



The last ice harvest was taken from Perch Lake in 1952

## Lake's winter harvest was of the frozen variety

Ice Harvesting was a big business in Sparta before the spread of refrigerators.

J.J. Lucas operated an ice house on Perch Lake property now owned by Harold and Irene Willgrubs. Lucas owned a 50-foot strip of lakefront, which he purchased in 1898. Lucas' ice house was located off of the north shore of Perch Lake, near the corner of Rusk Avenue and Main Street.

A competitor emerged on the scene in 1904, when C.V. Chamberlain bought land next to Lucas' for a second ice house. Chamberlain operated his ice business until 1914, when he sold out to Robert McPeak. As part of the transaction, McPeak had to pay Chamberlain one-half of the profits from the ice business and furnish a suitable home and board for Chamberlain. Chamberlain died 14 months later in 1915.

Meanwhile, Lucas added another 30 feet of land to his lakefront holdings in 1922. Lucas died soon after, and his ice business was purchased by Fred J. Domke. The new owner expanded the business, buying more lakefront land from the city.

Included in the transaction was Lucas'

ice house, where blocks of ice were stored between layers of sawdust. A fire, believed to have been started by vagrants sleeping in the ice house, destroyed the structure's roof in 1929. The following year Domke built a seven-foot fence around the structure.

Domke continued to operate the business until 1943, when he sold it to Cecil F. Hemstock. Hemstock owned the business until 1946, when it was sold to the Willgrubs. The Willgrubs continued the ice harvest until 1952, when the last harvest was taken from Perch Lake.

Already, the first, automatic ice vendor was in operation at 704 W. Wisconsin St.

According to Willgrubs, ice harvesting was neither easy nor exceptionally pleasant. However, it was easy recruiting part-time help for the business. A 35-man crew was needed to fill the ice house. Another eight men would work covering the ice with sawdust. And twenty more men were employed to fill railroad box cars with ice.

The Willgrubs subsequently razed the ice house and used some of the lumber in constructing their lakefront home.

## Society studies the past

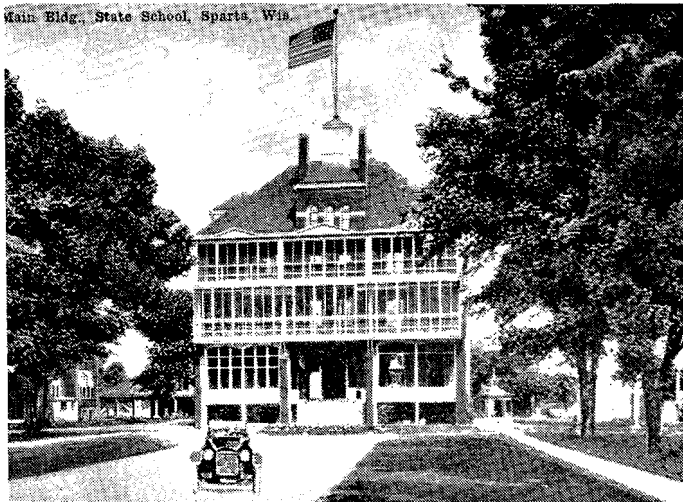
The Monroe County Historical Society was formed in 1971, when it filed an article of incorporation with the Wisconsin Secretary of State.

This action made the county society an affiliate of the Wisconsin State Historical Society and a member of the Wisconsin Council of Local History.

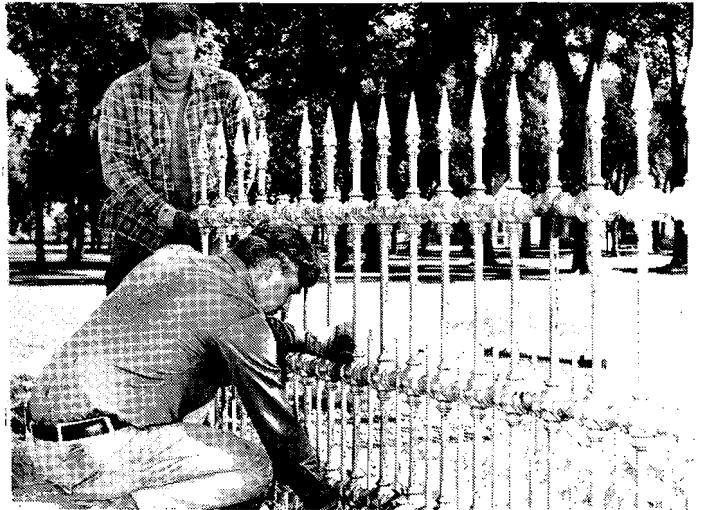
The Monroe County Historical Society was chartered to preserve, advance and disseminate the knowledge of Monroe County history. Meetings are conducted the first Thursday of every month and are held alternately between Sparta and Tomah during Spring and Fall months.

