

“Bringing rustic  
nostalgia to your  
vacation”

# Northwoods Navigator News

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SECOND ISSUE • SPRING/SUMMER EDITION • 2025



## A NORTHWOODS REVIVAL: GRESHAM SHORES RESORT ENTERS A NEW ERA

Tucked in the heart of Arbor Vitae, Popes Gresham Lodge has been a cherished Northwoods destination since the 1950s. Originally home to just a lodge and restaurant—now the well-loved Backdraft BBQ at Gresham Lodge—the property slowly evolved into a resort as cozy cabins were added over the decades. Today, the resort features six cabins, each holding decades of family memories, lakeside tradition, and that nostalgic “Up North” charm.

For over 50 years, generations of families have made Gresham Shores part of their summer story. And for much of that time, the resort and lodge were lovingly owned and operated by the same man, whose dedication kept the spirit of the place

alive. A few years ago, new ownership stepped in with a commitment to preserve that spirit—while giving the rustic cabins some much-needed TLC.

Enter Lakeland Rental Management. With deep local roots and a growing passion for design, Marketing Director Kaitlyn Kramer has been expanding her role—breathing new life into old cabins by blending her background in interior design with a love for the Northwoods.

This past spring, amidst snowstorms, family events, and even the arrival of a new baby, she completed a full transformation of Woodie’s Perch, one of the resort’s charming lakeside cabins. Her mission? To preserve the cabin’s authentic rustic

character while infusing it with comfort, personality, and fresh visual appeal.

The result is a warm, inviting retreat that celebrates its history while feeling right at home in the present. The vision came to life with the help of Reservations Manager Maggie Siclovan—and, occasionally, their husbands lending a hand with the heavy lifting. A true team effort powered by creativity, grit, and a little “girl power.”

But Woodie’s Perch isn’t the only cabin getting attention. The neighboring cabin, Smiling Moose, received its own facelift last year—just in time for a visit from social media travel influencers That Wisconsin Couple. Their long weekend stay and glowing posts brought new

visibility to the resort, with many curious travelers now seeking out the updated cabins.

As Gresham Shores continues its revival, the vision is clear: to preserve the timeless feel of a beloved Northwoods getaway while gently updating it for the next generation of vacationers. Whether you’re returning after decades or discovering it for the first time, come stay at Gresham Shores and experience a resort that’s being lovingly brought back to life—one cabin at a time.



Thank you for choosing to stay with Lakeland Rental Management!

We hope your vacation is both memorable and enjoyable.  
A few quick reminders:

Be sure to check the Information Booklet in your cabin for details on your stay, local contacts, emergency numbers, activities, and our favorite dining and sightseeing recommendations. You’ll also find interesting facts about the are you are staying in.

If you can’t locate your booklet, simply scan the QR code provided or give our office a call at 715-356-3178. We are here and happy to help!

Remember, these are peoples’ homes that they have graciously opened up to share with you, please treat them with care.

Lakeland Rental  
Office Hours:  
Monday-Friday  
9 AM - 4 PM  
715-356-3178



## DID YOU KNOW?

### *MINOCQUA IS HOME TO THE WORLD’S LARGEST PENNY*



While the world’s largest penny sculpture may technically reside in the neighboring town of Woodruff, its story is deeply woven into the fabric of Minocqua’s rich history—and at the heart of it is a remarkable woman: Dr. Kate Newcomb, lovingly remembered as the Angel on Snowshoes.

In the early to mid-1900s, Dr. Kate provided medical care to the remote Northwoods communities, often trekking for miles—sometimes on snowshoes—through deep snow to reach her patients’ homes. Her selfless dedication earned her a place in the hearts of residents across the Minocqua area. But after years of enduring the physical toll of house calls, Dr. Kate began dreaming of a better way to serve her patients: a local hospital.

Lacking traditional fundraising channels, she came up with a humble yet powerful idea. She encouraged local school children to collect and donate pennies to help fund the construction of a community hospital. The idea quickly captured the imagination of people far beyond the Northwoods.

After a national news feature highlighted the effort, support poured in from across the country. By mail, hundreds of thousands of pennies arrived—eventually totaling 1.7 million pennies, or \$17,000 at the time—enough to build a modest 17-bed hospital, which opened its doors in March of 1954.

Sadly, Dr. Kate passed away just two years later at the age of 70. But her legacy endures in the most heartwarming way: with the World’s Largest Penny, a 9-foot-tall roadside sculpture honoring the fundraising effort, and the Dr. Kate Newcomb Museum, which shares her story and the lives she touched.

Today, visitors to the Minocqua area can witness this inspiring piece of history—proof that even the smallest contribution can lead to something truly monumental. It’s a testament to the power of community, compassion, and one woman’s unshakable determination to care for her neighbors.



## TWO NAMES, ONE MISSION:

### *THE STORY BEHIND LAKELAND RENTAL MANAGEMENT & NORTHWOODS NAVIGATOR*

In 2019, Nicole Beer stepped into the world of property management by acquiring Northwoods Property Management, a trusted name in the Minocqua area. With a passion for lakeside living and a clear vision, she rebranded the company as Lakeland

Rental Management, reflecting the charm and lifestyle of the Northwoods.

