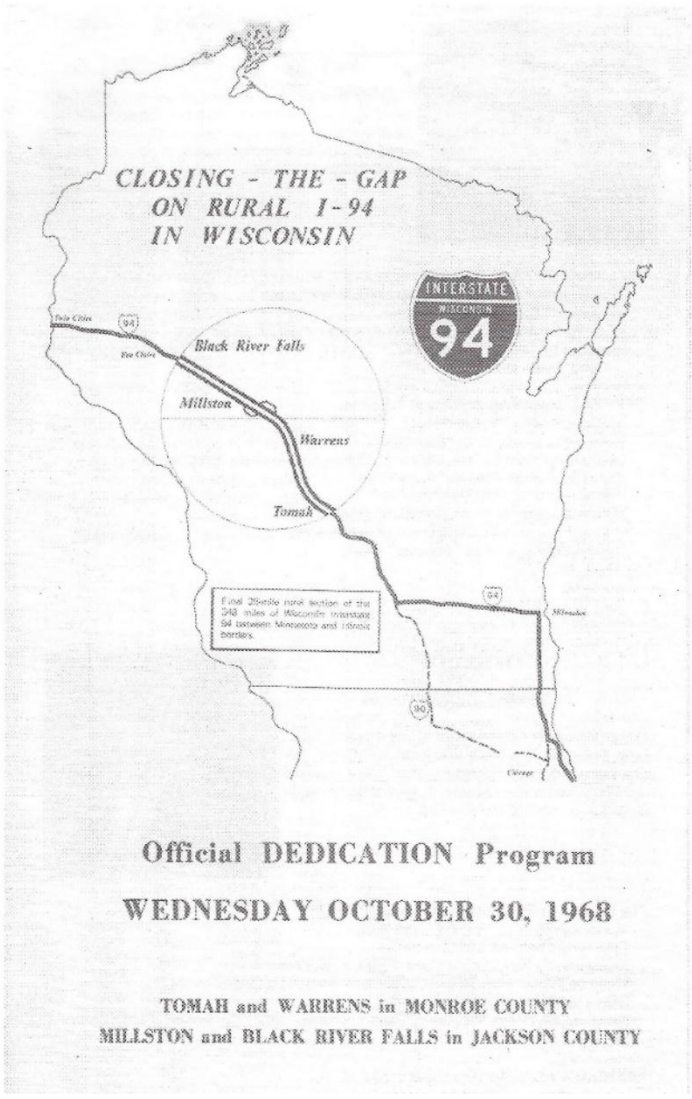
This convergence of major highways, and the fact that I-94 mirrored U.S. Highway 12 in its trajectory, made Black River Falls a natural site for the developing Interstate system in the 1950s. As noted previously, the Wisconsin portion of Interstate 94 runs north and west between Pleasant Prairie in the southeast and Hudson in the northwest. The 56-mile section from Black River Falls to Eau Claire was completed in 1967, followed by the 28-mile Tomah to Black River Falls segment in 1968, significant because it completed the 341 miles of roadway comprising I-94. Further, access to those three highways prompted two exits into the city, exit 115 on the west securing access to Highways 12 and 27, and Exit 116 on the east, connecting to Highway 54.[27]

In back-to-back years in the late 1960s, then, Black River Falls became the site of two grand openings related to the I-System. From the vantage point of 50 years later, the opening celebrations truly reflect a piece of Americana. Images and accounts from the Banner Journal indicate the importance of these events to citizens of the community and region. The first such opening occurred in early November of 1967. State officials, including Lieutenant Governor Jack B. Olson, helped choreograph multiple stops along the stretch from Eau Claire to Black

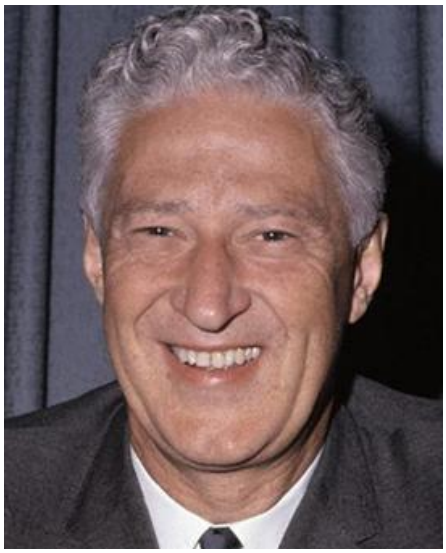
River Falls. Local volunteers stepped forward to plan events and welcome state officials for ribbon-cutting ceremonies, parades, and downtown celebrations.[28] The Black River Falls ceremony was the last of eight stops on November 9th, including a caravan of more than 200 cars. Local officials made the most of the city's designation as "Deer Capital of Wisconsin," serving more than 1,700 venison burgers. The BRFHS band, decked out in their red and gray uniforms, performed for the crowd and a drum group from the "Winnebago Indians" (now Ho-Chunk) closed the ceremony. Black River Falls Mayor Oswald Johnson presented a crimson hunting shirt to Lieutenant Governor Olson and predicted "a bright future for this community and county."[29]

Celebrating the Final Stretch: Tomah to Black River Falls

With excitement and enthusiasm, residents planned their second "Grand Opening" in less than a year. Two weeks in advance, local merchants gathered for planning. Present at the meeting were G.C. Waarvik, William Wilcox, Althord Larson, Don Berg, Jerry Bares, Gene Dana, Dan McKeeth, Ervin Bollom, Glen Voskuil, Archie Fisher, Louis Gardipee, Martha O'Brien, Toddy Porath, Bruce Gasch, Mike Anderson, and Gene Savage. Planning included activities in the downtown area for the evening of the opening, along with various innovations for the actual opening of the Interstate prior to downtown festivities. The planning committee, again, was interested in promoting the city's reputation as the "Deer Capital of Wisconsin," to highlight



businesses and regional attractions, and put their "best foot forward" in welcoming many special guests to the area, including the Governor.[30]



Republican Warren P. Knowles served as Wisconsin's 36th Governor from 1965-1971. His years of service in Wisconsin coincided with the building of the Interstate Highway system. Coincidentally, Knowles died of a heart attack while participating in the Governor's Fishing Opener in 1993 at Lake Arbutus, 12 miles from Black River Falls.

Proclaimed by Governor Knowles as "I-94 Day in Wisconsin," Wednesday, October 30th brought crisp fall weather. The preliminary program at the site of the opening, started at 3:00 p.m. with announcements by Gay Upton, followed by musical selections by the BRFHS Band directed by Al Perner. Wisconsin's 21st "Alice in Dairyland," Bobbie Thoreson, and "Miss National Rural Electrification," Sandy Meissner joined "Smokey the Bear" as special guests. The BRFHS pom-pom girls – the "Tigerettes" – also performed under the direction of Dorothy Berg. The ribbon-cutting ceremony by the Governor was a moment to remember. A late afternoon parade through downtown Black River Falls was followed by various activities, including a street dance and the free distribution of the ever-popular venison burgers by local volunteers. As noted in the local paper, "While darkness overtook the parade, there was no lack of enthusiasm. The shivering queens who came from all over the region and spent their entire afternoon in the chill winds, and the bare legs of the girls in the bands wore a slightly purple look, especially after the sun went down." Governor Knowles welcomed 250 members of the Wisconsin Road Builders Association to the Armory for an evening banquet where he extolled the importance of the completion of I-94, especially as it related to commerce and tourism. Guests were presented with five-pound boxes of cranberries by the Warrens community and hunting jackets were presented to John Jamison, Federal Deputy Highway Administrator (Washington, D.C.), Virden Staff, Illinois Highway Engineer, and Mrs. G.H. Bakke, wife of the Wisconsin Secretary of Transportation (Madison), among others.[31] Meanwhile, the downtown celebration continued into the late evening hours.

Epilogue

Although not evident at the time, that cold day in late October forever changed the city of Black River Falls in ways that were immediately apparent and some that were not. For residents with a living memory of the late 1960s, the completion of the I-94 line reminds them of

the tremendous volume of traffic that flowed through the downtown prior to the coming of the Interstate. Particularly during the peak tourism season, it is estimated that more than 22,000 vehicles per day, an average of 900 per hour, would go through the chokepoint near the bridge where Wisconsin 54 and U.S. 12 intersected. It was not unusual for traffic to be backed up more than 6 miles on both sides of the city. Oswald Johnson, the city's Mayor during this period, continually wrote letters to state authorities pleading for help with traffic control. "The problem became so severe last summer that it once took me about a half an hour to reach the city from county trunk E, a distance of about 4 miles," Johnson said. Leaders also sought more help from the Jackson County Law Enforcement Committee. City Alderman Harold Olson noted that "the city of Black River Falls pays more than 40 percent of the county taxes, so we would hope for some assistance from the county in our traffic problem." The traffic debate provides important context for the mixed feelings of local citizens about the Interstate. Mayor Johnson's commentary from December of 1968 capture these sentiments: "Economically, it will stimulate business, although it may harm some retail facilities. At present, the opening has been like a 'blood-clot' to several gasoline service stations whose business has been shut off from the mainstream of traffic . . . But, all in all, I anticipate that I-94 will stimulate our economy in many ways. The citizens of Black River Falls and contiguous area will in the next few years observe a great amount of development. We will be living in a period of adventure." Johnson's commentary has been borne out in succeeding years and more than 50 years later, the adventure created by the Interstate Highway System continues to unfold.

Looking north and west from atop the bridge into downtown Black River Falls. The corner of Wisconsin 54 and U.S. 12 saw dramatic traffic volume prior to the opening of the Interstate in the late 1960s. This is a contemporary photograph and it is important to realize that at the time of the opening in 1968, the bridge was a two-lane road. (Photo by Joel Busse)

Commentary on the Interviews

The purpose of the following interviews is to personalize and therefore enhance our understanding of the story we are presenting. We attempt to transcribe the language accurately, including the less formal speech patterns employed in our conversational speech. It takes many hours to transcribe a one-hour interview and we thank FHP Intern Sam Lund for completing that work. Since our first project in 2002, we have interviewed 65 of our county's residents and the projects serve as a powerful repository of our local voices. We have chosen to continue transcribing them in this format for the sake of preserving them.

David Hoffman

David Hoffman is a lifelong resident of Black River Falls. By the 1950s, Hoffman Construction was one of many companies contracted by the Wisconsin DOT to work on the interstate, mainly through paving and grading roads. Dave started out with various jobs under his father Duane (the owner of the company at the time), and eventually came to command his own grading crew by the time the project was finished. Ultimately, he served as President of Hoffman Construction from 1979 to 2008, and currently serves as Vice-President.

Interviewed by Paul Rykken and Sam Lund (12/17/20)
Transcription by Sam Lund

Rykken: Alright Dave, I guess we'll get started. Sam and I are going to tag-team a little bit here. You got your backup going, Sam?
Lund: It's ready.
Rykken: Can you start off by giving us your name and date of birth?
Hoffman: David Hoffman, born on November 12th, 1942. I grew up in Black River, I went to the grade school - which is now Union Place - and I lived at 201 Jackson, which was half a block from the school. I might've taken hot lunch twice while at school; otherwise I'd just walk home and have my mother make me lunch or make it myself if she wasn't there. I eventually graduated in 1961 from high school.
Rykken: That was what would become Third Street Elementary, right?
Hoffman: Yeah, and in fact we might've been the last class to graduate from there - I can't remember.
Rykken: I think it was the class after you.
Hoffman: Yeah, it was 1962. After that, they moved up here. Anyways, growing up in Black River was good. I remember the swimming pool, which was just down the hill from where we

lived, and where the Deer Park is now. I'd spend a lot of time down there. On the weekends, we'd go up to our cabin in Hatfield and do stuff there. My dad's sister and her husband lived in Long Beach, California, so we'd go out there once or twice a year and see them. Life was good, as they say, and we got to see a lot.
Rykken: Your parents were Duane and Lavina, correct?
Hoffman: Correct.
Rykken: And who was your grandfather?
Hoffman: My grandfather was Pete Hoffman.
Rykken: And he's the one that started the company?
Hoffman: Yes, right around 1916.
Rykken: Did you know him well?
Hoffman: Well, there's an interesting story: Pete Hoffman was shot and killed in 1927.
Rykken: Oh right, I remember hearing about this.
Hoffman: Before 1916, he ran a dray line with horses and wagons. I remember my dad telling me about how he'd help take a load of kerosene to Melrose, and that'd be a full-day trip with a team of horses and a tanker wagon. Basically, everything came in by rail, so he spent most of his time delivering packages like FedEx does today. Then, in 1916, they got involved with a road project: the Alma Center Ridge. He had some horses and wagons to help carry material, and Fred Meeks had some as well, so those two - plus two others who had lots of money, I don't remember their names - got together, put their bid into the state, and got the job. Then other work began to pop up, and that's how Hoffman Construction got going. When Fred died in 1922, it was just Pete left. That was the same year my dad graduated from UW-Madison; he'd been spending time working with Pete since he was 15.