Society members receive a newsletter called "Time Capsule," which is devoted to unpublished items about Monroe County history and its people. A second newsletter, "Portals of Time," provides members with information about society activities.

The Monroe County Historical Society also actively supports the Monroe County Local History Room located on Route 2, Sparta. In addition, many reproduced photos and books of historical interest are offered for sale through the society.



The Administration Building on the old Wisconsin Child Center grounds was removed in 1980 to make way for an extension of East Montgomery Street.



This fence, now at the Governor's Mansion in Madison, formerly circled the Wisconsin Child Center grounds.

## Child Center sold to City

The Wisconsin Child Center was established at Sparta in 1885 by an act of the State Legislature.

The Legislature appropriated \$30,000 for the project, then known as the State Public School for Dependent and Neglected Children. With a site for three buildings in mind, the State Board of Supervisors selected and purchased about 165 acres of land from the City of Sparta.

The new school soon became crowded and had to be expanded. In 1887 the Legislature appropriated \$65,000 to build a central administration building, two cottages and an engine room. Robert T. Roberts was the school's superintendent and steward throughout the expansion project.

More cottages and buildings were constructed later to accommodate the school's growing enrollment. After World War II, the school changed its name to the Wisconsin Child Center.

A wrought iron fence, given to the people of Wisconsin by the King of Norway, once enclosed the Rusk Avenue side of the center. The fence was moved to Sparta from Madison, where it had adorned the grounds of the State Capitol. In 1959 the fence was removed and placed around the Governor's Mansion in Madison.

After 89 years of operation, the Wisconsin Child Center closed its doors. The center, complete with buildings, was sold back to the City of Sparta for \$650,000. The residents were placed in foster homes.

Some of the Child Center buildings were razed and others were rented by the city. A nine-hole addition to Sparta's Municipal Golf Course was being constructed on the grounds in 1983.



Pinecrest Center, formerly Sacred Heart Mission House, 203 W. Wisconsin St.

## Sacred Heart Mission becomes halfway house

The Sacred Heart Mission House in Sparta is the oldest settlement of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in the U.S. province of the society.

The society was founded in Issoudun, France, on December 8, 1854, the day on which the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was proclaimed. Bishop Schwebach of La Crosse asked that missionaries be sent to the area to serve the diocese. A temporary home for the missionaries was established on Cass Street in La Crosse.

The Rev. Father Flock of Sparta invited the Mission House to move its headquarters to Sparta. In 1911, the society purchased a house from Charles

Muehlenkamp and located in the city September of that year. The property was canonically erected on December 11, 1911.

The present mission house was built near Highway 16 on the corner of Court and Wisconsin streets in 1922. The chief activities of the society were missions in the South Pacific and the Philippine Islands, and especially in New Guinea. The Sparta home was used as a retirement home for retired members of the society.

Recently, the mission house became affiliated with St. Mary's Hospital. At present it is a halfway house operating under the name of Pine Crest.

# Sparta guardsmen also celebrating a centennial

By LORAINÉ YESKE

The first Wisconsin National Guard unit in Sparta was organized in 1883 under the command of Captain John J. Esch.

Known as the Sparta Rifles, the unit was assigned as Company I, Third Wisconsin Regiment. When it was mustered into service because of the Spanish American War on July 15, 1896, it became Company L. Company commander was Captain Robert B. McCoy. McCoy, for whom Fort McCoy was named, later rose to the rank of Major General. And Company L later served in the Mexican Border Conflict in 1916.

The Sparta Guard, designated as the 64th Brigade, became part of the famous Red Arrow Division when it was mobilized on October 15, 1940. After one week of training at the East Oak Street Armory, the Sparta unit embarked on a troop train to Camp Beauregard, Louisiana.

During its training in the South, the 32nd Division was changed from the former Square Division to a Triangular Division. In this reorganization the Sparta Guard became the 32nd Cavalry and Reconnaissance Troop, one of the many designations it has held since that time.

On April 22, 1942, the Sparta company and other 32nd Division units boarded troop transports at San Francisco. They sailed for Australia, arriving on May 14, 1942.

Sparta soldiers saw action in New Guinea, Leyte and Luzon among other areas. During the Leyte Campaign, the unit received a Presidential Unit Citation for its valor. The Sparta unit was deactivated on February 28, 1946, after serving 654 days of combat duty.

Since World War II, the Sparta Guard has undergone many reorganizations, each requiring different military missions. In 1947, the unit was given federal recognition as the 32nd Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop (Mechanized) Wisconsin National Guard.

During the Berlin Crisis in 1961, the unit was called to active duty. Then designated as Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 2nd Reconnaissance Squadron, 105th Cavalry, the group departed Sparta in October for Fort Lewis, Washington. While at the West Coast base, the officers and men participated in rigid training for possible duty overseas. They remained in Washington until they were relieved from active duty on August 10, 1962.