As the business grew, Nicole sought a brand that better captured the magic, nostalgia, and adventurous spirit of the region. From that vision, Northwoods Navigator was born.

Today, the business operates under two distinct names with one shared mission: to deliver exceptional service and unforgettable experiences for homeowners, guests, and tenants alike.

Northwoods Navigator focuses on vacation rentals and real estate — offering everything from cozy cabins to luxury lakefront homes. Lakeland Rental Management specializes in long-term rentals, providing trusted property management throughout the region.

Together, they offer a full spectrum of

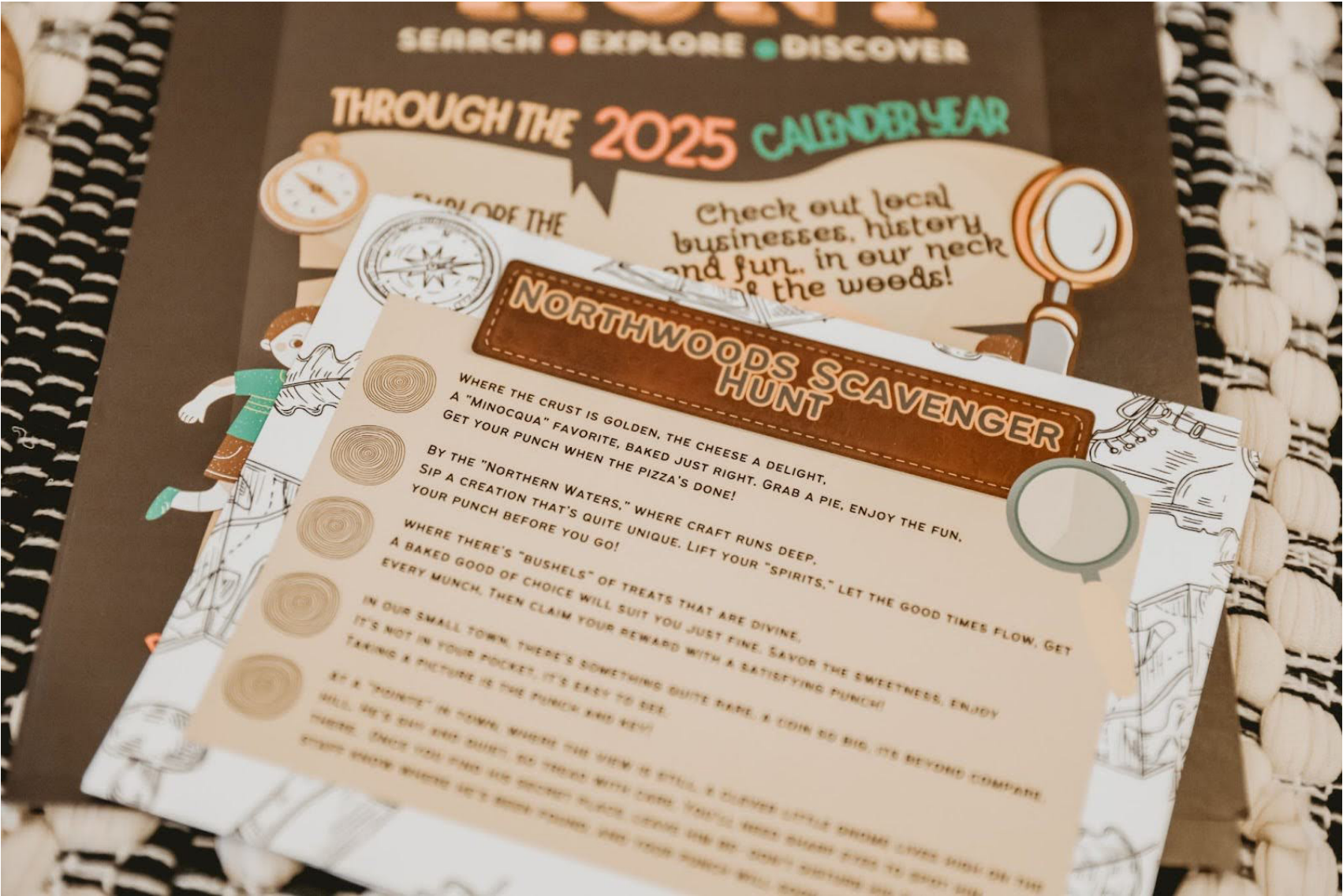
rental services rooted in local connection, dependable care, and a deep love for the Northwoods.

Whether you’re planning a weekend getaway or searching for a long-term home, Lakeland Rental Management and Northwoods Navigator are here to help you find your place in the Northwoods.



# EXPLORE MINOCQUA IN A WHOLE NEW WAY:

## JOIN THE LAKELAND RENTAL SCAVENGER HUNT!



This past winter, Lakeland Rental Management launched an exciting new initiative to connect guests with the charm and spirit of the Northwoods: the Minocqua Area Scavenger Hunt. In partnership with local businesses, we’ve created a fun, family-friendly experience that encourages vacationers and locals alike to get out, explore, and support the Minocqua community.

**How It Works:** Participants can pick up a Scavenger Hunt Card from any of our Lakeland Rental properties, right at our office in downtown Minocqua, or download a printable version online.