An early photograph of a horse-drawn wagon used by Peter Hoffman for regional hauling.

Rykken: What is that expression, "dray line"? I've always wondered what that meant.
Hoffman: I'm not certain, but I'd guess it refers to horse and wagon transportation and delivery. I'd have to google it to be sure.
Rykken: Yes, that's what I picture. *(Editor's Note: A* dray *is the truck transportation from one hub to the other within the intermodal chain. A* dray service *includes moving loaded and empty containers and chassis between rails, empty depots, shippers, and receivers.)*
Rykken: When did you start getting involved with Hoffman?
Hoffman: Well, from 7th grade until graduation, I worked on my dad's farm out by Alma Center during the summer. I'd stay out there with Lyman Larson and his wife Edna, who were very good to me. Let me tell you, you learn a lot when you spend some time on a

farm - everything you'd need to know for just about any other job. Once I graduated, my dad gave the choice of staying on the farm or helping him build roads; seeing how much money I was making from the farm… I decided to try roads instead. From then on, I worked with Hoffman. It was around that time that Hoffman got two jobs on the interstate. One was on Highway 51 and I-90, near Stoughton, Edgerton. The other one was down towards Madison. I spent that summer working with Hoffman, and I made enough money - around $3,000 - so that I could go to UW-Madison, and every summer I came back to work to earn more money. My dad could've just given me the money, but I wanted to earn it myself. I worked with Jack Kimball - do you remember him?
Rykken: I remember the name, but I never met him.
Hoffman: He was my dad's right-hand man, like Dick Lindow was my right hand. Jack had been working with Pete and Duane since they'd had horses - actually, to back up a little bit, they had a road project down in Irving in 1927 and the job got dropped right in his lap when Pete was killed. Jack started working with him and decided to stick with him. I ended up working for Jack, and he focused on building the culverts and all that.
Rykken: Was he a local worker?
Hoffman: Yes he was - don't you remember Bob Kimball?
Rykken: Well, again I only remember hearing the name.
Hoffman: Bob was the guy from Hank's Bar.
Rykken: Oh, okay… back to the previous topic, was this shooting a random thing, or…
Hoffman: Well, there was a government program at the time that Pete was working on, and this guy came down from the Twin Cities - and this guy wasn't quite right. When my grandpa interviewed him, he could tell something was wrong, so he gave him some excuse about how the guy's papers weren't right and that he couldn't hire him, though he offered to pay for the man's return trip. When Pete left the depot, the man followed him out to his car - this was at the old depot, where Federation Co-Op is now. The guy followed him out, pulled out a gun, and shot him. Everyone was shocked that this could happen - my dad didn't want anything to do with guns after that incident.
Rykken: So, the guy was seeking work and got turned away?
Hoffman: Yep, and interestingly, after the guy was captured - he seemed dazed and confused when they found him - my dad told me that there was a group of people that were gonna go down to the jail and "take care" of this guy, since Pete Hoffman was a very well-liked person in town. My dad went down there and got them to disperse - he wanted the law to take care of this. The guy was convicted and sent to prison - he died a couple years later.
Rykken: Wow… that's a story.
Lund: Wasn't expecting to hear *that* today…
Hoffman: Anyway, after that event, my dad - having graduated college in 1926 and wanting to carry on with the business - incorporated Hoffman Construction, creating the modern form of the company in 1927.
Rykken: Where did he go to school?
Hoffman: Madison. My dad was a smart guy - he graduated with his degree in 4 years, which wasn't so common back then.
Rykken: And then you went to Madison as well - I guess that's a generational thing. What did you study?
Hoffman: I majored in geography and took some geology courses as well. Most people in my business train to be Civil Engineers, but I decided that with all the money the business now had, I could just *hire* a civil engineer. To be honest, when most people say that you go to college to learn how to do this thing or that, I say that the only thing I learned in college was how to think. I had some good times there - even though I had to study a lot, since the course material was sped up, and not to mention that the competition got harder too, since now you're competing with kids from bigger, better schools.

Rykken: So, you graduated from there in 1965?
Hoffman: Yep, 1965.
Rykken: And you came right back into working here?
Hoffman: I went right back to work, and we got our first job for the interstate in Trempealeau County. I spent most of my time operating a scrapper.
Lund: So, you mentioned how the company got started, what was some of the other work that they did between when they were founded and when they started on the interstate?
Hoffman: Well that's kind of interesting… you know what happened in 1929 to the Stock Market?
Lund: Yeah.
Hoffman: It went right down, so when my dad took over in 1927, he had plenty of work for 2 or 3 years - he actually got married about one month after the collapse - but then there wasn't any work to do, it dried up. There was nothing going on; the government didn't have any money to pay us for new roads. However, it happens that my dad inherited the expert horseman trait from my grandfather, and he happened to be related to Ike Hollenbeck. Ike ended up becoming sheriff for a few years, and he happened to also be an excellent horseman. So, to put food on the table, they went into business as horse jockeys. Ike would go up to Canada to buy these good work horses, and then ship them back down here by rail. My dad and him would then sell them out to farmers in need.
Rykken: So, they were horse traders?
Hoffman: Pretty much. I should've written them down, but he had so many good stories about those horses. My favorite - and you're gonna love this - was "Never Trade Horses with A Preacher because you were expected to give them to him for free in exchange for going to heaven."
Rykken: (*Laughs*) That's good, that's good.
Hoffman: So, they did that through the Depression, with maybe a little road work here and there. Once World War II started, however, everybody went back to work. It was during that time that the Army created Camp McCoy, and my dad was one of the four contractors who helped to build it. That really helped to get his business going again - we specialized in moving dirt. In Wisconsin, most construction companies can be grouped into Excavators (like Hoffman), Bridge Builders - like Lunda - Concrete Pavers, and Crushers. It's like that to this day, and that setup probably developed during this time, when Wisconsin would start putting out bids to companies who wanted to do a specific job. We'd always go after grading jobs, and if there were structures that needed to be made on that, then we'd get quotes from Lunda, Kramer, or whoever else was in the area. Basically, on a road project in Wisconsin, whoever could control the biggest part of the job money-wise would be the one to bid on it. Anyway, World War II came along, and my dad went to work on Camp McCoy. Another interesting part there was that my dad actually got drafted in 1943; he was supposed to be shipped off to the South Pacific to build airstrips. He told the commander of the base about it, and the commander actually overrode my dad's previous assignment so that he could stay there to finish the construction. By the time McCoy was finished in 1945, the war was pretty much over, so he got lucky there. Another interesting thing was that my mother, Lavina, actually grew up in Sparta, which has a lot of sand nearby. Sand makes it so that weather isn't as big an issue with construction, so my dad got a lot of jobs over there. Basically, if a job wasn't in an area with sand, then he didn't really want it; he was still small enough so that skipping a job wouldn't hurt the company too much. He'd usually only get one job per year.
Rykken: Interesting… so he only did jobs that wouldn't be affected by water?
Hoffman: Yeah, but he'd still do State Highway jobs, and… I actually just saw a picture on Facebook a few weeks ago, with Bill Nichols and Ross Huber. The back of the picture had the Speltz Studios label on it; my dad had hired Speltz for a job on Highway 53, north of Galesville. Our office still has some of those pictures from them hanging up on the walls. Anyways, he did

some of the State Highways before the interstate, and some of the roads up by Osseo near Highway 10 since it was all sandy up there. He built the road from here to Sparta - except for the Cataract section, since that was rocky - as well as the road to City Point.
Rykken: So, someone else would come in and do those unwanted sections?
Hoffman: All with one other company: S.J. Groves, a company out of Minneapolis. They did all the rock cuts for him, and he did the rest. Also, a lot of the ponds and marshes around here used to be borrow pits where we'd take out sand to use in construction, and then the water and wildlife would come in and fill it back in.
Lund: Alright… so we kind of touched on this already, but how exactly did Hoffman get involved with Interstate construction? Were you contracted by the state or the federal government?
Hoffman: We worked under the Wisconsin DOT, which got its basic orders from the Fed. You probably know how the interstate came about, right? Eisenhower saw the Autobahn in Germany during WW2 and realized that it was not only a good transportation system, but a good defense system too, since they could move people and equipment around very efficiently. The whole interstate was originally built for defense purposes when it got started in 1956 - it was a Cold War thing - but it quickly got overtaken by the general public, which is how we think of it today.
Rykken: Did Hoffman Construction have any connection to it that early, or did that come later?
Hoffman: Our first job was in 1959, when the interstate was just getting started down by Madison and Milwaukee. My dad wasn't completely sure about working on it, since most of the planned route was on clay and not sand, and their spot was pretty far away from Black River. However, because our company was capital-intensive - a bulldozer cost 50K back then, today they'd be at least ten times that - the company basically consisted of one crew, which would include four to six scrappers, six bulldozers, a couple motor-graders, things like that.

Lund: So fairly small?
Hoffman: Yeah, it was a small company, and he didn't want to get sawed off, so to speak - he was a conservative guy when it came to that. Remember, he lived through the Depression, so he knew what could happen. In fact, one time he recommended that I buy a certain farm out near Alma Center; when I asked him why I should, he told me that it never hurts to be prepared for the next time you find yourself without a job, and you need to grow your own plants and raise your own animals. It took me a while to understand, but I still bought the farm - still own it today, in fact. I guess it was a good investment. Anyway, we got started on the interstate in 1959, on the interchange between I94 and Highway 12 in Lake Delton.
Rykken: Ok… I guess the other question we had was what happened up near Black River - did you have anything to do with the Hoffman Cut? That's how I always heard it when growing up - it's that cut in the rock on the way to Hixton.

Hoffman: Oh, we didn't get that job. It was L.G. Arnold that was given that section. We had the Northfield cut in 1966.
Rykken: Oh okay, the Northfield cut. That's the...
Hoffman: That's the big one, before you get to Northfield. Speaking of which, did you hear about the goat there? People said there was a goat hanging out around there this summer, even took pictures of it. Amy Hoffman even says she saw it. Anyway, it was a big project for Hoffman.
Rykken: Was that the biggest project they had done up to that point?
Hoffman: Up to that point? Probably. The only thing that came close was the job up near Osseo in 1965, on Highway 10 - we had two jobs up there in Trempealeau County. With the interstate coming about, there was enough work out there so that you could invest heavily in your company and have a guarantee that you'd get a return on your investment. So that was when we started growing the company?
Rykken: So, you would've been fairly young then - just out of college?
Hoffman: Yes. I remember having two different jobs on the interstate back in 1961, one by Stoughton-Edgerton and one on Highway N. Interestingly, my dad actually had to go to an equipment auction down in Arkansas, because he didn't have enough equipment for two different jobs simultaneously. The auction actually got rained out the first time, and when he went down the second time, he brought me along. I was just out of high school then. He bought an entire new grading crew - all Cat equipment that was barely used. It's kind of like buying a used car; it only needs to be used three or four years before the selling price goes down by half, even if it worked fine. That equipment was actually used originally for a dam project, and they just happened to finish right before the auction. I suppose a lot of times in life, things are a matter of timing. Anyway, once that happened, we had enough equipment for both jobs - that was 1961. Then in 1965 we got two jobs from Northfield to about halfway to the county line. That was the latest in the year we ever worked since it had been a pretty mild winter. As long as the dirt doesn't freeze and can still be compacted, we could still work. I think it was on January 4th of 1966 that a cold front came through, and it took half the day to just start up the vehicles. We actually had to call the sheriff for an escort so we could move our equipment from Northfield to Black River - winter is typically when you work on fixing your equipment anyways. The next spring, we finally finished the Northfield cut, with the help of our three new thirty-yard scrapers, plus some D9s, another rubber-tired dozer - he essentially bought another crew. Now, the Northfield cut was a little different since it was so deep. We actually bought a test drill and drilled down to where we could no longer penetrate the sand rock. It turned out that we would need to drill and shoot the sand rock as well as clear more dirt, to the point where we had to use dynamite. My dad had a hard time sleeping, since he was worrying about that job every night. Then, in 1967, we got a job for the Interstate from Tomah up to Warrens. In 1968 we had two jobs on I-90 in Sparta - home country for us. Those two jobs had about 4 million cubic yards between them, and that was by far the biggest job we ever had. We had to get another scraper crew to complete it - those new machines really helped out.
Rykken: One thing I'm interested in is were you contracting under the state or federal government?
Hoffman: It was always under the Wisconsin DOT if that's what you're asking. The project was financed by 90% federal money, 10% state money, and there was a federal district office in Madison that had to approve the state's plans before they could implement them. The state would then contract the projects out to the contractors. The low bid on the project would get the work.
Rykken: Okay, I didn't know that. Sort of a classic example of federalism, right there. The other thing we wanted to get into - there's still two questions we want to get to, since we've already been here 45 minutes, but that's okay - can you give us some background on how Black River