The unit again was reorganized as Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1st Squadron, 10th Cavalry in March 1963. Four years later, this unit was called to active duty to assist law enforcement

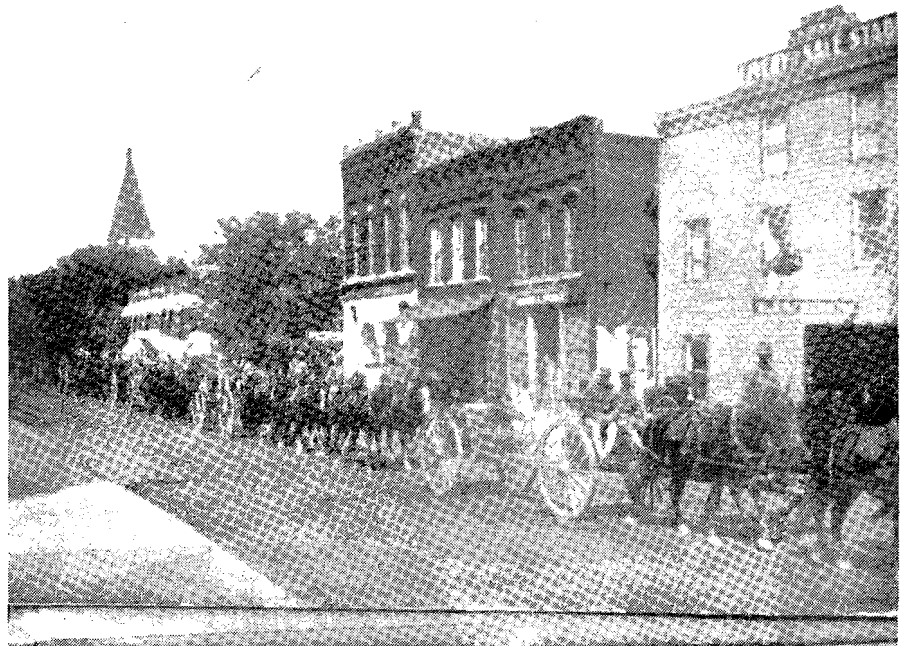
officers during the 1967 riots in Milwaukee.

In 1973, the Sparta guard successfully completed the Army Training Test on its first try.

During a state employees strike in 1977, members of the unit were called out to the Black River Falls Boys Camp. Annual training in 1979 was conducted in Texarkana, Texas. The following year the unit trained in Hanau, West Germany. In

1981 and 1982 the unit performed direct support maintenance at Fort McCoy and at Camp Williams, Wisconsin.

This unit has had several commanders since its reorganization after World War II. Among them are Charles Ambelang, Charles Masters, Edwin Monick, Jack Shafman, Ewald Erickson, Rex Slayton, Henry Heitman, Walter Riley, Ronnie Walheim, James Olson and Gerald Schaller.



Thirteen cannons fired an artillery salvo as the cortege left the Sparta Armory for the cemetery. After a brief graveside service, the artillery fired a second salvo instead of the usual rifle volleys.

General McCoy was the father of six sons and a daughter. He married Lillian Riege of Platteville in 1893. She died in an automobile accident in 1910. In 1920, McCoy married Mae B. Oswald of Minneapolis.

Five sons and a nephew served as

pallbearers at McCoy's funeral. They were Capt. Bruce R. McCoy, Robert McCoy, Douglas McCoy, Harold McCoy, Stuart McCoy and nephew Alex Gibbon. The eldest son, Lt. Malcolm McCoy, died at Vancouver Barracks, Washington, in 1917.

He also was survived by his daughter, Lillian. McCoy outlived his father by less than a year. Bruce E. McCoy, a Civil War veteran, died in his sleep at 96.

## Astronaut's inspiration found down on the farm

Probably no Sparta resident has spent more time off the ground than former astronaut Donald K. "Deke" Slayton.

Slayton, who was born in Sparta in 1924, is best remembered by city residents as a docking module pilot in the 1975 Apollo-Soyuz space link-up. In the next breath, most Spartans also would mention Slayton's selection as one of the seven original Project Mercury astronauts.

However, Slayton spent his formative years as a pilot. And the inspiration for flying came to him as a farmboy in the Monroe County township of Leon.