Each card includes clues that lead you to iconic local businesses and beloved

Northwoods attractions—from coffee shops and fudge counters to scenic overlooks and hidden gems. At every stop, simply get your card punched by a participating business. Once your card is fully punched, head back to our office to claim your prize! You can choose between:

- One free piece of Northwoods Navigator merchandise
- A 25% discount on a future booking with Lakeland Rental (terms and conditions apply).

It’s a small token of appreciation for supporting our town and exploring all that the Minocqua area has to offer.

Lakeland Rental is deeply rooted in the

Northwoods. We believe in preserving the history, charm, and sense of community that makes Minocqua so special. This scavenger hunt is just one more way we aim to bring people together—to share stories, make memories, and support the incredible local businesses that make this area worth visiting year after year.

Whether you’re here for a week or just a weekend, the scavenger hunt is a fun and easy way to explore the area—perfect for families, couples, or solo adventurers. Grab your card, follow the clues, and discover your new favorite places in Minocqua.

*Let the hunt begin!*

# TOP 10

## THINGS TO DO IN MINOCQUA IN SUMMER

### 1. Bearskin State Trail

Ride, walk, or run along this scenic 18-mile crushed-granite trail winding past forests, wetlands, lakes, and more than a dozen historic trestles. Family-friendly and accessible year-round.

### 2. Min-Aqua Bats Waterski Show

Catch “the world’s longest-running amateur water ski show” every Sunday, Wednesday, and Friday evening on Lake Minocqua—an entertaining summer tradition since the 1950s.

### 3. Wildwood Wildlife Park

Get up close with over 1,700 animals—feed deer, goats, pigs, even birds in your hand. Ideal for families and animal lovers.

### 4. Torpy Park & Beach

Fun for all ages: sandy beach, playground, tennis, picnic shelters, public dock, volleyball courts—and often hosts events, live music, and festivals.

### 5. Scheer’s Lumberjack Show

Head to Woodruff for thrilling timber-sports events like log-rolling, ax-throwing, and chopping, often featuring world-champion athletes.

### 6. Ice Cream at Kilwins Downtown

Enjoy pontoon cruises—morning, lunch, or sunset—or rent a kayak, canoe, paddleboard, or jet ski to explore the chain of lakes at your own pace.

### 7. Rock Falls Riding Stables

A full day of fun: horseback trail rides, go-karts, and mini-golf make this a great choice for groups and families.

### 8. Northwoods Zip Line Adventure

Thrill-seekers: soar over the Northwoods on one of the largest zip-line tours in the Midwest—soar through forests, over water, and get those endorphins flowing.

### 9. Minocqua Farmers Market

Every Friday morning, browse fresh produce, baked goods, artisan crafts—and enjoy live music while supporting local producers.

### 10. Downtown Delight & Treats

Stroll charming downtown streets filled with boutiques, fudge shops like Dan’s, waterfront dining at Thirsty Whale, nostalgic ice cream parlors, and summer festivals—perfect for relaxed exploration.



“Bringing rustic  
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# NOW AVAILABLE: NORTHWOODS NAVIGATOR MERCHANDISE!

*TAKE HOME A PIECE OF THE NORTHWOODS*



Whether you’re wrapping up a weekend at the cabin or reminiscing about a perfect summer by the lake, you can now bring a little piece of your vacation home with you—thanks to the brand-new line of Northwoods Navigator merch!

We’re excited to announce that Northwoods Navigator collection is now available for purchase at our Woodruff office. From cozy hoodies to classic T-shirts, stylish hats, mugs, and more, each item is designed to capture the nostalgia

and rustic charm of the Northwoods lifestyle.

Our Northwoods Navigator brand was inspired by those who love to explore Wisconsin’s lakes, woods, and small-town magic. Whether you spent the week fishing, hiking, sipping coffee on the porch, or gathering around the firepit, our merchandise is a great way to commemorate your stay and share your love for the Northwoods with friends and family. Swing by our office to check out the full selection—or surprise a loved one with the perfect Northwoods gift.

### Want to Get Your Hands on Some Free Merch?

There’s another fun way to score your own piece of Northwoods Navigator gear—by participating in our brand-new Minocqua Area Scavenger Hunt! Once you’ve

collected all your punches, you can stop by our office to claim a prize—either a free merch item or 25% off a future stay (terms apply).

It’s a great excuse to explore the area, support local businesses, and earn some Northwoods swag in the process.

Visit Us to Browse or Play stop into our Lakeland Rental office to, Shop the full Northwoods Navigator merch line, Grab your scavenger hunt card and start exploring or Redeem your completed card for prizes and discounts

We’re proud to offer this new way to connect with our guests and community. So whether you’re picking up a T-shirt as a souvenir or completing your hunt for the perfect hoodie—we can’t wait to see you!

## REMEMBER: *BOOK LOCAL!*

In today’s world, booking vacation rentals through platforms like Airbnb and VRBO has become the norm. While these services may seem convenient, what many people don’t realize is that booking through third-party sites often takes away from the small business owners who manage and care for these properties. For guests booking in the Northwoods area, choosing to book directly through the local business or property manager makes a world of difference.