ended up with two exits? There's some story involved there, because apparently there was originally only supposed to be the north bridge.
Hoffman: I really don't know, though I'd like to know too. My theory is that because we had both Highways 54 and 12, they decided it would just be easier to have two exits. If you remember, it was around this time that 54 changed direction and went straight, instead of going out by the Box factory.
Rykken: Okay, so that happened then… somebody once told me that McDonald had some land over in that area near the 54 crossing, and that he might've had something to do with it...
Hoffman: Yeah, McDonald had his farm over there. I don't know about that for sure, but I think it was just out of convenience, rather than any backroom deals. I don't think a single individual can influence the DOT's plans. With the power of Eminent Domain, they're going to build wherever they think is most beneficial to the public - if it hurts the landowner, then so be it.
Rykken: I mean, I guess it makes sense. The reason I bring it up is because my other question was what were people thinking at the time about how this would change Black River?
Hoffman: I think it was positive, very positive. It was always bumper to bumper on Highway 12, and you couldn't get anyway. In 1967, when I had stopped working on the machines and I had my own crew, we were working near Millston, along with some guy's company out of Iron Mountain, Michigan. We actually had the borrow pits lined up, so he did the part from the river to the railroad, and we went from the railroad to the rest area. Anyways, when we finished each day and went home - oh my god, I can still remember those Friday nights, carpooling home with some other buddies - including Pudge Kimball, he was quite the character. He'd been around since the company had been using horses. He was the one my dad had gotten to teach me how to operate a scraper. Anyway, there was one night where the traffic was so bad that Pudge actually got out of the car by Castle Mound, and we didn't catch up to him until he got to Millis (Trucking). He walked that whole way because the traffic on the Highway was so slow.
Rykken: Were there any local individuals who were lobbying to be on the Interstate? Or was that on the State level?
Hoffman: It was at the state level.
Rykken: One of the things we're going to explore with this project is how the interstate changed the town, especially east of the bridge.
Hoffman: Oh, and another thing that I just remembered - you remember the Real McCoy's, right? Remember that sign north of town?
Rykken: I do…
Hoffman: Twenty Gas Stations in two miles, and then the Real McCoy's. Sure enough, if you counted, there were indeed twenty gas stations before you got to McCoy's. You wouldn't think that possible, but between Pines until you crossed the river near McCoy's, there were actually that many stations.
Rykken: Yeah, I know. Also, Keith Brown is someone we're going to talk to as well, he used to work there.
Hoffman: He also worked for us at one point.
Rykken: Really?
Hoffman: Yes, maybe even on the interstate.
Rykken: Oh, well that's even better then.
[Editor's Note: Keith later denied that he worked on the interstate, stating that he had joined Hoffman Construction in the 80s]
Hoffman: Yeah, you can ask him about his construction work.
Rykken: We'll do that, yeah that's great. Is there anyone else in the community who is still alive that would be worth talking to about this?
Hoffman: Maybe… Al Lahmayer . . . He's good at thinking how… you know there was that controversy when we were lobbying for the prison -- but as it turned out, it brought some good jobs - and people - into town.

Rykken: I suppose that progress can be… *tough*.
Hoffman: When people think of prison, they don't think of Black River; they think of Black River as the Deer Capital of Wisconsin, and people are surprised when they learn there's a prison nearby.
Rykken: Yes, there were a lot of nay-sayers at the time, but it didn't quite turn out like they thought. Well Sam, do you have any last questions?
Lund: Were you at the formal interstate opening in Tomah in 1968? The Grand Opening?
Hoffman: I probably was, but I don't remember anything from that. All I remember is that Tomah to Black River was the last stretch to be done in Wisconsin, which is all in that book (*gestures to book*) there.
Rykken: One of the things we're focusing on is the Grand Opening - there was a lot of news coverage of that.
Lund: Can you give us just a brief overview of how you think the interstate has affected our community in the long term? Compared to how it was before?
Hoffman: Well, you know, it really consolidated everything, and made it more efficient - especially the truck traffic. One thing it definitely did was - do you know where Scholze's is now? That was our office, and before that it belonged to RJ Arthur & Company. They picked up cars out of the Jamesville plant and brought them to Black River - it took about 8-10 hours for a round trip. With the interstate opening, they sold that building to Peter and me because we had had our offices on the corner near the new Kwik Trip. We rented our old space to Wisconsin Dairies, so there'd always be trucks pulling in to fill up. Anyways, RJ Arthur moved from here to Elk Mound, and I remember a lot of people who were close to retirement decided to stick with it a few more years and kept driving all the way down there for work.
Rykken: Actually, wasn't it called Jactco Trucking or something?
Hoffman: Sorry - it was Jatco who we bought it from, and before them it was RJ Arthur. They started out hauling four cars at a time, and by the time we bought it they were moving eight to ten!

Rykken: Well… this has been fantastic, with a lot of good information. This is great, I learned a lot today.
Hoffman: Good!
Rykken: I had heard about the story about your grandfather before, but I never actually heard the details… it's a tragic story.
Hoffman: Yeah, really affected my dad.
Rykken I'm sure… we also got some more names, so we'll look into them soon. I'll have Sam start working on the transcripts for this in January, and hopefully by the end of the school year we'll have a good story to tell.
Hoffman: Alright, and if you need me, you know where to reach me.

Keith Brown

Keith Brown is a life-long citizen of Black River Falls who grew up during the "golden age" of the town (his own words). While not directly involved in the construction of the interstate, he has worked just about every type of job one could have during that time and was involved in many aspects of the community. He saw first-hand the affects the interstate highway had on Black River Falls. Keith currently sells real estate with Clearview Reality.

Interviewed by Paul Rykken and Sam Lund (1/7/20)
Transcription by Sam Lund

Rykken: Ok, so any questions before we start, Keith?
Brown: No, I'll try to give you as much information as I can recall.
Rykken: I'm probably going to be taking the lead on most of the questions because Sam is struggling with talking today, since he's got a bad cold. We'd just like you to start by giving us your name and your date of birth.
Brown: My name is Keith Brown, and I was born November 3rd, 1943.
Rykken: Alright, during World War 2, but no memory of that time, right? Too early?
Brown: No, none whatsoever. Maybe a little of the Korean War, but not for World War 2.
Rykken: And then where were you born, Keith?
Brown: Right at the Krohn Clinic in Black River Falls.
Rykken: And that was when the clinic was down on Main Street?
Brown: When they were downtown. Yeah, they had been there for many, many years, and I'm trying to think of… my mother always said that the doctor… the name escapes me right now, but it'll come to me later, she said that the doctor told her that it was either going to be twins or this kid had an awfully big head. Then out I came, and there I was. I still got a big head, by the way.
Rykken: And that clinic was where the country bank is now, roughly?
Brown: Correct. It was a really neat old building, and they kept adding onto it through the years and remodeling it before eventually running out of space. The great big brick building next door - the Gebhardt building? I forgot what it's called - eventually got attached to it and they used that for a while, but they still ran out of room. There was also - I can't remember if this was before or after the other building - there was a space between that and the old Fire Department of about twenty feet, and they even added that extra twenty feet to the building, and it still wasn't enough, and then it was all over. They had no other place to expand to.
Rykken: Can you give us just sort of a brief description of your childhood?
Brown: Well, I told many people… I suppose most people have fond memories of their childhood, but I am adamant that if you took Black River Falls as a town… I grew up over on Roosevelt Road, over by the Hart Tie Lumber Company. At that time, that was the box factory, and was one of the bigger employers in Jackson County. My dad worked there for sixteen

years, and we lived just a block away, so he never had a problem getting to work. At that same time, Hart-Tie was located behind it - they own the whole thing now, on both sides of the road. In front of that were these great big oil tanks, all the way down towards what's now the Credit Union, and those were for Texaco and City Service, because the train used to come through and they'd unload the fuel into those tanks, and then the local delivery trucks would fill up there and then make their deliveries. We had the icehouse, which was about a block and a half away from my house. That was a huge, framed, four-story building that they used to cut and store hundred-pound cuts of ice out of the river. It had a chute-system on the north side of the building, where'd they'd load the lower one first with the ice blocks, then cover it with saw dust, then more ice, then more sawdust, and so on. As a kid, the best I can remember seeing that go up about halfway to the top of the building. Refrigerators had come into being by that time, but there was still a lot of ice being sold. We could go down and play in the ice house, and get soaking wet and covered in sawdust, and then from there we could go to the pickle factory, which was right alongside the tracks, right after where the fuel tanks were. The pickle factory was a long, framed building with at least half a dozen - probably more - big vats where the farmers would run their cucumbers through, and the machine would sort them by size - they didn't want the big ones. The ones they saved were mixed with salt, brine, and a bunch of other stuff, and were then stored in these big vats where they'd age. When they matured, the train would pull up alongside the factory and literally sucked the cucumbers out of these vats… so yeah, we could go up there and get in trouble. Just down from there was the depot, which was where the trains came in at. That was a big deal, since when we knew the trains were coming in, we'd scurry over and put a penny on the track so we could watch the train crush it.
Rykken: Was the depot in the same place where that one building is being demolished?
Brown: No, the depot actually sat more to the east, on the other side of where that new building is being built. If you went back there, you could have probably seen some of the remnants of it, the curves of the tracks and such. That was another neat old building. I wish - like so many other things in Black River - that it could have been saved, since it would have been a nice place to have the Chamber of Commerce or something, since it had these great big walkways and huge bricks where they used to have these carts to unload the cargo. Obviously, people would get on and off as passengers as well.
Rykken: So, where DNS is now, the depot was west of there?
Brown: Correct.
Rykken: I see pictures of that all the time, including a famous picture from when the soldiers came back from World War 1. Anyways, in other words, this area that you lived in was full of working-class buildings?
Brown: Well, we were right next to the river, so we were playing and goofing off there all the time. Homstad had his coal bins down there, so we could go down there and use those. McGillvary had his lumber yard, where Danmark Plumbing is now, so we'd go over and climb around on those buildings until they'd run us out of there.
Rykken: That was one of the connections back to *old* Black River?
Brown: Yes.
Rykken: That was part of the original stuff.
Brown: I could go back to… well, I don't remember everything. There's a lot of things that people told me about as I was growing up that I didn't know about, like that building used to be there, and this guy used to do this, and all that. I remember, having grown up in the 40s and 50s, that a lot of the changes - perhaps because of the *lack* of changes - went unnoticed for a while. We can see it now, but there was a time where it was just a happy-go-lucky kind of town. The biggest thing Black River had going for it at the time was that we were the deer capital of Wisconsin. As a kid, I can remember when hunting season came; it looked like the streets were bleeding, because there was so much deer blood that leaked onto the ground - back in those days, it was red or red/black. Every tavern and restaurant was completely full, and it was really

something to see. People even rented out their garages and basements, so while all that has changed over the years - people have started bringing their campers and stuff - it was a really big thing back then. The other big thing we had was Highway 12 itself, which gave the town a lot of business. As you know, I used to work at the Real McCoy's Service Station - I brought this picture case to show you guys (*shows display case*). From Pete & Red's Tire Shop, which was located near where the interstate crosses by Rozmenoski's - which also isn't there anymore - just as you cross by that land, by the overheard, there was a little shop called Pete & Red's Tire Shop, and they sold recap tires. They also sold near beer, which I found out when the guys told me we could go out there and get beer. I said 'Really?', so we went out there and drank some, and I was like 'This don't taste right', and the guy said 'Well, that's because there's no alcohol, that's near beer.' They laughed at that since I was a sucker. Anyways, between that point and McCoy's - which is where Jack's or Better is now - there were twenty-one places you could buy gasoline from. When I tell that to people, they don't believe it, but then I remind them that I didn't say twenty-one gas *stations*, just twenty-one places you could buy gas from. There were one or two pumps downtown by Krueger's, and another up by Millis Cars. That's two or three isolated deals, but there were gas stations… in the summertime, after school got out, it was literally bumper to bumper all summer long. People today always say 'Well it couldn't have been that busy,' I like to tell them to watch all the traffic that goes by on the interstate. All that traffic - albeit maybe a little less - used to go through Black River Falls. It was the only way to get to Minneapolis.