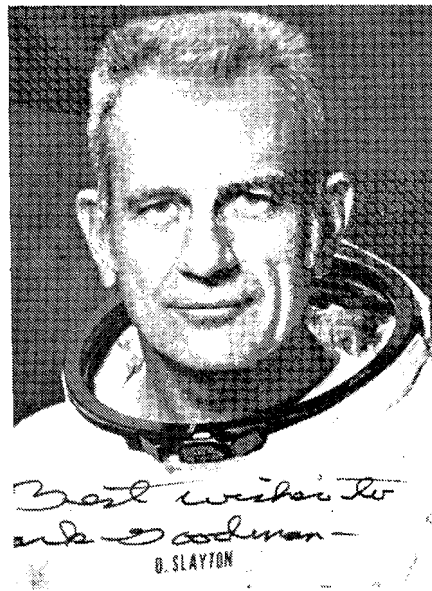
Slayton once told newspaper correspondent Nora Magelee that he became interested in aviation while down on the farm. "I guess it was when I was pitching hay on the farm when I was in high school as I watched planes from Volk Field and Camp McCoy fly overhead," he said. "I was wishing I was up there rather than down here, pitching hay, and knowing there must be an easier way to make a living."

After attending Leon Primary School and graduating with honors from Sparta High School in 1942, Slayton enlisted in the service on his 18th birthday. He became an aviation cadet and won his wings in 1943, receiving instruction in Vernon and Waco, Texas.

During World War II, Slayton piloted a B-25 in the 340th Bombardment Group. He flew 56 combat missions over Europe before returning to the United States in mid-1944. Then he served as B-25 instructor pilot in Columbia, South Carolina, until April 1945, when he joined the 319th Bombardment Group in Okinawa.

Flying over the Pacific, Slayton participated in seven more combat missions in the Japanese Theatre. Once the war ended, he again became a B-25 instructor pilot.

In January 1947, Slayton enrolled in the University of Minnesota. He maintained membership in the Minnesota Air National Guard and received a degree in aeronautical engineering in 1949.



"DEKE" SLAYTON

Following his graduation, he worked in Seattle as an aeronautical engineer for Boeing Aircraft. He was recalled to active duty in early 1951 and was assigned to Minneapolis as maintenance flight test officer of an F-51 squadron.

For a time, he later was a technical inspector at the 12th Air Force Headquarters and spent 18 months as a fighter pilot and maintenance officer with the 36th Fighter Day Wing in Bitburg, Germany.

Slayton returned from Germany in 1955 and attended the Air Force Flight Test Pilot School in California. From 1956 to April 1959, he flew most jet fighter-type aircraft and some foreign fighters as an experimental test pilot.

Before being named as one of the project Mercury astronauts in 1959, Slayton was Chief of Fighter Test Section A at Edwards Air Force Base. He had logged 3,600 flying hours, 2,200 in jets, prior to his appointment by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Poised to follow fellow astronaut John Glenn into outer space, Slayton had to

wait 16 years for his chance. He was scrubbed from Project Mercury in the mid-1960s after a slight heart murmur was detected after a rigorous training exercise.

According to Magelee, Slayton was outspoken in his "disappointment over the loss of his chance to fly in space..." Grounded, he became director of flight crew operations and selected astronauts for subsequent space flights.

Slayton finally got his chance to travel in space on the 1975 Apollo-Soyuz mission. The American-Russian space rendezvous was intended, Slayton said, to develop a procedure for rescuing disabled space ships.

"Probably more important than the rescue mission is that this is the first time that I know of where the two nations are joining efforts in a constructive program, and generating a dialogue for the betterment of the world," he said before the mission.

On July 15, 1975, Slayton along with Brig. Gen. Thomas P. Stafford and Vance D. Brand were launched from Cape Canaveral, Florida, in an Apollo spacecraft. A Soviet Soyuz spacecraft carrying Cosmonauts Alexi Leonov and Valeri Kubasov was launched the same day from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in central Russia.

The two vehicles completed their cosmic link-up two days later on July 17, 1975. The link-up was commemorated by a pair of U.S. stamps issued that year.

After the mission, Slayton remained with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration until his recent retirement. He accepted an executive position with a satellite company and was living in Houston, Texas, during the City's Centennial.

According to Magelee research, Slayton excelled in track as a Sparta High School athlete. He played on the Future Farmers of America basketball team in high school, and he showed Oxford sheep one year at the state fair in Milwaukee.

Magelee wrote that Slayton's schoolmates "described him as a reserved youth, who caused little attention, worked hard, never got in scrapes or did anything spectacular."

Slayton married Marjorie Lunney of Los Angeles, a civilian secretary to an Air Force officer. They were married in two ceremonies held in Weisbaden, West Germany. One was held to fulfill requirements for the German government, and the other was held in a chapel on a military base. They had one son named Kent.

Slayton was known as Don during his Sparta days. He acquired the nickname "Deke" as a test pilot at Edwards Air Force Base in California. To differentiate then-Capt. Slayton from another test pilot, Capt. Don Sorlie, Slayton used his initials D.K. Eventually, the initials became Deke.