At Lakeland Rental Management, we

encourage guests to book directly through our website [northwoods.navigator.com](http://northwoods.navigator.com), rather than using third-party platforms. By doing so, you’re supporting the local homeowners who open their doors to travelers like you, and the businesses that work hard to maintain these properties and ensure you have a fantastic stay. Not only does booking directly put more money in the pockets of the homeowners and small businesses, but it also allows for a more personalized experience, with better service and attention to detail.

“When you book through major platforms, a significant percentage of your payment goes to the booking site,” explains Kaitlyn Kramer, Marketing Director for Lakeland

Rental Management. “By booking directly with us, you’re not just securing your vacation, you’re actively supporting the homeowners who pour their hearts into maintaining their cabins and also supporting the small businesses that work behind the scenes to make sure your stay is memorable.”

At Lakeland Rental Management, we offer a variety of privately owned cabins that combine modern comfort with the charm and nostalgia of the Northwoods. Many of these homes have been part of the community for generations. They are lovingly cared for by local owners who are passionate about sharing their piece of the Northwoods with visitors. When you

book through third-party sites, the service fees often leave these local owners with less of the revenue they rely on to continue providing high-quality, well-maintained accommodations.

So next time you’re planning your Northwoods getaway, remember that booking direct is the best way to support small businesses and local homeowners. Plus, you’ll get the added benefit of knowing that your hard-earned vacation dollars are going straight to the people who make your stay possible. Make sure to visit [northwoodsnavigator.com](http://northwoodsnavigator.com) to explore our wide selection of vacation rentals and secure your perfect Northwoods retreat today!

# NORTHWOODS NAVIGATOR TO LAUNCH EXCLUSIVE GUEST EXPERIENCES IN THE NORTHWOODS

Northwoods Navigator, known for its unique collection of vacation rental properties across the Northwoods, is preparing to elevate guest stays with a brand-new lineup of curated experiences designed to immerse visitors in the magic of the region.

Starting later this year, guests will be able to enhance their vacation with optional add-on experiences ranging from thrilling to indulgent. Whether you’re a fan of the supernatural or a foodie looking to savor the flavors of the Northwoods, there will be something for everyone.

**Upcoming offerings include:**

**Ghost Hunting Experience:** Join a guided evening tour of local legends and haunted hotspots. Perfect for adventurous guests looking to explore the eerie folklore of the area.

**Local Tasting Experience:** A curated sampling of the Northwoods’ best—featuring local brews, wines, cheeses, and seasonal specialties.

**Private Chef Night:** Treat yourself to an in-home dining experience where a private chef prepares a gourmet meal tailored

to your tastes—all within the comfort of your cabin.

“We’re excited to introduce these experiences as a way to help guests connect more deeply with the Northwoods,” said Kaitlyn Kramer, Marketing Director at Lakeland Rental Management. “We don’t just want to provide a place to stay—we want to create unforgettable moments that guests will talk about long after their vacation ends.”

A full menu of experience options will be available on Lakeland Rental

Management’s website, each with transparent pricing and the ability to book in advance or during your stay. Whether you’re planning a romantic weekend, a family getaway, or a solo retreat, these experiences offer guests a chance to craft a truly personalized Northwoods adventure.

Stay tuned as Lakeland continues to roll out even more unique offerings designed to enrich your stay and bring the spirit of the Northwoods to life—one experience at a time.

# NORTHWOODS NAVIGATOR RENTALS PARTNERS WITH LOCAL STAR PROGRAM TO SUPPORT STUDENTS AND COMMUNITY

Minocqua, WI — Northwoods Navigator Rentals is proud to be more than just a vacation rental company—we’re a part of the Northwoods community. This summer, that commitment to community involvement has grown stronger through a special partnership with Lakeland Union High School’s STAR Program.

The STAR Program—Strengthening Teaching-Learning and Results for States—is designed to support students with autism by providing real-world work experience and life skills training. One of the vacation rental owners in the Northwoods Navigator program also happens to be the director of the

STAR Program and recognized a unique opportunity to connect students with a local business. She reached out to Northwoods Navigator’s owner, Nicole Beer, to explore a possible partnership—and it turned out to be a perfect match.

As a result, a few STAR students have joined the Northwoods Navigator team this summer, helping out in the company’s laundry office. The added help has been a huge benefit during the busiest season of the year, and the collaboration has created a meaningful experience for everyone involved.

“We are so thankful to have the support of these students during our high-traffic

summer months,” said Kaitlyn Kramer, Marketing Director at Northwoods Navigator Rentals. “It’s an incredible feeling to know that not only are we receiving help when we need it most, but we’re also playing a small part in helping local students gain confidence and valuable job skills.”

This partnership reflects Northwoods Navigator’s broader mission to support and connect with the local community whenever possible—from working with local artisans and small businesses to creating inclusive opportunities for students and future leaders.

“We’re more than cabins and rentals—

we’re people, and we care about people,” said owner Nicole Beer. “It’s what makes the Northwoods special, and we’re proud to play a role in that.”

As the season continues, Northwoods Navigator Rentals remains dedicated to finding new and meaningful ways to give back—and to being a company that not only serves its guests but also uplifts its community.