Rykken: One of the statistics I saw, as we get into this, was that that stretch had about 700 cars go through every hour. That's from the DOT.

Brown: I wouldn't know what the actual number is, but 700 is definitely possible. Maybe as a fifteen-year-old kid pumping gas like me, you're thinking 'My god, where do all them cars come from?' Either way, it was good for us since they stopped to buy food and gas. That traffic brought in the revenue that allowed me to have a job. Even though at the time we thought it was really something, it wasn't until we got older that we realized how much that *really* was. We were just too busy with other things at the time. Sometimes, on busy days, we'd have 3 guys working on drive with 4 pumps. As soon as we heard the bell - *ding-ding, ding-ding* - we'd be out there to fill up the car and wait for the next car to pull in, and on the busy days it'd just be a constant flow of vehicles, so we never got a break.

Rykken: You must've had gas trucks coming in quite a bit too? Just to fill up all the tanks?

Brown: Well, he came by once - if not twice - a week. Maybe even more than that. They bought their gasoline from Rasmussen Oil Company, out of Sparta, and Ray - the guy who drove the truck up - was there quite often. He'd bring a big wooden stick out and measure how much we had left, and then he'd fill us up. We'd always tease him and tell him that we were empty again before he left.

Rykken: That's also connected to the fact that the shop was located on the conjunction of Highways 12, 27, and 54.

Keith Brown in the early 1960s pausing for a photograph during another busy day at The Real McCoy's. Brown worked there from 1958-1963.

Brown: Correct.
Rykken: That plays into the interstate story quite a bit. Anyway, you've told us a lot about your memory of Black River prior to the interstate, but one thing I wanted to ask you about right away was that Hoffman said that you worked for him at one point.
Brown: I did, but not during the interstate construction period. It was during the mid-80s, roughly 83-86.
Rykken: Okay, now while you were working at… was it McPeak?
Brown: No, it was the McCoy's.
Rykken: But who owned the place?
Brown: The building or the business? Mack McCoy owned the business. *(Gestures to display case*) This is Mack McCoy here, and that's Martha, and that's how the station looked at the time. I'm pretty sure Rasmussen owned the building - the same people we were buying gas from. We bought pretty much everything through them. Mack never owned the building, he just leased it from them… at least as far as I recall.
Rykken: The reason I ask about McPeak is… didn't the McPeak's eventually own the business?
Brown: Yes, eventually they did.
Rykken: They weren't related though, were they?
Brown: Oh no, they were completely unrelated. Two different things entirely. The McPeak's bought the place many, many years after I left. The era of Highway 12's dominance and the Real McCoy's was long over by the time they got involved.

This image is from an early 1960s promotional postcard for The Real McCoy's Service Station and Restaurant located in the Town of Brockway at the corner of U.S. 12 and Wisconsin 27.

Rykken: I also wanted to ask, out of curiosity, if the name "The Real McCoy's" was based on that figure of speech, 'This is the real McCoy'.
Brown: Well, it was his last name, so I think he thought he could capitalize on that. Donald E. McCoy, they called him Mack. He actually had a jacket with the phrase "The Real McCoy" - not McCoy'*s*, like the rest of us.
Rykken: Do you remember the television program "The Real McCoy's"?
Brown: Oh yes, yes I do. Walter Brennan and all them, yeah I remember that.
Rykken: But that had nothing to do with this?
Brown: No, but every once in a while, I remember this happening at least twice to me while I worked there, probably happened to the other guys too - someone would jump out of their car and say "Get yer gun!" I'd be washing a windshield or something and say, "Get my gun?". He'd respond, "I'm a Hatfield if you're a McCoy, we gotta talk!" or something like that. I'm sure that a lot of the people coming down Highway 12 just about peed their pants when they saw the Real McCoy's sign, knowing that they could reenact something like that.
Rykken: I only remember that show because I grew up during the 60s. I remember the Real McCoy's store, it was a very… *hopping* place, a lot of activity there.

Brown: I told people - you wouldn't believe this - I said that we'd take in so much money that we'd have to take money out of the till and put it in the safe to get the drawer shut. They'd say, "Well you're really exaggerating", I'd say "No, I'm really not". To think that gasoline at that time - when I started working there - regular was about 27 cents, and the other stuff was about 31 cents. It would vary by a few cents.
Rykken: And when did you start there?
Brown: 1958. I worked there until 1963.
Rykken: And that was the heyday of the store? The peak period?
Brown: Yeah.
Rykken: Okay, my question is when we get into this story of the interstate… you were there in the early sixties, and then the interstate comes in around 1967, finishes in 1968, what happened to the Real McCoy's after that? Did it change a lot?
Brown: Well, Mack died in 1963. Before that, though, I asked him - everyone knew the interstate would be finished by 68 - what he was going to do once it was finished. He said "Well, we'll pump a little gas and sell a little coffee like we used to do when we first started. We'll take it easy." He never got to see those days, of course. If I recall correctly - I could be wrong - I think he knew he had some sort of heart problem, since he was a real heavy smoker. I saw him buckle over on his desk a couple times – he would reach into his desk and take a few pills. I'd ask, "Are you okay?", and he'd say, "I'm fine, I'm fine". One day, he headed up towards Crandon, WI - where we bought a lot of our junk from. I heard from someone that was with him that apparently, they had had a big dinner the night before - a steak and I presume a few drinks. The next day, he was found dead in bed. He was 43 years old.
Rykken: Oh, my goodness…
Brown: I can remember Elmer Davis - he was one of the three county cops at the time - pulling up behind the restaurant that day, and I didn't really think much of it until I heard a scream from the kitchen. It was Martha McCoy. Word quickly spread among the employees, and we decided to shut the place down and closed it up. Poor Mack: he had everything to live for, all those years to get to that point he dreamt about. His oldest son, Bob, got a hard-luck discharge from the army due to his dad's death, and he started to run the place. Unfortunately, he didn't get along quite as well with other people. I was long gone by the time this happened, of course. They eventually bought an old Shell Station someplace, and he had it moved up from Sparta to where the Subway is now - in fact, the Subway *is* the Shell Station with a different facade and sign put on it. They pumped gas there for a while trying to capitalize on their proximity to the interstate exit, and so that's kind of how that evolved.[32]
Rykken: So… in 1968, you would've been 25, right?
Brown: That sounds about right.
Rykken: Do you remember the Grand Opening?
Brown: No. I don't know why; I remember it taking place, I just wasn't involved in the festivities. I suppose by that time we had known it was coming for years, and now that it was here, it didn't seem like a big deal anymore.
Rykken: There were several things that day - they started in Millston and came up the line. I think they had something downtown at night, I've got some information on that somewhere. Anyway, what would you have been doing by that point in your life?
Brown: Well, what was I doing at 25? I've done just about everything you can possibly imagine at some point or another. Well, in 1968… I think I would've been working for Dan & Harry's Men's Ware by that point.
Rykken: And you did that for…?
Brown: I worked there for about 2 years, and then Keith Ferris got a job with HD Lee Company, so I left for a while, then I came back and managed the store from 1967 to 1973.
Rykken: And that was Hagen's Men's Ware?

Brown: No, that was Farris - originally Dan & Harry's; they had a store down in Tomah too, and they were planning to move into Sparta too. Well, Sparta never materialized, and after a while they weren't satisfied with how the Black River Store was doing compared to Tomah, so when Keith approached them and asked to take the store over, I think they were more than happy to sell it to him. That's when it became Ferris Clothing.
Rykken: So, you were working downtown when the interstate came in, and that's the next part to get into: the effect you saw of the interstate on our town's business. I know that there were concerns that it was going to hurt the downtown businesses.
Brown: Oh, very much so.
Rykken: Did some people try to fight it, or did they just kind of resign themselves to it?
Brown: Well, there were a few people - to give credit where credit is due - like Don Berg, who worked tremendously hard to get people to fix up the fronts of their stores. He believed, among other people, that the tumble weeds were going to be rolling up Main Street when the interstate opened, and that Black River Falls would become history, and so Don decided to help fix up the town. I actually helped him sometimes, on nights and weekends. We fixed up his shop, we did the front of Kimball's bar and gave him a mansard roof, we fixed up Ozzy Moe's inside, we did some work for Hagen's Men's Wear, and best of all, we did the Cozy Corner Tavern. Me, him, and Glen Vosquil - as well as maybe Bob Radcliffe? - were all instrumental in building that back bar, which is still there today. It was across the street from where the Wright Place is now. We put hundreds of hours into it. Don was willing to put a lot of his time and money into these guy's buildings because he wanted to recreate a sort of old-town Chicago, or that old Swedish-style town down south. He wanted everyone to work together on this, but of course everyone wanted to work independently - just like they do today. It frustrated him. One of the main issues, in my mind, was Jerry Waarvik. He told Berg that he wanted him to fix up his drug store, and so Berg drew up some sketches and designs - it looked really pretty. Then Jerry turned around and put up that nondescript aluminum front, and Berg was . . . just so mad that Jerry would do something like that. I always felt sorry for him, since he spent so much time and effort trying to convince people that this was what we had to do. As it turned out, it wasn't nearly as bad as Don thought it would be, but you'd have never convinced him. He was sure we would become a ghost town. Anyways, there were a lot of things that took place during that time to try to prevent the negative consequences of the interstate.
Rykken: Speaking of consequences, do you know why Black River got two exits?
Brown: No, I don't know why. I'd have guessed it's probably because of the three highways we have going through our town - 54, 27, and 12 - so it would've made sense to include them, but I don't know for sure.
Rykken: That's what Dave Hoffman told us too. I originally thought there was some kind of backroom deal that caused that, but Dave said that's not really how the DOT works.
Brown: No, I think the state just looked at a map and decided that it would be more convenient to have exits at both bridges. There wasn't much on that end of town at that point, it was really just the DNR building, so there wouldn't have been any other reason as to why they'd do that. Of course, now there's the truck stop and all the hotels and restaurants.
Rykken: Were both the exits built at the same time? I'm not a hundred percent sure about that.
Brown: I don't remember for sure, but I would assume so. I don't know why they'd finish one, move on, and then come back and make the other.
Rykken: Out east of the bridge, you said it was the DNR building, and then… I think somebody said the first new building over there was Perkins. I don't know if that rings a bell or not, but it would make sense because it's an interstate-oriented restaurant.
Brown: Well… no, I honestly can't remember. All I remember is that the truck-stop was one of the first.
Rykken: Actually, wasn't it Grouchy's?
Brown: Grouchy's! That's what it was! Later on, it was Big Al's Big Chief.

Rykken: I assume Grouchy's was a chain… and then Perkins came in after that? I remember Perkins coming in, so that must've been before we moved in the early 70s.
Brown: Somewhere after that, Perkins came in. It was known as "Pantyhose Junction." The girls wore these tight orange dresses - like mini-skirts, almost. The truck drivers coming in really enjoyed that. I think a couple of them are still around - Bev Kirshner and a couple other gals that worked there.
Rykken: So, it was one of the big spots in town?
Brown: Yeah, it was. Originally, after Perkins came in, Arrowhead Lodge set up nearby, with a deal that Perkins would provide them food. That's why they had such a dinky little kitchen that didn't do much - it was basically just a warming kitchen. As soon as Perkins started, almost from day one, they were always full, so they told Arrowhead that they couldn't supply them since they could barely supply themselves. Arrowhead eventually started fixing their own food, and now they don't serve it at all, but I remember some of the early people there - Don LaChapelle and those other guys - those early managers had a steady work load, it was packed 24/7. It's still busy, but not nearly as much as it was back then.
Rykken: So, when you look back now, after everything you've seen, how would you summarize how the interstate changed the town? What's your takeaway?
Brown: Well, I think the biggest thing it brought were the new jobs, because now on both ends of town, there were new businesses where there were previously none, which created a lot more opportunity for potential workers. As far as the economy concerned, that was a big plus. Secondly, there was the tourism aspect of it, since the interstate made travel much easier, and once people arrived and saw the town… well, it was kind of like the old days. One of the reasons that the McCoy's did so well was because people could eat and gas up at the same time. People would always park their car and tell us to fill them up and check the oil while they went to eat something. We'd do that, then move the car for them and keep the keys until they came back. They liked that, because everyone was always in a hurry to get to where they were going, whether it be shopping or fishing or whatever. That continued with the interstate, since they could pull off, grab something to eat, and then get back on. Really helped that we were about halfway between Chicago and Minneapolis. Not only was the conception that Black River was going to die because of the interstate wrong, but it ended up being the biggest boost we ever had.
Rykken: I've talked to so many different people in Black River who say something along the lines of "Well, Black River has an advantageous location", and they'll usually allude to La Crosse and Eau Claire. You remember, though, in the days before the interstate, you took Highway 12 to get to Minneapolis.
Brown: Correct.
Rykken: It must have been slow?
Brown: Yep, going right up the line - Merrillan, Augusta, Fall Creek, and such - you'd go straight to Eau Claire, then you'd take Highway 12 all the way to Minneapolis. It was really something, to drive on a two lane road for that long. Thinking back on it, there were a lot of accidents between Tomah and Black River, since these guys would come off going 80 miles an hour, and they'd think they could get away with 80 miles on Highway 12 too, only to find a deer crashing through their windshield.
Rykken: That last stretch - it was literally the last part to be completed, the area between Black River and Tomah - before that was done, people would fly along the interstate, and then they'd have to get off and take this dinky road until they could get back on. Where *did* they get back on? Was it at Northfield or . . .? I guess I don't know that.
Brown: Well, I'm not sure if it was all the way to Eau Claire or not, but I do know that they were working both ends, so I don't know where the severance point was. Either way, that stretch was a problem for those who drove on it.

