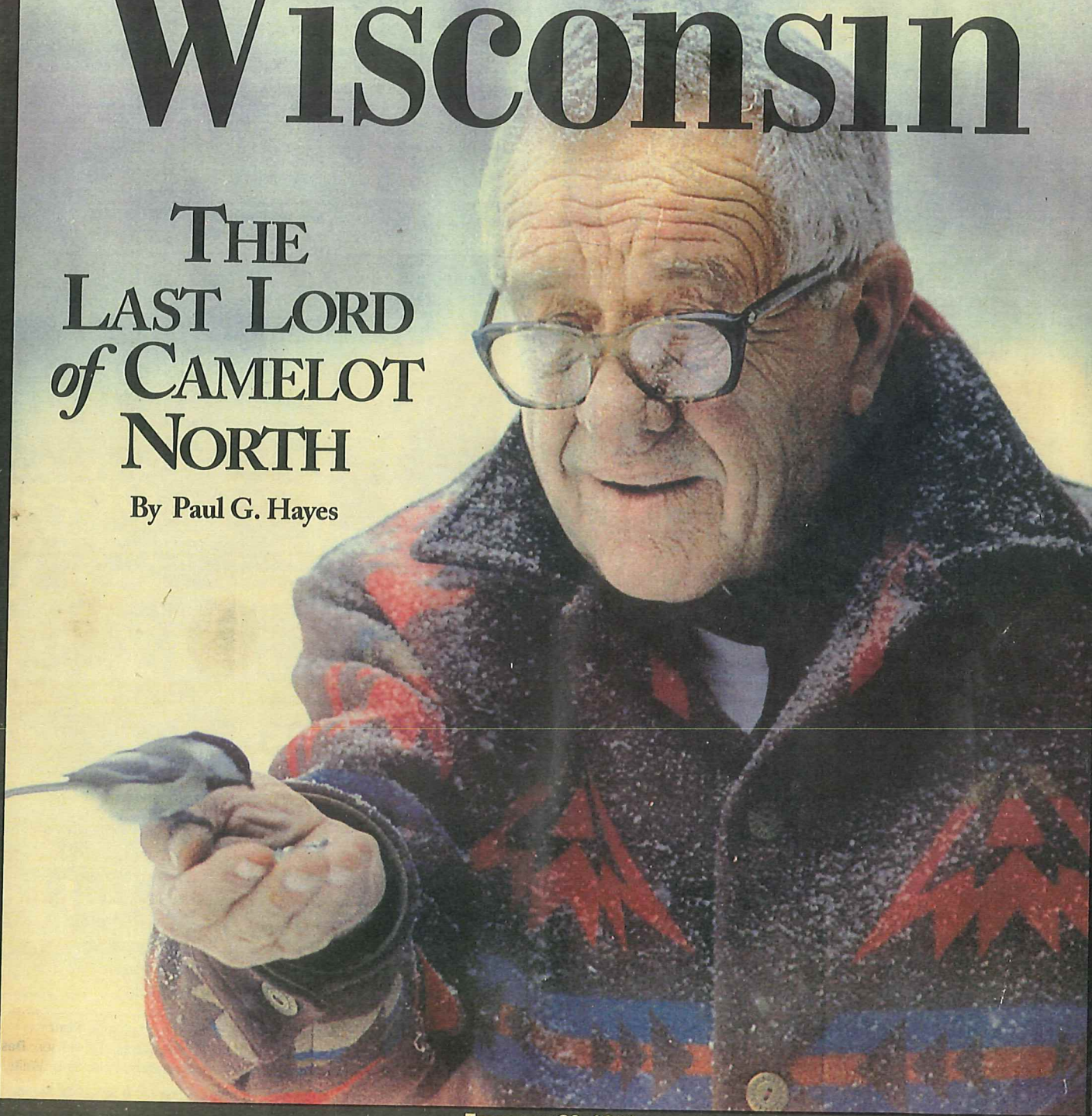


Wisconsin

THE LAST LORD *of* CAMELOT NORTH

By Paul G. Hayes



FEBRUARY 20, 1994

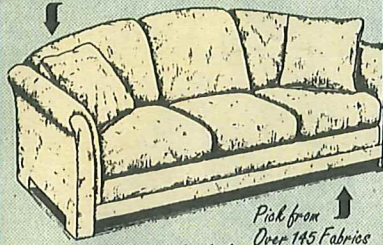
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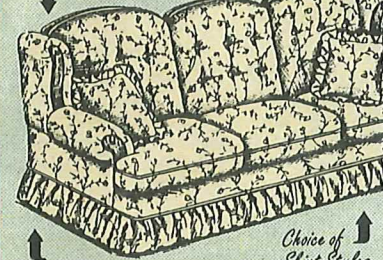