**Frogs Used to Control Mosquitos:** Minocqua once tried to control its mosquito population by importing frogs. In 1925 hundreds of frogs were imported from Glorida to combat the mosquito menace. This fact came out in an article in *The Minocqua Times* under the headline “Green From Found Near Town Hall” published March 26, 1926. The article said that spring was officially ushered in– Al Denoyer had found a live green frog near the town hall. “The creature was somewhat chilled and stiff jointed,” the paper noted, “but when he was placed in warm water, he hopped about as briskly as in midsommer.”

Article from Lakeland Times  
Centennial Edition

**Quite a large forest fire was raging west of Woodruff for the past few days. We understand that some camps belonging to OS Lemma were destroyed**

May 3 1900



## GIGGLE CORNER

## Q: HOW DO PINE TREES GET ONLINE?

**A: THEY LOG IN!**

### Q: WHY DID THE BEAR APPLY FOR A CABIN RENTAL?

**A: HE HEARD IT CAME WITH  
FREE S'MORE SUPPORT!**

**Q: WHAT DO YOU CALL A FISH  
WITH NO EYES?**

**A: FSH**

## Q: WHY DON'T FISH DO WELL AT SCHOOL?

**A: BECAUSE THEY'RE ALWAYS GETTING CAUGHT!**



**“THE NORTHERN” -  
WHERE MINOCQUA  
HISTORY BEGINS**  
*COMPILED BY WILLIAM PIPER —  
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An Indian Village Known as Nin-ocqua and Trading Post First Existed on this Site the history of Minocqua begins at Nitschke's Northern Resort, formerly the site of the Hotel Northern, also known simply as The Northern, located at the end of Northern Road and adjacent to a water thoroughfare connecting Lake Minocqua to Lake Kawaguesaga. In 2025, it is celebrating its 125 th anniversary as a Resort. The first recorded history of this particular site comes from field notes

prepared by government surveyors of the Indian reservation dated April 1, 1851, and reads as follows:

“We find on the banks of a short thoroughfare in Section 15, Town 39, Range 6, a fur trading post, which is one-story hewed-log building, 20 x 40. There is also an Indian village called Nin-Oco-Qua, with about 300 Indians and a great many Indian Mounds in the vicinity.”

The Indians who lived in this area were

Ojibwe or also known as Chippewa. The earliest known surveys of the area, dating back as far as 1862, show an Indian village on the north side of the thoroughfare between Lake Minocqua and Lake Kawaguesaga. This survey can now be found on a web site maintained by Oneida County.

The first white men to visit the area were probably French fur traders. In the mid

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1800s, the John Jacob Astor American Fur Trading Co. Post occupied a fur trading post along this thoroughfare, where the Northern Resort is now located, and is likely the trading post referred to in the surveyor field notes. This trading post that was the precursor to the Northern Hotel also has a connection to the grand Waldoff Astoria.

Understanding the connection involves some history. John Jacobs Astor was America’s first multi millionaire. He lived from 1763 to 1848. He was born in Walldorf Germany and after he emigrated to America became a businessman, merchant, real estate mogul, and investor who made his fortune mainly in a fur trade and by smuggling opium into China, and by investing in real estate in or around New York City. When he died in 1848 he was one of the richest people in America and his total wealth equaled .9% of America total GDP. In relation to GDP, he had as much wealth as Jeff Bezos does today. Much of his wealth came from fur trading. Thomas Jefferson gave him permission to start the American Fur Trading Company which had a chain of trading posts in the Great Lakes region. His agents would trade with the Indians and ship furs to Europe. He later expanded to the Pacific Northwest.

Before the Civil War, one of Astors trading posts that were part of a chain of American Fur Trading Company posts stood on the site of the old Northern Hotel. The site was across the channel from the Indian village. One of John Jacob Astor’s descendants, John Jacob Astor IV, later built the Waldorf Astoria. Gus Nolan, the founder of the resort, went on to build the Northern Hotel.

### Gus Nolan First Visits the Site in 1886

Gus Nolan was one of the first Minocqua residents to have visited the area and later continued to live in Minocqua at the Hotel Northern. He was born in Petersboro Canada in 1858, the son of Irish immigrants. He came to the United States in 1873, and followed the timber industry as a timber cruiser and estimator. It was said that “Gus was a large man, not in the sense of being overweight, but larger than the average in every dimension. He had a warm, friendly manner, and was distinguished looking.” He would go on



to become a leading citizen of Minocqua. Gus was a government surveyor who first ran the line between Michigan and Wisconsin. After completing that assignment, he then was sent to survey the southeastern boundary line of the Lac du Flambeau Indian Reservation to the west of Minocqua. He was told to report to an agent at Flambeau where he then received an order to assist with moving to the reservation the Indians known from the earlier survey to be living at this site. He first arrived on the site on May 21, 1886. An Indian interpreter, John Catfish, was hired to help him and they camped along the south side of the thoroughfare between the two lakes. Because of the field notes of 1851 and the 1862 survey, he expected to find the Indian village at this site. However, by the time he

arrived, the Indians had moved across the lake and onto the island where Minocqua is now located. It consisted of 387 Indians in two bands. All he could find on the south shore of the thoroughfare was the foundation of an old log cabin which may have been the site of the trading post. On the north shore he found Indian burial mounds.