Rykken: One other thing; do you remember hearing people talk about the interstate back in the 50s? You should have been old enough to remember by then. One of the things we're trying to do with this research is trace it back to 1956 when the project began.
Brown: Thinking back to those years, I suppose I was just like everyone else at the time, I was just too preoccupied to think about it. No, I don't think I heard very much about it until I started working at McCoy's in 1958, and it wasn't until about 1960 where I started to hear a lot about it. After that, it wasn't until that last 27 miles between here and Tomah was all that was left when it became the talk of the town. So, by 1968, I was very much involved in that conversation, but prior to that, not so much.
Rykken: One of the things that surprised me, I just learned this, was that Wisconsin was one of the first states to complete their sections of the interstate, way ahead of schedule.
Brown: Really?
Rykken: We must've had some good operations in Wisconsin.
Brown: Well, that interstate is what really put Hoffman on the map. They bought all that heavy machinery in order to fulfil their contracts, and since they were operating so close to home, they were able to make tons and tons of money off of that.
Rykken: Dave Hoffman told us that these were good jobs, too -- really helped the economy.
Brown: Oh yeah, yeah. Definitely. I think a lot of the land the interstate itself is on was good too, not a lot of swampy areas, which is the big, heavy work that you don't want. Working in sand and dirt is okay, but if you're working on clay, then you're gonna have a rough time, with the clay getting stuck in the wheels and stuff. I worked on the labor crew when I was with Hoffman, and we had these massive shovels that we used to clean the machines out in order to make sure they didn't get stuck. It was hard work. I was 40 years old by that point, and I was wishing that I had done this when I was 20.
Rykken: I guess one final thing – you have given us some good information here, but do you have any names of individuals who might still be around? Anyone else we might want to have a chat with? We're going to talk to Larry Lunda soon, and we already talked to you and Dave Hoffman.
Brown: Larry is a good one, because anything he didn't see himself, he probably knows from his dad and his company records . . .. the problem is that everyone else I can think of is dead now.
Rykken: Well, it was fifty-something years ago now…
Brown: It would've been 1962 when I went through the Dale Carnegie course - I have a picture with me and the other members; Cliff Nelson, the predecessor of Lunda Construction, as well as Al Larson, Cliff Ristow, John Welda, Cliff Nelson, and a bunch of others. I didn't have the picture hanging up, I kept it in a box. One day, I found it while I was cleaning, and I realized that except for me and two other people, everyone else in that photo was dead. I was only nineteen or twenty at the time.
Rykken: So, somebody came into town to give the course?
Brown: Well… (*pauses for a moment*) sorry, I get choked up thinking about it, but I think it must've been around 1960, the Dale Carnegie course came to town, and got a bunch of people to go through it. They came back in… actually, it must've been in 1963, and Martha asked me if I wanted to go through the course, since Mack had wanted me to take it. She offered to pay for it… (*pauses again, on the verge of tears*) it's just, after all these years…
Rykken: No, that's good. We're bringing out a good story here.
Brown: Well, at the time, I didn't have any money, so I couldn't pay her back, but she just gave me the money anyway… I'm sorry, I'm… it was a really emotional thing for me. $125 seemed like all the money in the world to me at that time.
Rykken: That's okay, that's fine. So, she was willing to put up the money, and you didn't have to pay her back?
Brown: Nope, she just gave it to me, because Mack had wanted me to take it.

Rykken: And I assume this course helped you a lot?
Brown: (*Recovering*) Well yeah, I enjoyed it a lot, and when they brought it back in 1981, Howie Sturtz and I got to be associate instructors for the class. I've seen lots of people who've benefited from it, but I've also seen many who didn't gain much at all, so I guess it just comes down to how you approach it. There was one session where they made a "magic wand" - a rolled up newspaper - and gave it to each member, and when you were given it, you'd go up to the front table and give a talk on a subject that made you madder than any other subject you could think of, whether it be female drivers or taxes or whatever else people were mad at back in the 60s. The wand and the table were there for you to take some of your frustration out on. People were yelling and pounding on that table like you wouldn't believe! Afterwards, we had to give the exact same talk, but now without the wand. Many people found that hard because they needed something to pound on. There was one guy, who sat next to my table, who only came in two or three times, and when he was called up front during this exercise, he took the wand and told us that while we might be getting something out of this, this course just wasn't for him, and then he walked out and never came back. He probably never got his money back, either. Anyway, I really liked it, because I did oral stuff all the time anyway, so I'd go up front and start yakking about this, that, or the other thing. Howie Sturtz, his speeches were really emotional; he talked about something that happened to one of his kids, and he started crying - he had the whole place in tears by the time he was done.
Rykken: Yeah, that's an interesting side bar. Well, thank you Keith, this was excellent! I like the Real McCoy's connection, because that's really a symbolic connection to how the interstate affected a lot of businesses.
Brown: Well, if there's anything else you need - oh, and another small thing: we'd place these cards (*holds one up*) on people's windshields once we cleaned them, since that was one of the things we did. As it turns out, Mack and Leslie Hart were good friends - Les was your (*Sam's*) great grandfather, wasn't he? - and he wanted Bobby Hart to have a job, so while Bob was working at McCoy's, I used to tease him on how he used to clean the windows. In the summertime, when it's really hot, you have to work on one half of the windshield at a time; he'd always try to do the whole thing at once, and it would be all smeared up when he was done. I told him that he was good for our business, because then they had to pay twice to be able to see out of it!

Rykken: (*Looks back at display case*) Is this a picture of you?
Brown: Yep, that's the only picture I could find of me while I worked there. I'm honestly surprised that there weren't any more, considering how long I worked there.
Rykken: We didn't take many pictures back then, since we'd have to take them down to be developed, and that took a lot of time and money.

Larry Lunda

Larry Lunda started working at Nelson Construction as a young boy in the early-mid 60s, the company. Nelson Construction became Lunda Construction around the time that interstate work began in earnest. Larry's father, Milt Lunda, served as President of the Company until 1988. Larry served in that capacity from 1994-2013.

Interviewed by Paul Rykken and Sam Lund (1/13/20)
Transcription by Sam Lund

Rykken: Larry, a couple things first. We interviewed Dave Hoffman back in December. Last week, we interviewed Keith Brown. The angle from Keith was more about the impact it had on-
Lunda: Main street?
Rykken: Main street, yes, and his experiences working from 1957 to 1962 over at The Real McCoy's.
Lunda: Oh yeah.
Rykken: And he had a lot of stories about that, and how the interstate changed all that. We were talking about the whole traffic thing before the interstate.
Lunda: I can remember that corner vividly growing up, because all the traffic that was going between Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Chicago, Madison, they all went across the bridge - and then it was just a two lane bridge until 1980 when the four lane bridge was built. Then they'd turn and go south on what is now Highway 27 and what was - well, it still is Highway 12. Then they'd make a left at The Real McCoy's. The Real McCoy's are a little bit like if you've ever traveled south, you'd see signs for "Stuckey's".
Rykken: Hm?
Lunda: They had signs up all over the place, and their slogan was "Awful darn good coffee". But that was a good corner there, a lot of people stopped there for gas and for breakfast.
Rykken: One of the statistics we found - this is just preliminary still - says that the DOT (Department of Transportation) said that there were 700 vehicles going through Black River every hour, which to me didn't sound terribly high, but I guess if you think about the size of the city at the time, it's a lot.
Lunda: Back in the day, especially on Fridays, north-bound traffic would be backed up about 4 or 5 miles past the park, all waiting to get across the bridge. The narrow point was that bridge.
Rykken: Sure - the chokepoint?
Lunda: Yeah, the chokepoint was the corner down at the bottom of the bridge. There were no stoplights then, so it was all through-traffic. Then a reverse would happen on Sunday; they would line up going north out of town on Highway 12. So yeah, it was different. A lot of people were concerned about all this traffic going right through town - people like the McCoy's - because they prospered from all that traffic. It was a big change for them to suddenly not have that traffic anymore.
Rykken: Larry, can you start by just giving us your full name and date of birth?

Lunda: Larry Lunda, October 21st, 1950, in Detroit, Michigan.
Rykken: Oh okay, I didn't know that. Can you give us a brief description of your growing up years?
Lunda: I grew up in Black River from 1954, so I was 4 years old when we moved here.
Rykken: Is that from Detroit?
Lunda: Yes. So, there was Nelson Construction that was doing local bridge work, and that family goes back to Mount Horeb, Wisconsin. My uncle was involved with that.
Rykken: What was his name?
Lunda: Cliff Nelson. My dad had gone through engineering school at Marquette and had worked for Ford Motor Company. That's where he was working in Detroit -- Ford Motor Company at River Rouge.
Rykken: Okay, keep going.
Lunda: So, the call came in and said, "Would you want to come back and work with the family construction company back in Wisconsin?" So that's what he did in 1954. I went to grade school here in Black River Falls.
Lund: Which school would that have been?
Lunda: I went to grade school in the old Third Street school, which got turned into a residential place.
Rykken: Union place?
Lunda: Union place, built back in the 1870s. I went to school there in the 50s and 60s, so it was almost a hundred years old then.
Rykken: I want to ask about Cliff Nelson, since he was your uncle - your dad's brother? What's the relation there?
Lunda: That's an interesting relationship. They were originally cousins and became stepbrothers.
Rykken: Oh, okay. I guess I just never put the names together.
Lunda: My dad's dad - Lunda - served in World War 1 and got gassed, so he died in 1927.
Rykken: What was his first name? I hate to ask if-
Lunda: You know, I can't remember his first name. I never met him, you know, he died in 1927 -- Oh, Melvin!
Rykken: Melvin?
Lunda: Melvin Lunda.
Rykken: So, he had war injuries? His lungs were -
Lunda: Yeah, his lungs were compromised from the gas, so he died 7 or 8 years after World War 1. So, his wife, Alma Lunda, had a sister who was married to John Nelson. John was Cliff Nelson's father. Then that sister died, so John Nelson married Mrs. Lunda. So originally Milt and Cliff were cousins, then they became stepbrothers.
Rykken: That's unique. Interesting story.
Lunda: Anyway, Cliff graduated from Marquette in civil engineering, and so did my dad. Milt was working for Ford Motor Company when he got the call. It looks like maybe they were anticipating more work coming with the interstate system, but Milt came here in 1954…
Rykken: Ok… now, Keith gave us an almost kind of a romantic view of growing up in Black River. He grew up on Roosevelt Road and he talked about all the things he did as a kid. Do you look back on it that way too? Is it kind of a golden era childhood?
Lunda: Well, I think a lot of people do, don't they? About their childhoods? That they were in a unique period in time? Your memories of growing up were… it was a good time, but I think all generations have that, don't you think?

Milt Lunda (1920-2008) teamed with Cliff Nelson to form Nelson Construction which later became Lunda Construction. Milt served as President until 1998.