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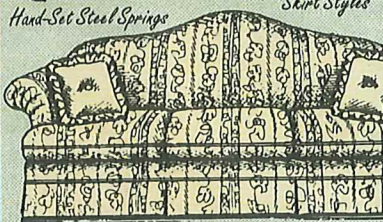


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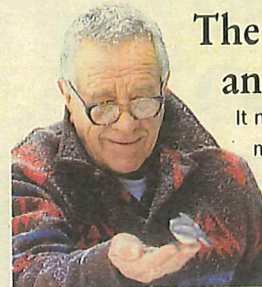
February 20, 1994

Forward I recently visited the spot in Dallas where John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963. Simply being in a place that was such a prominent part of my childhood made a big impression. But it was a slow trip through the museum in what used to be the Texas School Book Depository that really intrigued me. The photos and film of both the assassination and of the Kennedy presidency seemed to be from a different world, not only one in which presidents rode in open cars but one in which there was a vastly different attitude toward politics and leaders. How disillusioned we've become. How much we've become a nation of TV watchers rather than participants. The balance isn't all to the past, but there are things about that time that are missing now. The sense then that problems could be solved may have been an illusion, but it was a nice one.

This all came to mind again as I read our cover story (page 4) on the Hanson brothers of Mellen. We're not talking about perfect people or times. But there was something in the way that people tackled issues then that we're lacking today. And that's a loss, I'd say.

-Alan Borsuk

The Hanson brothers and Camelot North



It never received much public attention, but for many years a "free resort" in Ashland County was one of the political capitals of the state.

4

Photos of Martin Hanson (left and on cover) by NED VESPA

A new fish dish starts to get hot

Tilapia, a fish that originated in the Nile and now is grown commercially, is becoming a hit in Wisconsin. Dennis Getto dines out on it (page 22), and Grace Howaniec prepares it at home.

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Photo by NED VESPA

Incest aftermath

A suburban Milwaukee mother and daughter talk about the anguish caused by incest within their family and how they have slowly found the path to healing themselves.

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Editor: Alan J. Borsuk; **Asst. Editor:** Paula Brookmire; **Staff writers:** Richard L. Kenyon, Celeste Williams, Paul G. Hayes, Bill Nelson; **Design artist:** Gene Gerbasi; **Artist:** Luis Macharé; **Secretary:** Yolanda D. White

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WHERE WILDLIFE & POLITICS THRIVED

For Louis and Martin Hanson, running a 'free resort' for leading liberals brought fun and impact

By Paul G. Hayes



Martin Hanson and his sister-in-law, Camilla Hanson, drink coffee in Mary's Beehive, Mellen. The late John F. Kennedy (right) appears in Ashland in 1963. Martin Hanson is third from left at the rear, smiling and looking left.



AP Wirephoto

Long ago when the sun shone kindly on liberal thought, there was a magic place, which was hidden in the green woods of the far north of Wisconsin. It was blessed with rare freedom and beauty and with richness of nature and of the mind.

Here gathered the powerful knights and ladies of the day. Here, with Sir Martin at the helm, they barged down the sparkling Brunsweler River and they saw beavers at work and looked upon the gentle beasts of the forest; to wit, deer and otter, fisher and badger. Here they hunted grouse and fished for muskellunge.

Precisely at 5 p.m. each day, according to the unwritten code of the place, corks were pulled from bottles of all sorts of liquors and brews. Later all the notables present carried their glasses to seats at King Louis' long table, which sagged under princely portions of prime rib of beef and baked potatoes and cream pies and much else that was good.

Late into the night, seated either at the table or on a screened porch overlooking Beaverdam Lake, would the notables regale each other with tales of adventures and anticipations for the future, singing of epic victories

over Republicans and telling droll stories.