### Evil Spirits? An Indian War and Disease Caused the Indians to Move Across the Lake

Gus wondered what happened to the Indian village shown on the survey and what caused them to move across the lake. He learned through his interpreter, John Catfish, that the Indians believed the site was inhabited by evil spirits. Nolan recalled what he was told by Catfish: “The older Indians believed that evil spirits had visited the camp or that it was the evil spirits of the Sioux whom they had killed in battle in the early 1850s.” While the Chippewa were peaceful people, they were under attack by the Sioux throughout the northwoods. This battle was known as the Sioux/Chippewa battle of Nin-Oco-Qua and took place sometime in the 1850s. The Chippewa prevailed but hundreds of Indians died. Later, many Chippewa died from smallpox disease which nearly wiped out the entire population. It was then that they decided to move. Surveyor Field notes of 1882 reflect the village was reestablished on the island. There are some reports that buried bones of the Indians, together with arrowheads and other artifacts

could be found along the shores of the thoroughfare during the early 1900s. There is also an archaeological report that a conical shaped Indian mound existed somewhere behind the kitchen building of the hotel.

### Hell’s Half Acre. The Site Serves the Men Building the Railroad and Minocqua

Gus finished his work in 1887 and left briefly, but soon returned the following year

as the railroad arrived and Minocqua began to be built. Minocqua became a town in 1889. The Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad began laying tracks north to Minocqua in 1887. Before the town of Minocqua was even built, the site of the Hotel Northern occupied many tents and temporary log cabins for railroad workers and the laborers who built Minocqua. John E. Murray owned a saloon in a tent along the south side of the thoroughfare and a man named Foss had a saloon called “Hells Half Acre” in a tent part way up the hill there. Indeed, with several taverns, it was a rowdy place for lumberjacks and railroad workers after

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a long day at work. The line reached the Kawaguesaga swamp, just south of The Northern by October 1887. The swamp posed a major problem as everything began to sink. There was an attempt to build a trestle over a half mile portion of the swamp. The trestle kept sinking. A corduroy of 90 foot timber trees was laid over the sunken trestle and fill was placed on top of the corduroy. It was reported, “Six yoke of oxen, three teams of horses and 13 sand cars were on the fill when the corduroy of lumber broke. A cry went out to cut the thugs and save the horses, but the entire corduroy sank so fast that today, the railroad cars, horses and oxen, still chained to their scrapers and slushers, are on the bottom.” Pilings were then driven into the swamp and the trestle was completed. Eventually the trestle over the swamp was replaced with fill.

### Nolan Returns, Marries and Opens the Hotel Northern

When he returned in 1888, Nolan began working for the Land Log and Lumber Co. and other operators. He also helped survey the new town of Minocqua as it was being built. In 1892, he married Josephine Parent, the daughter of the owner of the property. Josephine’s father had been an agent of the Hudson Bay Company, a fur trading post. When the post closed, the land was deeded to Parent, who later built the home that became the Nolan’s home in 1895.

Gus was persuaded by the owner of Liggitt and Meyers Tobacco Co. to set up a resort quarters and was guaranteed enough business to make the business pay. The first Nolan home was originally used for this purpose, after which the cabins and

hotel were built. Later the old homestead was moved down to the end of the row of the cabins, nearest the lake, possibly close to where Cabin 1 now stands. The cottage closest that is somewhat ornate was Nolan’s original home.

### Hotel Northern: A Premier Resort in the Northwoods

The resort opened for business in 1900 and was known as the Hotel Northern. It was a premier resort of the Northwoods. The hotel was built in proximity to where Cabins 15, 16 and 17 are located. The steps from the hotel can still be seen leading down to the water. From early 20 th century photos, there was a small boat house at the bottom of the stairs in the thoroughfare. A larger boathouse existed on the west side of the tracks, in Lake Kawaguesaga, in proximity to the tiny island that can be seen on that side. Pilings still protrude from the water around this island which was once named Lee’s Island after a subsequent owner of the resort. Other photos and artist renderings indicate a bridge existed between the hotel and the tracks, possibly to allow passengers to exit or to reach the boat house. That area leading to the trail is now filled in.

By 1924, the hotel could accommodate 100 guests and had 6 cabins, a boat house and dance hall and other buildings on 10 acres of ground. Gus Savage later became its manager. It was known for its fine lithia spring water, fishing and good eats. Among Nolan’s first guests were presidential candidate William Jennings Bryant and his family, who came in 1900 when he brought his campaign to northern Wisconsin. Although his actual stay cannot be confirmed, there are old newspaper

reports that President Woodrow Wilson had booked a stay at the Hotel after his nominating convention for a second term was over.

Josephine died on July 30, 1926 and Nolan married Ethel Cleary on November 15, 1928. Gus Nolan died in 1945. He and his first wife Josephine, are buried at a cemetery in Merrill.