Lund: Yeah.
Rykken: Sure, yes. Although, I think in Black River, what I've learned about Black River is that the Post-World War 2 era - the 50s and into the 60s - was kind of a golden era in some ways.
Lunda: Well, we didn't have… I don't remember "helicopter parents". We checked out at the beginning of the day, and when we were 10 years old, we'd be on our bikes and we were gone all day. The parents didn't have to worry about kids.
Rykken: Yeah, different era.
Lunda: Or maybe there were the same amount of problems, but we didn't have a 24/7 news cycle. So maybe kids were being abducted and having other problems, but we were lucky. We never had any problems. I can remember a typical day would be to get on our bikes, and in the afternoon, we'd be down at the swimming pool.
Rykken: Now your dad was getting into construction at that point and working with your uncle. When did you start hanging around Lunda construction - or what would become Lunda Construction? What was it called at that time?
Lunda: It was still Nelson Construction. Cliff Nelson died around 1966, and he was probably only about 56 years old.
Rykken: Ok… young guy.
Lunda: I think he might've been born about 1910. Yeah, 1910, so yes, he was pretty young. He had a heart attack. The name change occurred about 1968. I started hanging around Lunda construction when I was 10 years old. I mopped the floors on Saturday mornings for… I think it was two dollars.
Rykken: Had to start right at the bottom.
Lunda: Yes. Then when I was fifteen, I wasn't old enough to drive but I was loading trucks in the backyard. Bob Swiggum's dad lived up below the water tower, Walt Swiggum. He goes back to the family back in… Mount Horeb, Wisconsin. The Swiggums came up here. So, Walt would pick me up at 7 am and drop me off, we'd have a half-hour lunch, he'd pick me up, and go back to work. I was loading trucks back then and running the loader a little bit too.
Rykken: When you were in high school, then?
Lunda: Yes.
Rykken: So, Swiggum… they came with Cliff?
Lunda: I imagine, yes.
Rykken: Because they had been doing that work down at Mount Horeb.
Lunda: There was an uncle down there that was involved in construction. His name was Sam Swenson. Sam came up and built that shop in 1938. They would commute back and forth between Mount Horeb, where they'd do concrete box culverts. They got to know the county engineers in LaCrosse and Jackson county. They'd build small bridges and box culverts for them in the late 40s and early 50s. They had some 4-wheel drive Oshkosh trucks that they used to plow snow for those counties in the wintertime. They drove back and forth on pretty marginal roads back then, commuting between Mount Horeb. It was a long way to go, back in the 30s.
Rykken: Absolutely… so you would have been - if we jump into the interstate phase of this - you would have been in high school when that was starting, roughly.
Lunda: Yes - well, actually, I'd have been… it started in 1958-59, so I was only 8 or 9 years old, so I wasn't even in high school yet.
Rykken: Would that have been interstate work, already?
Lunda: Yes.
Rykken: Oh, okay, so that's early.
Lunda: Maybe not around here, but up around Minneapolis and Menominee, they were doing bridge work.
Rykken: I think the full-blown start was around 1956.
Lunda: Well, in the late 50s they were building bridges up around Menominee - or at least the early 60s.

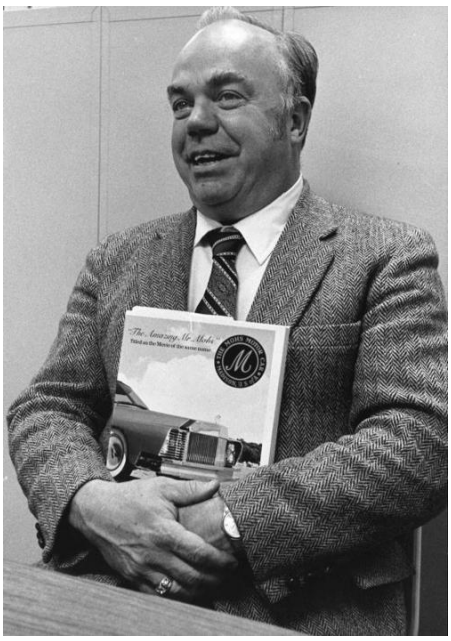
Rykken: When did the bridge work start for Nelson/Lunda?
Lunda: In that time period. Well, they were doing county and local bridges before then, back in the late 40s and 50s. Sam Swenson was doing box culverts back in the early 40s. I've actually got pictures of my grandma and her sister out on the job site in a tent; they did the cooking. When the crews were on the road, they lived in… kind of a wagon-type of thing. It was like a circus wagon with big truck wheels underneath it, and it had a big bed, wood siding, and a roof on it. Probably had a stool in it. They were real pioneers, out on that interstate system.
Rykken: It sounds like it, I didn't know that. That's interesting to me. Just to connect to Hoffman for a second, were there jobs where you and Hoffman were both involved?
Lunda: Oh, absolutely.
Rykken: Did it happen frequently?
Lunda: Oh, always, yes.
Rykken: Because they were doing grading and dirt-moving…
Lunda: A lot of these contracts were under the state of Wisconsin, and every month they would have maybe 30 to 40 jobs they would contract out. Contractors would bid on that work, and the lowest bid would get the job - the bidder was expected to do that job for the price that they had bid. Some jobs were packaged with grading and bridges together, and maybe guardrails, landscaping, and concrete paving. Some companies, such as L.G. Arnold out of Eau Claire, did all three of those disciplines - they'd do bridges, concrete paving, and grading. Some of the projects were… say if you were going across a major river, and they might have a mile of grading on either side. The bridge would have more contract value than the grading, so then the bridge contractor would be the prime contractor, and they'd sub out the grading. At the meetings down in Madison, there would be grading contractors would give the bridge contractors a price, and then the bridge contractors would bid on it, and the winner would select their own subcontractors. This was done based on price because if you didn't do it on price, and the winner gave the job to their buddy instead, then the lower cost contractor would inevitably find out, and you probably wouldn't get offers from a lot of contractors again. It kept things honest. So, if some jobs had more grading on them, then we'd quote them, and if we had the low bridge price, then we'd be a subcontractor to Hoffman.

From humble beginnings in the 1930s, Nelson Construction – later Lunda Construction -- eventually became involved in major road and bridge projects in many areas of the country. They were partners, for example, in the massive Marquette Interchange Project in downtown Milwaukee from 2004-2008.

Rykken: Okay… so one of the things we're exploring here is that this I-system was the largest infrastructure program in US history. We keep hearing that, and it sounds to me - as we're getting it now from both you and Dave - that the Federal government would contract with the **Wisconsin DOT,** and then the WDOT would contract it out with you guys. So, you were never directly dealing with the Federal government -or were you?

Lunda: Not on the interstate projects. Maybe on some other types of projects, we'd do a federal job - like a Core of Engineers job, you might deal directly with the Federal government. But on the interstate program, depending on where the project was - intercity or rural - there were different levels of funding that the state would get. I'd say that most of the time, the state would receive 80%, sometimes 90%, of the necessary funding from the federal government, and the state would have to make up the difference. The Feds had a big say in it, and kind of supervised how funds were spent. They made sure that costs, extra work, and price values were fair.
Rykken: Alright, let's get narrowed in on the 1968 situation. One question I want to ask you first on that - I've read this, and I'd just like your take on it: Wisconsin supposedly finished their interstate work early - I think they were the fourth fastest state. Does that square with your memory?
Lunda: Well, I don't know the number, but I think we were a leader - I think in part because Wisconsin had some very good contractors. Other areas, especially down in Kentucky and Atlanta, lagged far behind. I think Wisconsin had some good leaders, and were able to go out and obtain the land - a lot of it was obtained through Eminent Domain, and sometimes it involved court involvement, but they did a pretty good job. Of course, they had to come up with a design for this - the contractors weren't designing it, the state did the design - so they had to come up with contract-able packages which were of a size that would fit the contractors who were bidding for it. I think they did a very good job packaging it, but I also think Wisconsin contractors were… a notch above a lot of other states. I think we had a pretty good work force as well; a lot of people here grew up on farms, so they had a good work ethic, which is one big thing we looked for a lot when we were building and growing up our company. These kids who came off the farm had a lot of knowhow, and if something broke, they could use a number 9 bailing wire and get that piece of equipment running again. A lot of other people didn't have that talent. When we were working up in Menominee, we ran into the Kadingers -- they were in the junkyard and farming businesses. They were just a natural bunch; they didn't have bridge experience, but they caught on very fast because they knew how to work. We had a lot of family groups that were like that in the eastern part of the state that followed us. One thing that really helped us was Davis-Bacon, because Davis-Bacon paid much higher wages than were available on Main Street or the filling station. A lot of times, it was two or three times more. Davis-Bacon is a Federal law that requires contractors to pay certain wages, much higher than the minimum wage - maybe three or four times higher in some cases. That was really a blessing, because although we had to pay more wages, we simply put it in our bid, and it allowed a lot of these people to travel to us.
Lund: So, everyone wins?
Rykken: Yes, it's a win-win. I was thinking too, when you said that Larry, that one of the other questions we had was how this was impacting the community. For the workers in Black River, this was a pretty good wage for them.
Lunda: Absolutely. Plus, when they were building this interstate system for a couple years around Wisconsin Dells, then a couple years around Madison, then a couple years around Eau Claire, that really brought a lot of money into the economy. We were buying ready-mix from local suppliers, and we were staying in motels and restaurants, so that was a boon. That stimulated the economy. The whole interstate system, when you think about it, really helped to stimulate the national economy. All the material that went into it - reinforcing steel, railings, structural steel, and prestressed girders - a lot of it was locally produced; if not in this area, then Eau Claire produced a lot of that.
Rykken: That's an interesting side of this whole story, which is that infrastructure of that type is a tremendous stimulus to the economy.
Lunda: Absolutely, and we used to always preach that it benefits the traveling public - it's much safer on the interstate than on the old Highway 12 - and it stimulates the economy and provides all sorts of jobs.

Lund: And were there any downsides that you know of? Did you hear anyone else say anything about that?
Lunda: Well, certainly there were people who would lose a portion of their property, because the interstate cut through it. They weren't happy about that… but if you didn't have Eminent Domain, then we'd still be following section lines and making ninety-degree corners. We had to do that for the benefit of the greater good. Yeah, it hurt some people, but they were compensated too. Maybe another downside was that businesses changed, like the Real McCoy's. When the interstate was finished, their business suffered. They had had some good times though, and other businesses developed in their place. We ended up with Perkins and the truck-stop out there by the interstate.
Rykken: Ok… so let's talk a little bit about the Grand Opening. You and I have talked about this a little bit before, but not a lot. This last piece that was done, between Tomah and Black River… both Dave and Keith commented on how people would swing down the old road to Tomah, and… this last piece needed to be done. Do you remember the opening?
Lunda: Yes.
Rykken: And you've talked to me about this Mohs guy who came-
Lunda: The Mohs car?
Rykken: Yes, can you tell us a little bit about that?
Lunda: Well, I believe his name was Bruce Mohs. He was an inventor, and an… *eccentric*.
Rykken: They always say that about him.
Lunda: He designed airplanes, mainly floatplanes and seaplanes. He mocked them up in prototype, but not much of it really took off and became commercial. He also designed this Opera Car, which was basically like an international truck chassis, with an international truck engine and truck wheels. It had white walls, with big chrome caps on it. There were no doors on the side of it. It was massive, and with the radiator on it looked like a Rolls-Royce or something.
Rykken: When you sent me the stuff the other day, I saw the pictures. We can get some copies of those later.
Lunda: Since there are no doors, the rear of the car opened like a clamshell. It was ahead of its time. Tesla and these other companies have clamshell doors now, this was a clamshell door in the back with a step that dropped down below the bumper, so you'd take a step and then hunker down and get into your seat. As an 18-year-old, that really impressed me.



Bruce Mohs (1933-2015), often described as eccentric, invented the 1967 Mohs Ostentatienne Opera Sedan and attended the 1968 interstate opening in Black River Falls.

Rykken: I wonder if it was typical that he'd go to events like this? I suppose as a way to show off, to market his stuff a little bit.
Lunda: I suppose, yes. Well, I think he might've been the first vehicle in the parade, I think he even brought up a couple people from the state government. Maybe even the governor came up, I don't know.
Rykken: Sure, well, we've got the program. I should've pulled that out -
Lunda: Was the governor here? For the last link, I would think he would be.
Rykken: I think he was, yes. They had several events. They had one down in Tomah, and then kind of worked their way up the line.
Lunda: But this was the last link.

Rykken: This was the last link, and the parade… do you remember the parade? Was that at a different time, or -
Lunda: Well, I can remember the high school band. I can remember gathering out by what is now the truck stop, there was some type of celebration out there. I guess there was a celebration out on Highway 12 and the interstate.
Rykken: Yes, there was, and I think I've told you the story about my dad on that.

