

Statistics and Boondoggling Tales of Earlier Days By Bob Dewel

Like the housewife who clears out the clutter every few months, we have to do the same. There are clippings and stories that don't qualify for a full column but deserve mention. Here's a column about weather, local cities, and army boondoggling.

Wisconsin Weather Extremes

In 1901 the newspaper reported that it was 35 below in Baraboo. I believe there are similar stories of frigid temperatures since then. However, they are either not official or are not recognized by the media. The internet, which knows everything--go to Infoplease and click Wisconsin Temperature Extremes--, fails to report our local readings. It does list the lowest reading anywhere in the state over a period of years and does show the Wisconsin all-time record low as -55 at Courderay. That was in 1996, but Courderay also has record lows in 1962, 1964, and 1983. Better take your earmuffs if you go there.

There are other records of interest, none of which are near to Sauk County—where is Gorden for example. Most interesting, though is the statement that the record low in Wisconsin in 1966 was 7 ABOVE in Gorden. In 1949, the Wisconsin low is said to be 10 ABOVE, in some place called Coddington Exp. Farm. So take your choice, global warming or cooling?

Learning from a Zip Code

Someone sent me a suggestion I go to Zipskinny (select Google first) and see how much can be learned fry

comparing zip codes. You can get ratings on population density, high school education, the number of bachelors and married in your area, how many have lived here five years or more, unemployed figures, and median income for about ten zip codes in the 53*** zip code area. Why Reedsburg's 53959 was not included I don't know, and Baraboo's 53913 is not a choice on the Reedsburg page.

There was one area of comparison between the towns. The Baraboo 53913 code covers some 17693 addresses, while the Reedsburg 93599 code only reaches 11525 addresses. This would be of interest to a merchant in his advertising plans Baraboo showed 7752 housing units, compared to 4741 in Reedsburg. The Baraboo Zip area occupies 132.55 square miles as compared to 108.36 for Reedsburg.

There are several more comparisons that can be made with Reedsburg. Baraboo has a slight edge in persons with college degrees, but slightly fewer married persons, and a slightly higher divorce rate. Comparative household incomes are given in several ranges of dollars, for the reader to ponder. At the unknown date of these figures, Reedsburg had somewhat fewer unemployed, but more persons below the poverty line. Readers who like statistics can go to this site and compare many groups of cities in these categories.

Military Boondoggling

A boondoggle is an unnecessary or wasted activity, often cursed in more colorful terms by soldiers when forced into an activity by an officer aspiring for favors or attention from his superior officers—there's a term for that too. The Chicago Tribune recently printed images from World War one showing several boondoggles, one of which is reprinted with this article.

Note that what appears to a federal shield is actually a distant photograph from some high point of men, soldiers of course. Thirty Thousand



THE SHIELD
The most populous living insignia photographed by Arthur Mole and John Thomas contained 30,000 men at Camp Custer, Mich., in 1918.

The close-up (left) depicts the soldiers closest to the camera.

(Yes, 30,000) Soldiers! After what must have been weeks of planning and rehearsal, these men at Camp Custer Michigan were ordered in to this clever but useless formation!

If the number 30,000 seems large, remember that as one is more distant from the camera, the smaller the object appears. Thus while we can pick out actually recognizable men in the first few rows, the star-studded area at the top contains far more men than the striped area below. In fact, under a magnifying glass, each star alone appears to contain an estimated 250 to 300 men, with thousands of men in the blue background. The men were told what to wear, white or blue or Khaki, as well as where to stand and what hat to wear.

Each man appears to be shoulder to shoulder and in close proximity to the men before and behind him. How would you like to be one of the poor "grunts" (G.I.'s, etc.) in the middle of this mass of male humanity? Note that in the front row left, wearing white shirts, there are three men. Two groups back, there are only two men--one lucky guy must have been on sick call that day--only two men where there should be three!

Now follow that row back, and the men are five or six abreast though the white line seems narrower. Because the picture was taken from the top of a building, or perhaps a crane, the grouping of men has to be much wider at the rear to compensate for the camera making distant things smaller. It was clever photography.

This is only one of several such pictures printed in the Tribune, from other army posts. It sounds like different posts competed for similar displays. There is even one portraying the Statue of Liberty rather well, though pointless as far as the war effort was concerned. Were any Sauk soldiers involved in these exercises? Old scrapbooks might reveal participation. If so, let us know, please.