### The Hilkers Continue the Traditions of the Northern

In 1946, the resort was purchased by Lee and Barney Hilker of Dayton Ohio. The Hilkers preserved the resort essentially the way Nolan ran it, filling it with his antiques. It was reported: “Hardwood floors formed the base of the entire lodge. Guests relaxed, as always on the porch in straight back rockers. The kitchen had the original stove, along with original kitchen utensils, coffee grinder, ice crushing machine, meat scale, butter churn, milk cans and crocks. Ben Franklin stoves provided the heat. The walls were

decorated with trophy fish, moose and deer that Gus had shot. His snow shoes were on display and his hat and cane remained on the clothes rack. Guests shared bathrooms and at the end of the hallways stood porcelain shaving stands and mirrors. The Hilkers offered either a modified American or European plan, prepared by Beulah the cook. Probably the one major change they made was installing modern plumbing, although the pumps were kept ready in case the modern water system failed. The chamber pots were filled with flowers. Lee Hilker did not know Gus Nolan, but after living at the resort among his possessions and running the resort, felt Gus was a member of the family and tried to keep his memory alive. The Hilkers ran the resort for 32 years.

### The Railroad Helps Make the Hotel Northern a Premier Vacation Destination

The trains continued to bring guests to

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Minocqua, the hotel and local camps. A Milwaukee Road train schedule from 1957 shows that a train known as the Tomahawk left Chicago daily at 11:00 p.m. and arrived in Minocqua at 11:30 a.m. the next day. The Fishermans Express would leave on Friday and arrive the same day. Passengers would return with their weekend catch on Monday. The trains would also bring young campers from the city to local camps like Camp Kawaga and Agawak. The train ceased operating in 1971 and the tracks were removed in 1973 to make way for the Bearskin Trail State Park.

### Webb’s Northern Resort Transitions to Modern Amenities

The property was later subdivided and the resort portion was sold to Phil Webb and his brother around 1978. It became known as Webb’s Northern Resort. The back portion of the original 10 acres was retained by the Hilker family. The only remaining house is the yellow cottage on Northern Road seen before entering the resort. In addition, the old Star Cottage, an historic log cabin, can be seen situated in back of the yellow cottage. This log cabin dates back to the earliest days of Minocqua and according to Gus Nolan was once part of John Mann’s resort located on the other side of the thoroughfare. Phil Webb was a carpenter and operated the resort for 13 years. During 1980s, he first built the gray cabins. Building codes made the hotel obsolete. The hotel and other cabins were razed in 1987. This made room for the newer cabins. Some of the current condo owners at the resort can remember Phil Webb and his battle with

the Wisconsin DNR over the rights to the Bearskin Trail that goes through the resort property. After the railroad tracks were removed and people started using the old railroad right-a-way as a path into town, Phill objected to the use and placed a large barricade across the trail preventing people from crossing over the Kawaga Trestle and going into town. The property of the Northern actually extends to the shore of Lake Kawaguesaga. While the Railroad had an easement for its use as a railroad, the easement did not extend to other recreational use. The legal wrangling ultimately resulted in a settlement that gave the Wisconsin DNR an easement through the resort property. This eventually was made part of the Wisconsin State Park. Phil allegedly had a hard time managing money and eventually lost the property to a bank.

### The Resort Transitions to Nitschke’s Northern Resort Condominium

The property was then acquired by Richard and Brigit Nitschke who proceeded to convert the property to condominiums in 2002 and built several more cabins. It is now known as Nitschke’s Northern Resort Condominiums. Each of the 21 homes is privately owned. Most are offered for vacation rental through rental agents including Lakeland Rental Management which also acts as the property manager for the Condominium Association. In the tradition of The Northern, the resort continues to offer a wide, well-kept lawn and beach for recreation, access to the water and now the Bearskin Trail. It provides an “Up North” experience with modern conveniences.

### The Northern Is Remembered as the Place Where Minocqua Began

Gus Nolan proudly mentioned the importance of the site of The Northern during a 1932 interview for the Lakeland Times. “It was on the west side that the first road was cut into this part of the country from Tomahawk, and the first tote roads to Flambeau and Woodruff started from here. It was on the banks of this thoroughfare that the first load of freight was unloaded. That came in by wagon. The west side of the lake took an active part in the origin of Minocqua. Here was where the name Minocqua originated. It was taken from the name of the old Indian village, Nin-oco-qua, which the Indian interpreter informed me meant noon-day or mid-day, as it was half way between the Wisconsin and Flambeau Rivers and the Indians making the trip either way usually reached here by noon-day. It was here that the first store and first hotel were started. Here also was located the first railroad depot and from it was sent out the first telegram from this section. A little later John Mann began the first summer resort

in this vicinity and it was located where the Star cottage now stands.”

### Nin-oco-qua: Remembered as the Special Noon Day Resting Place

Gus Nolan knew The Northern was special. Guests who visited planned to return year after year, “for they know that here, in Minocqua, at “The Northern”, they find not only tranquility, but themselves.” It will always be known as Nin-Oco-Qua, - the noon-day or halfway resting spot for many vacationers before they journey back from whence they came. By all means, it is where the history of Minocqua and your vacation begins.