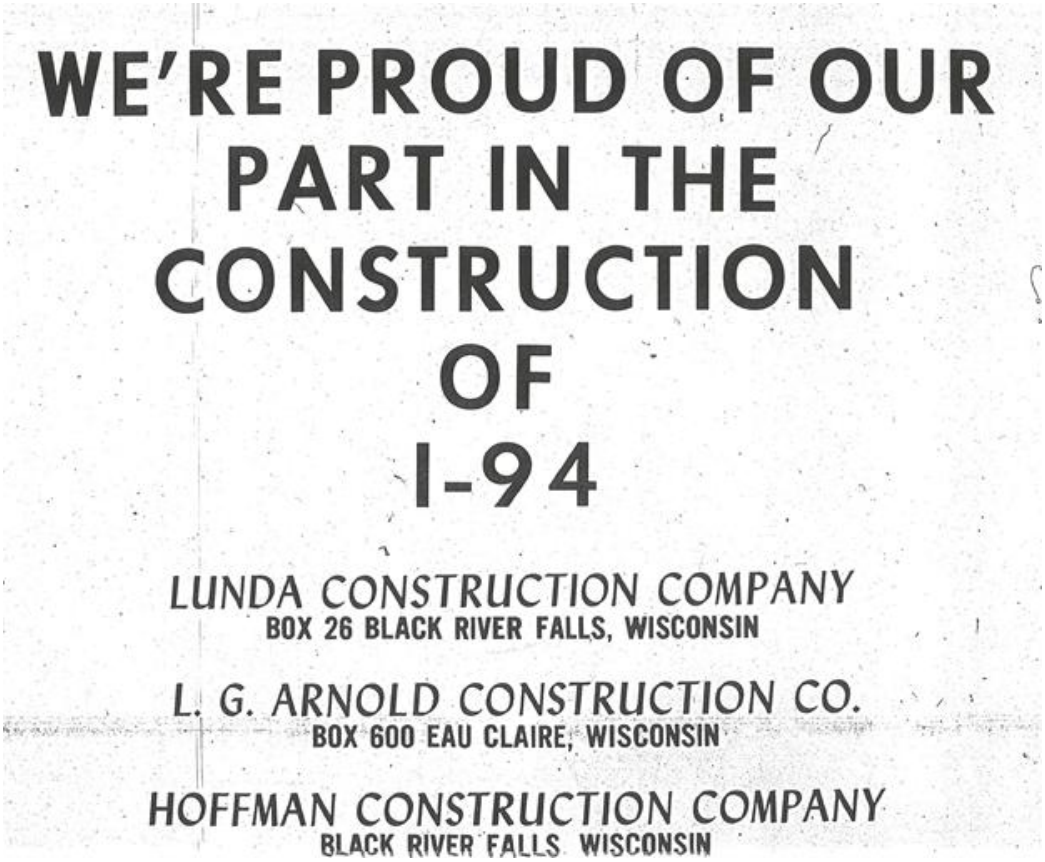
The Ostentatienne Opera Sedan had many distinctive features. Most notably, one entered the car from the rear. The interior of the car had features of a small airplane.

Lunda: Yes.
Rykken: This is a good small town story… they were going to serve beer during this opening, and my dad - and he rarely did this, he didn't speak out a lot - he got really vocal about it and wrote letters to the city fathers - whoever they were at the time - and I've got some evidence of this, I only found out about this after he died, which was interesting. He just argued that it would be inappropriate to sell alcohol at the opening of this, and they didn't, which I think was interesting.
Lunda: I mean, he had some pretty good grounds. This was a DOT opening, and DOT and alcohol shouldn't go together...
Rykken: No, no - and that was another thing. While he was there, he wasn't actually involved in it, according to the program. I always thought he was involved, but he wasn't. He was definitely there, though, because he talked to me about that, and I was at the celebration downtown, for sure. It was interesting. Anyway, so you just remember seeing the vehicle?
Lunda: Yes.
Rykken: I don't think we got… you sent me something where I can find pictures of it online. There were all kinds of pictures of it. He did different versions of it. I don't know if there's any in the local paper, though. We've got all sorts of clippings about it, yet it's funny nobody seems to have taken a picture of it. Anyway, I guess the other thing then, Larry, is that you were 18 at the time. You were getting ready to go to UW-Madison, and your world changed rather dramatically after that. From your vantage point and all the things that you did, how would you assess the impact of the interstate on our county? What were the highpoints of that? Because that's the core of our project, that change. Is it kind of a before and after thing, almost? Was it that big, or...?
Lunda: (Pauses for a long moment) I think we're fortunate to be on the interstate system, I know that. You can see some towns that were bypassed, and how they suffered because of that.
Rykken: Can you give an example of that? I'm trying to think of what that would be…
Lunda: Well, towns like Augusta, Fall Creek, Fairchild. Highway 12 went through Fairchild and Augusta, but now the Interstate is carrying the traffic. Other towns, like Black River Falls, Wisconsin Dells, and Mauston, I think they were fortunate.

Rykken: Sure. I remember, as a kid, driving to Minneapolis on Highway 12, and that was really a cumbersome trip. It was two lanes, so if you got stuck behind someone, you couldn't really go around them. So yeah, okay, that's a good improvement. Obviously, it changed the local economy too. What else?
Lunda: I do think that people were now more apt to shop up in Eau Claire, since it was much easier than before. Before, they'd have to go through Augusta, Fall Creek, and Fairchild to get up there. Where before it was now an hour and twenty minutes, now you're up there in fifty minutes. The Mall, as well, that's located out by the Interstate. The people who built the Mall were thinking too, they purposely put that on the south side. That brought it even closer to Black River Falls, took another ten minutes off. I think that Main Street here in BRF suffered, since more people were going to Eau Claire to go to shows, restaurants, or do shopping. I think our theater downtown started to suffer too.
Rykken: Keith told us quite a bit about Don Berg, and how he was trying to get a concept going downtown that would draw people in.
Lunda: The old building fronts?
Rykken: Yes, exactly. Keith's frustration was that it never happened. Don was always kind of frustrated about that. It was just kind of interesting, thinking about Don and his shop. What about all that economic development east of the bridge? Would any of that have happened without the interstate?
Lunda: No, none. We wouldn't have had all the motels out there, or the car lot, the Chevy place, or…
Rykken: Maybe even the prison? (Jackson Correctional Institution)
Lunda: Probably, you're probably right. If we didn't have a good transportation system, that prison might've never been there.
Rykken: And then you add into that the Casino eventually… it all rolls from the Interstate.
Lunda: And maybe Hatfield… they've had some growth out there. From what I remember back in the 50s, there wasn't much out there. They've had a tremendous expansion of camping areas out there. It's got to be at least five-fold of what it was before the interstate. Maybe that's in part because people can travel easier now, they can pull their trailers up from Madison. Rather than taking four hours, it takes much less time now.
Rykken: One of the things you hear from Law Enforcement is that the interstate put us on the pipeline of the drug trade, which probably wasn't a positive. I've heard that's still the case.
Lunda: Yes, I've heard that too. And then… there's four-wheeling since we've got miles and miles of trails out here. A lot of those people stay in local motels, primarily the one… oh, what's it called? It's the lodge with the moose. What do they call that?
Rykken: It's not Arrowhead anymore, I know that. I don't know what it is now. (Note: it is currently called the Surestay Plus Hotel by Best Western)
Lunda: Well, a lot of people stay there, and they go snowmobiling or four-wheeling. That wouldn't have happened, if the interstate hadn't been there.
Rykken: Yeah, it's really interesting… it's hard to quantify that, there's just so much change. I guess just one other quick thing, which bridge, or bridges was Lunda responsible for in this area?
Lunda: We did the Highway 12 bridge, going north, that pair of bridges. We did the bridges that go over the railroad tracks, by old Highway 54, that's where the dump used to be. We also did the bridge that is the new Highway 54. We did a lot of others - the ones in Hixton, the ones in Millston. Now, as a kid, my dad didn't hunt, so therefore I didn't hunt either. However, I enjoyed riding along with him when I was fifteen, sixteen years old, driving all the way down to Mauston. I knew all the sites, and how to get off Highway 12. I can remember riding up and down the grade along the new interstate, long before it was paved. Good memories.
Rykken: So, in a way, it was really affecting your entry into that world a little bit too?

Lunda: Oh sure, yeah. Sometimes - we'd say this often - we'd be successful on a bridge project down in Milwaukee, next to our competitor's office, Payne and Dolan. We'd say sometimes that the jobs that are closest to home are the toughest to get. We lost in that way, since we didn't get to do the bridges going across the Black River. L.G. Arnold came in and beat us. They underbid us, so they built the bridges across the river.
Rykken: Okay, interesting.
Lunda: But all the grade separations up around Osseo, we did the lion's share of those bridges.
Rykken: One thing we learned about through talking with Dave Hoffman was that… I kept referring to the area around Hixton as "Hoffman's Cut", but he said that wasn't really it, so I was using the wrong term. He said that one was closer to Osseo. That's just how I grew up calling that area, but it was interesting to get his take. I really have a better understanding of it after these interviews, it was good for us to do both you and Dave, because I never quite understood the joint effort that went into this, since I didn't know enough about the businesses and what they did. Is there anything…
Lunda: I can remember Duane - that's Peter and David (Hoffman)'s dad - vividly from those years, being out on the grade with my dad.
Rykken: So, they weren't really competitors, were they?
Lunda: No, we were bidding on different work.
Rykken: So, they were more collaborators than competitors…
Lund: Also, since we asked the other two, I figured I'd ask you in case you'd know: do you know why Black River ended up with two bridges with exits?
Rykken: Yes, the "two-exit question!"
Lunda: Well, I think there was probably some lobbying going on, though I don't know if that was from Black River Falls directly. The decision ultimately rested with the DOT, and since you got Highway 54 - a state highway - it'd be remiss if they didn't have exits for that, and of course US Highway 12 would want access too. I'm certain many communities lobbied to have an exit, but it was ultimately the DOT who decided on it, because putting a bridge and interchange in costs a lot more money.
Rykken: Absolutely, and we were lucky to have two.
Lunda: Well, you had to have grade separation on Highway 54. We had to continue that; it was a major state highway. We'd have to have put bridges in anyway, in order to get the separation since you can't put a stoplight on an interstate. Since we already had the bridges, it wouldn't cost that much more to create on and off ramps. It was a forgone conclusion that Black River was going to get two.
Rykken: Well, that's interesting… so you're saying it's about our location and the confluence of those highways.
Lunda: Yeah, and maybe that goes back to the Spaulding days, where Black River was a large enough community so that, when they were making decisions on where Highway 54 should go, and where Highway 12 should connect to it back around the turn of the century, that they decided to run it through Black River Falls. Same thing with the rail line, the railroad ran through here first… maybe that was because of Spaulding, so that there was enough activity to warrant having a railroad. Therefore, they put the two roads through here, and that's why they put the interstate here.
Rykken: Spaulding was involved in road building, I know that, up north of Black River towards Hudson or something. I don't know all the history of that, but the location of the town was strategic in many ways, like lumbering and the river. The rail would be the next natural connection, and so on.
Lunda: So maybe it was the river and the falls since it was why they set up here in the first place. That's why we have the confluence of roads and rail lines. Oh, and one other thing that was kind of interesting: it took another eleven years after the completion of the interstate - and all the Highway 12 traffic died down - before the bridge downtown was replaced in 1980. It was

originally a two-lane bridge, so it was remarkable that all the semi traffic going across the interstate now was originally going across that tiny thing.
Rykken: So, what you're saying is that we had the interstate finished in 1968, and it wasn't until 1980 that they redid the bridge into 4 lanes? That's a big deal.
Lunda: That was quite a change… we started that job in the spring, and I think we had it completed by the fall. All Black River traffic, going from the east side to the west side, had to go out on the interstate to go around. We really needed the interstate in order to build this bridge - at least if we wanted it in the same location, so it'd line up with Main street.
Rykken: Interesting… well thank you very much.
Lunda: You bet.
Rykken: That was great. Can we get a couple pictures?
Lunda: Sure.



Final Reflections
(by Sam Lund)

The Interstate Highway System is more or less the main reason as to why Black River has become as big as it has, but that fact tends to be lost on many people - especially those who weren't around to see what it was like to live without it. The main goal of this project was to answer the following questions: A) How was the interstate built, and what were the challenges faced? B) What was Black River like before the interstate? C) How did Black River change because of the Interstate? In talking to the three men we interviewed this year, I got my answers to these questions, as well as many more facts and stories that greatly deepened my knowledge and interest in this now-seemingly mundane highway.

Dave Hoffman and Larry Lunda were both brought up in their family construction businesses; both were college-age when the Interstate began its main building phase in Wisconsin, not so much older than I am now. Their family companies had been mostly local up to this point, but when the Wisconsin DOT began contracting out portions of the road, both companies took advantage of this massive opportunity by expanding their crews and equipment. Hoffman Construction graded the foundation for the roads, while Lunda Construction focused on building bridges. Both men used this project as a way to gain experience for dealing with the problems that come with construction - hard terrain, lack of manpower and supplies, and the like - and both eventually rose to high positions within their companies.