Among storytellers, none was more admired than Sir Gaylord, master of wit, giant of conversation and conservation; verily, the Galahad of his day.

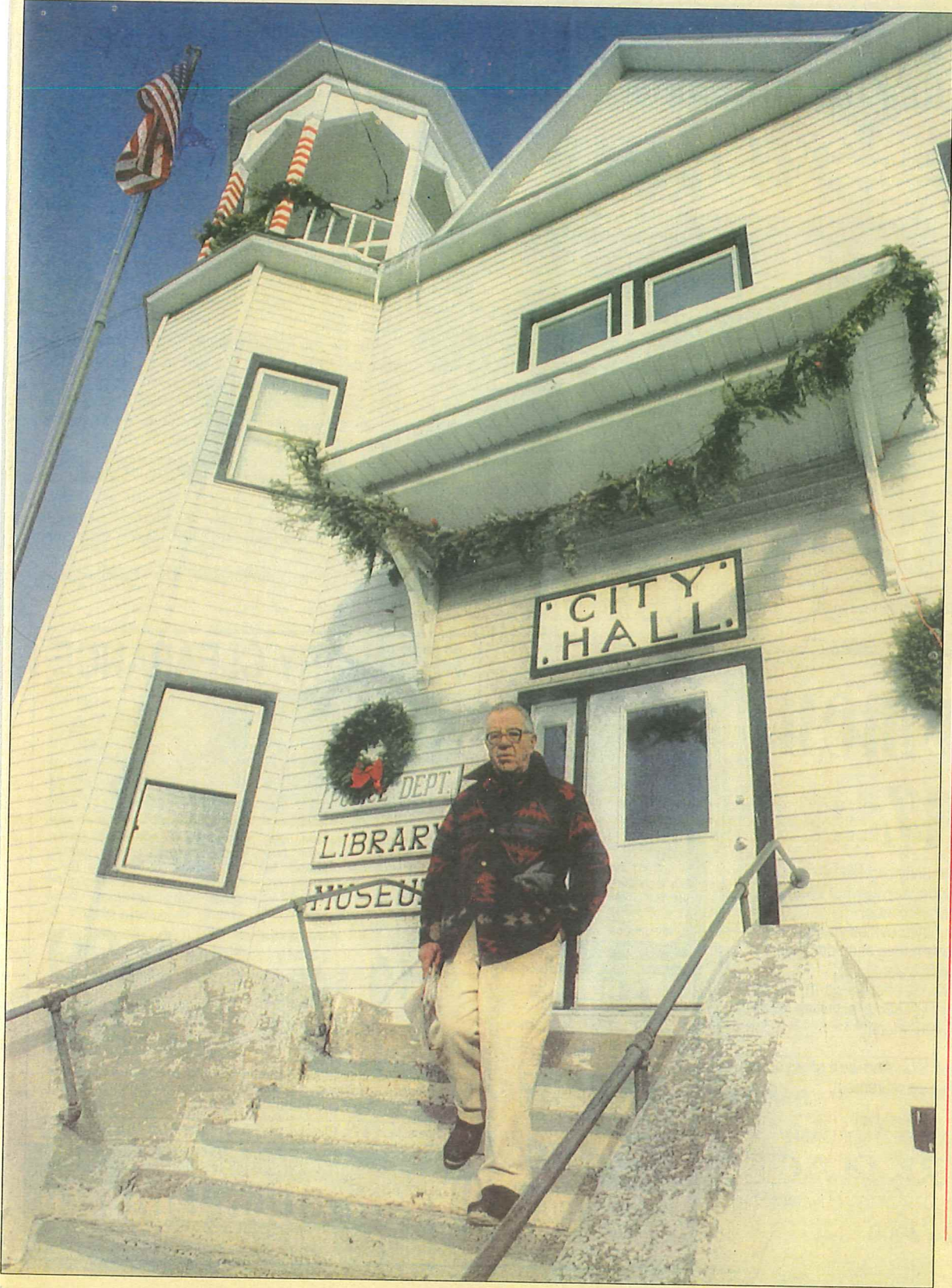
Sirs Bud and Orrin, Sirs Patrick and John, Sirs Morris and Ben, Sirs David and Chuck and Raymond; also Ladies Camilla and Carrie Lee and Ladies Anne and Mary Lou and Barbara and others of much distinction and high station; in sooth, all who bore the shield of Democrat were welcome.