#### AWAY UP NORTH

Away up North, where the World is new,  
Where the joys abound, and worries are few.  
Beyond the Cities, and far away--  
To lakes and streams, where I love to play.  
To sheltering shade of stalwart pine,  
Where the Soul of man, finds peace Divine,  
Out of the path of the mad stampede,  
To peace and quiet, my footsteps lead.  
There let me study the Maker’s plan,  
Worship in Temples, not made by man,  
Strengthen my body, and cleanse my Soul,  
and stayed till I’m rested, well, and whole.  
“Away up north” yet it is not far,  
a pleasure trip, with an easy car,  
Why should I stay, when I long to go--  
and FISH and rest, for a month or so?  
E. F. Hayward circa 1926





“Bringing rustic  
nostalgia to your  
vacation”



## A STORIED PATH THROUGH THE NORTHWOODS: *THE HISTORY OF THE BEARSKIN STATE TRAIL*

Nestled in the heart of Wisconsin’s Northwoods, the Bearskin State Trail is more than just an 18–22-mile corridor for biking, hiking, or snowmobiling—it’s a journey through time. Its origins date back to the late 1800s when the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad carved a route northward to ferry massive white pine logs from the dense forests to the mills and markets of the urban Midwest.

As the timber industry boomed, so did rail travel. In January 1888, daily passenger trains began running from Merrill to Minocqua—then just taking shape as a town. Later, luxurious excursions like the “Fisherman’s Special” and the Northwoods Hiawatha carried travelers from Chicago to their summer retreats, complete with plush chairs, dining cars, and parlor lounges.

Constructing the railroad through glacially sculpted terrain wasn’t without incident. The Harshaw trestle became infamous when a locomotive and three cars derailed into a marsh, followed by a crane collapse during rescue efforts. The heavy equipment slipped deeper into the

bog and remains buried there today. In nearby wetlands, logs used in construction swallowed teams of horses, oxen, and rail cars—also lost to the marsh’s depths .

By the mid-20th century, automobiles and highways shifted transportation entirely. Passenger rail services dwindled, and by 1970, the line north of Wausau was abandoned . Recognizing its recreation potential, Wisconsin’s DNR acquired the corridor in 1973. Over the next few years, wooden trestles were decked, rails removed, and a compacted granite surface laid—birthing the Bearskin State Trail

Today, the trail winds through pine-dotted forests, marshes, streams, and lakes—crossing more than a dozen historic wooden trestles. It begins in downtown Minocqua, Where the original train station once stood and where you can still see the original clock from that station in the square, spanning the iconic Lake Minocqua trestle, and continues through scenic landscapes to Hazelhurst and Harshaw. At roughly a 3% grade, it’s accessible for all skill levels—and winter brings its own charm with snowmobile

and cross-country ski access

Historical markers dot the trail, sharing tales of logging camps, vanished towns, early settlers, and railroad forebears. Whether it’s the Harshaw derailment saga or the drowned teams in marshlands, the past is ever-present .

What began as an industrial freight line

has evolved into a natural and cultural landmark. Celebrating its 50th anniversary as a trail in 2023, the Bearskin continues to attract tens of thousands of visitors each year . From bald eagles and loons to historical intrigue and scenic solitude, the Bearskin State Trail is a timeless gateway to Northwoods heritage.







# THE TIMELESS SPLASH:

## *A HISTORY OF THE MIN-AQUA BATS WATER SKI SHOW*

Nestled on the shores of Lake Minocqua, the Min-Aqua Bats Water Ski Club holds the honor of being the world’s longest-running amateur water ski show, delighting audiences since 1950

### From Lakeside Fun to Local Tradition

What began in 1950 as a group of curious local youths taking to the lake on Sunday afternoons quickly morphed into something extraordinary. As crowds gathered to watch, the group officially formed the Min-Aqua Bats in 1952, secured nonprofit status, built a handmade ski jump, and purchased their first boat—a patriotic-red, white, and blue Correct Craft—funded by enthusiastic “pass-the-bucket” donations from spectators. By 1956, show bleachers, lighting, and a clubhouse had been added to the Aqua Bowl, and a concession stand followed in 1982, turning the venue into a vibrant community hub.

### Innovators in Show Skiing

In the 1950s, the Min-Aqua Bats pioneered many of the acts now standard in water ski shows—like doubles and trios—setting the stage for synchronized acrobatics now synonymous with the sport. Today’s shows echo that early spirit, combining daring stunts, barefoot skiing,

jumps, and choreographed routines. Shows run every Sunday, Wednesday, and Friday evenings throughout the summer—and admission remains free, sustained by sponsorships and that beloved bucket tradition.

### Athletic Excellence and Community Leadership

Beyond their local performances, Min-Aqua Bats athletes compete—and win—in water ski tournaments across the Midwest. In recent decades, team members have earned more than a dozen State Three Event titles, along with prestigious regional and national honors. Uniquely, the club is youth-led; teenagers and college-age skiers not only perform but also steer the organization—running meetings and making decisions independently, a tradition that builds real-world leadership and camaraderie.

### A Launchpad for Talent

Many Min-Aqua Bats athletes have progressed to college teams or major professional ski shows like Tommy Bartlett’s and SeaWorld. Others have toured nationally, with roots hailing from across the U.S.—from Mexico to Hawaii—as well as right here in the Northwoods.

### A Living Legacy

In 2017, a vibrant, mural-style tribute was painted in downtown Minocqua, capturing the vintage elegance of the Bats’ signature aqua-ballerina aesthetic—a testament to the show’s cultural

### Conclusion

For over 70 summers, the Min-Aqua

Bats have been the heart and soul of Minocqua’s lakeside summer nights—offering free, energetic entertainment, teaching water ski artistry, and shaping generations of young leaders. Their legacy is more than just water-ski acrobatics—it’s a community tradition that continues to inspire.





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