Keith Brown, while not involved directly with the construction of the interstate, was one of the many people who was directly affected by it. Among his many other jobs, he used to work at the Real McCoy's, located roughly where Jack's or Better is now in Brockway. He described how busy both his service station and store and the roads outside were prior to the interstate, as Highway 12 was previously the most traveled route in the area. However, once the construction of the interstate was complete, travel and business in the area radically changed. New businesses opened, especially near the south exit; new jobs were created. On the other hand, older businesses such as the Real McCoy's lost the benefit of their previously advantageous locations, and soon dried up and moved out.

Talking to these three men revealed a world that I had never imagined. Before 1968, when the interstate finished construction, Black River had been a small town. Our only real strength was that we had lots of deer come hunting season, and that we had three different highways (12, 27, and 54) converging on our town, which is likely the reason we managed to

get a spot on the interstate, and how we ended up with two exits rather than just one. As Lunda pointed out, the likely reason we had those highways was because of the old rail line, which itself was only there because of the logging business, created back in the Spaulding days a century earlier. It made me realize and appreciate that history can still play a huge role in the present.

As I write this on my porch, listening to the cars distantly zoom by on the Interstate bridge half a mile up-river, I realize that the coming of this highway was essentially the birth of our modern town. Its arrival not only made travel to larger cities easier, but also completely changed the economic importance of our own area - largely for the better, though not without its hiccups. However, most people today never seem to appreciate the importance of this incredibly important road; most people in Black River today have spent their whole lives growing up in the age of the Interstate. Even though many of us use and rely on it almost every day - whether to take the family up to Eau Claire for a special dinner, or to take a road trip out to South Dakota, or even just have a job that relies on Interstate travel for business (of which I fall into all three of these examples), many people never the road beneath their treads a second thought. I was one probably one of those people, until this project made me see otherwise.

The coming of the Interstate was one of the most important events in the history of Black River Falls, as well as Jackson County as a whole. Even on a state or national level, this country-wide highway has had huge implications on how Americans travel and live. Its story, as well as the stories of the men who built it and those who were affected by it, deserve to be known by all of us.

Sam Lund
Falls History Project Intern
Black River Falls High School Class of 2020

Notes

[1] My reference here is to that famous quote from Robert Kennedy: "Progress is the nice word we like to use. But change is its motivator. And change has its enemies." Kennedy, Robert F. Address by Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy Before the U.S. Conference of Mayors: 25 May 1964, Department of Justice, www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/ag/legacy/2011/01/20/05-25-1964.pdf.
[2] I participated in a week-long study titled, "Eisenhower and the Art of Presidential Leadership" under the direction of Professor Michael Birkner of Gettysburg College. This was my 7th such program sponsored by The Gilder-Lehrman Institute of American History. The Institute is based in New York and BRFHS has been an Affiliate School of the Institute since 2012
[3] "Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Birth of the Interstate Highway System," www.army.mil, accessed April 4, 2020, https://www.army.mil/article/198095/dwight_d_eisenhower_and_the_birth_of_the_interstate_highway_system)
[4] The quotation comes from President Eisenhower's State of the Union Message, 6 January 1955.
[5] Ellis' use of this phrase came during lectures he gave in 2015 at Amherst during a study seminar I attended on the topic of John Adams. His point was that during the Revolutionary Era, people walked great distances – roughly 4 miles an hour. This is a difficult world for us to imagine in 2020.
[6] Rickie Longfellow, "Highway History," U.S. Department of Transportation/Federal Highway Administration, June 27, 2017, https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/back0103.cfm)
[7] Andrew Jackson, "Jackson's First Presidential Veto Was the Maysville Road Bill in 1829.," Jackson's first presidential veto was the Maysville Road Bill in 1829. | DPLA (Digital Public Library of America), accessed April 11, 2020, https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/jacksonian-democracy/sources/137)
[8] "Maysville Road Bill," Gale Encyclopedia of U.S. Economic History (Encyclopedia.com, April 10, 2020), https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/maysville-road-bill)
[9] Wikimedia Foundation. (2020, April 15). Federal Aid Road Act of 1916. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Aid_Road_Act_of_1916
[10] "Ike's Interstates at 50." *National Archives and Records Administration*, National Archives and Records Administration, www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2006/summer/interstates.html.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] "Special Message to the Congress Regarding a National Highway Program." *Special Message to the Congress Regarding a National Highway Program | The American Presidency Project*, 22 Feb. 1955, www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/special-message-the-congress-regarding-national-highway-program.
[14] Ibid. It is noteworthy that President Eisenhower connected the road building project to national defense and highlights the impact the Cold War had on policy makers at all levels of government. Selling the project as both an important factor for the nation's economic growth AND national defense clearly raised the stakes for lawmakers.
[15] "Interstate Highway System." *Interstate Highway System | Eisenhower Presidential Library*, Eisenhower Presidential Library, www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/research/online-documents/interstate-highway-system
[16] Weingroff, Richard F. "The Greatest Decade 1956-1966 - Interstate System ..." *Highway History*, www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/50interstate.cfm.
[17] Ibid.
[18] The Governor's statement comes from remarks he made at a banquet in Black River Falls on 30 October 1968, while attending the grand opening of the Black River Falls to Tomah segment of I-94.
[19] "Wisconsin State Trunk Highway System." Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 7 Oct. 2018, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wisconsin_State_Trunk_Highway_System.
[20] Ibid.
[21] US Highway 12, originally a Wisconsin Trunk Highway, provides a good example of this. Interstate 90/94 essentially supersedes US 12 as an east-west road running from Aberdene, Washington to Detroit, Michigan. Bechtel, George. *A History of Wisconsin Highway Development, 1945-1985*. Wisconsin Dept. of Transportation, 1989.

[22] Bechtel, George. *A History of Wisconsin Highway Development, 1945-1985*. Wisconsin Dept. of Transportation, 1989, p. 58. The debate over tollways in Wisconsin resurfaces in nearly every major debate over sources of funding for road building and maintenance.
[23] The Mayor's statement came from December of 1968, roughly one month after the Tomah to Black River Falls opening.
[24] The Hochungra people (Ho-Chunk) traced their origins to Red Banks near Green Bay. The Black River Valley is located on the northern edge of their territory and came into federal hands via the Treaty of 1837, marking the third and final land cession by the Ho-Chunk tribe.
[25] The village was originally called "Spaulding's Village," named for Jacob Spaulding, founder of the community. The 131-mile-long Black River starts in Taylor County near Rib Lake and has one of the fastest flow rates of any river in the state. It meets the Mississippi River northwest of LaCrosse, roughly 40 miles from Black River Falls.
[26] Price played an important role in the early history of Black River Falls and operated a stagecoach line between Black River Falls and LaCrosse as early as 1854.
[27] We posed the question of the two exits to Hoffman, Lunda, and Brown and discussed the significance in the small city's development.
[28] The November 8th, 1967 edition of the Banner Journal listed the following volunteers: Bruce Marshand, Ted Ibinger, Jerry Houlton, Robert Dreis, Ralph Hutzenbuehler, Theodore Ormond, Gerhard Waarvik, Curtis Woodruff, William Schunke, Frederick Gebhardt, Melvin Schmallenberg, Gerald Hoonsbeen, Julie Surma, and Ralph Lund. An interesting connection for our project is that Sam Lund is the great-grandson of Ralph Lund!
[29] "County Celebrates Opening of Interstate." The Banner Journal, 15 Nov. 1967.
[30] "'Merchants Plan For I-94 Dedication.'" The Banner Journal, 16 Oct. 1968, p. 1.
[31] "'I-94 Opens With Colorful Ceremonies'." The Banner Journal, 6 Nov. 1968, p. 1. The "Official Dedication Program" is linked here and offers informative details of the day's events.
[32]The "Real McCoy's" was a notable landmark in Black River Country for many years. This article offers background as to its origins and valuable insights associated with the business: https://madison.com/travel/signs-of-the-times-the-search-to-relive-fond-chldhood-memories-of-trips-north-on/article_7ca0bc3f-7f27-5683-8aba-38d7377922de.html

APPENDIX: Falls History Project History

History colleague John Pellowski and I first began discussing the concept of a local history project in 2000. In the summer of 2001, I attended my first of many study seminars sponsored by the Gilder-Lehrman Institute of American History of New York. The seminar was held at Amherst College in Massachusetts with historians David Blight and Lois and Jim Horton. The topic of the seminar was "The Underground Railroad." David Blight impacted my thinking about the power of memory in our lives and communities. I began imagining the Falls History Project while driving back from Massachusetts that summer. How could we bring a greater awareness of our local history into our classes? How do communities grapple with and understand their own history? These questions were foremost in my mind.

It was in 2002, then, that we began to develop these projects. From the outset, the goal has been to explore local and regional history through authentic interaction with available sources, including a heavy emphasis on oral history when possible. As an introduction, I researched the life of Mitchell Red Cloud, Jr., BRFHS graduate and Medal of Honor recipient from the Korean Conflict. Beyond his gallant and tragic story, I wanted to explore HOW he is remembered in the community. My original essay is from 2002 and I revised it in 2019.

We have partnered with Jackson County History Room Director Mary Woods from the beginning and have utilized the resources held at the History Room at the Public Library for most of the projects. In addition, our intention, from the start, has been to develop an archive for future history students and community members. Through 2020, we have completed 18 projects, had 21 interns, conducted 65 interviews, and produced nearly 900 pages of material.

2002 "Mitchell Red Cloud, Jr. and the Power of Memory"
Interviews: Merlin Red Cloud, Jr., Nancy Lurie, Marianna Moe, Basil Holder

2002 Black River Falls and World War II
Intern: Andi Jo Cloud
Interviews: Floyd Pratt, Vilas Johnson, Elmo Johnson, Bob Teeples, and Thor Rykken

2003 Black River Falls and the Great Depression
Intern: Kristen Boehm
Interviews: Ozzy Moe, Bob Pratt, Lillian McManners, and George Brudos

2004 Black River Falls in 1952
Intern: Jill Janke
Interviews: Basil Holder, Gene and Janet Krohn, Sam Young, Richard Faldet

2005 Music History
Intern: Kirsten Bjerke
Interviews: Axel Dressler, Larry Hansen, Richard Camlek, Dick Deno, Margaret Severson

2006 Black River Falls in 1968
Intern: Cory Schultz
Interviews: Bill Wilcox, Al Lahmayer, Gerald Laabs, Chris Goldsmith

2007 The Korean War Experience
Intern: Katie Norton
Interviews: John Noble, Mary Van Gorden, Myrle Thompson, Richard Piette

2008 The Jackson County Fair
Intern: Max Hart
Interviews: Norman and Margie Johnson, Lillian Hart, Bob and Jennine Capaul, Jerome Laufenberg

2009 The Integration of the Public Schools
Intern: Alex Zank
Interviews: Larry Garvin, Sadie Winneshiek Garvin, Tina Boisen, Nancy Lurie Paul Rykken

2010 BRF and the American Civil War
Intern: Levi Miles (also Megan Rykken who edited the previous projects)

2011 BRF in 1875: Spaulding and the Removal Episode
Intern: Erick Conrad
Interview: Anna Rae Funmaker

2012 The Life and Times of Merlin Hull
Intern: Josh Hanson

2013 The China Connection: Black River Falls to Shanghai
Intern: Sandy Lin
Interviews: Basil Holder, John Noble, and Richard Holder

2014 Black River Falls and the Great War
Intern: Dominic Vase
Interviews: Ken Schoolcraft and Randy Bjerke

2015 William Thompson Price
Intern: Zane Dukes

2016 Edna Frances Perry
Intern: Michaela Custodio
Interviews: Mildred Evenson, Leona Greengrass McKee, and Mary Perry

2017 No project was completed in 2017. We took the time to edit the projects for more consistent formatting and launched the Falls History Project Website.
Interns: Jacob Markhardt and Ally McJoynt

2018 BRF's Holy Hill: The Origins of Three Parishes
Intern: Elizabeth Pardoe
Interviews: Mary Van Gorden, Rosemary and Jim Smetana, and Barb and Paul Hanson

2019 The Vietnam War
Intern: Sydney Sampson-Webb
Interviews: Andy Thundercloud, Al Ciezki, Gary Hoyer, Ken Schoolcraft, Chuck Buswell, and Xong Xiong

2020 The Coming of the Interstate
Intern: Sam Lund
Interviews: David Hoffman, Larry Lunda, and Keith Brown

Aerial View: Black River Falls High School: 2020