Occasionally a Republican was invited, but such acts arose from pity, generosity or political expediency. An ambassador from India was brought here by Sir Gaylord and the ambassador played poker and ate prime rib, explaining politely as he ate that cows were sacred only in India.

On occasion, journalists attended, but only if they left their pens, notebooks and cameras in their crude huts in distant towns. For here, all talk and practical jests, of which there were many, were informal, off-the-record, congenial and protected from the critical eyes of Madison, Milwaukee and local politics.

For Democrats, it was a time of optimism as they occupied not only both US

Photography by Ned Vespa



Senate seats from Wisconsin, but also, for many years, its governorship. Indeed, for a bright time lasting many years there existed in splendid isolation in the north Wisconsin woods a congenial and hearty place we can only call — now sound the trumpets loudly! — CAMELOT NORTH.

“THE two easiest decisions I ever made,” said Martin Hanson, “were, first, moving up here, and, second, giving up desserts for bourbon.”

Louis and Martin Hanson, bachelor brothers and heirs of a furniture-making fortune in Chicago, moved permanently in 1961 onto 1,240 acres west of Mellen in Ashland County, whose northern border abuts Lake Superior.

In a sense, the brothers were returning to their boyhood home. Their father, who liked to fish, bought the land in 1926. Louis was a baby and “I was in the oven,” Martin said 67 years later.

Continued

Martin Hanson says that deciding to move permanently from Chicago to Mellen was one of his easiest decisions.

Remembering life at Camelot North

The father, also named Martin, and his brother and business partner, John, dammed the Brunsweler, which enlarged Beaverdam Lake to 25 acres. On a point of land on the lake they built Beaverdam Lodge, including a dining hall and sleeping cabins. Every summer the Hanson family left its suburban Oak Park, Ill., home, caught the train to Mellen and settled into the cottages.

Black and white home movies from the 1930s reveal a carefree life, with the small children, Louis and Martin and sister Anne, moving among doting parents, an uncle, aunts, friends and neighbors.

The movies show a northern Wisconsin much different than now. The last lumber camp in Mellen closed after the winter of 1923-1924, ending decades of rapacious tree cutting. The logging companies left behind 30 million acres of stumps, a wrecked land covered with logging slash. Public and private efforts to convert land to farms sputtered along for a while, but the Great Depression of the 1930s forced most farmers out of business.

The Hanson boys learned much from the abandoned land and its abandoned people. They watched the mostly Finnish farmers of the town of Marengo struggle for survival. Martin said the men of the north set fires in the

slash at night in order to collect pay as volunteer firefighters during the day.

Increasingly in the Depression, the red flag of Communism flew over some settlements in Ashland County and the Hanson brothers took note. They themselves came from a politically interesting family that added richness to their political outlook.

"My father was a Chicago Tribune Col. Robert McCormick Republican," Martin said. "My mother back in the teens ran for attorney general on the Socialist Labor ticket in Illinois."

The sons admired their capitalist father but were more influenced politically by their mother and by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal, for it was under FDR that the land around them began to heal, aided by the Civilian Conservation Corps, by the Wisconsin Conservation Commission, by the US Forest Service and by time. The land grew green again as trees were planted or resprouted naturally.

This firsthand observation of regeneration may be the source of Martin Hanson's optimistic, hands-on approach to the natural environment.

"It's the hand of man that destroyed it; the hand of man can bring it back far quicker by management," he

says repeatedly.

MARTIN fished and hunted as a boy. By 14, he was hunting bear. Later, he hunted bear with bow and arrow; still later, he hunted bear in Alaska. Also, he made movies and later videotapes of wildlife. A 550-pound Alaskan brown bear he killed in 1956 was a national record for bow hunters for two years.

Louis plunged as eagerly into history and political lore as Martin had the outdoors. Neither had finished college, but both acquired vast knowledge. Their separate interests came to distinguish the brothers: Louis was known as the politician, Martin the conservationist, but such labels oversimplify; of course, the brothers shared both interests.

The Hanson furniture factory, which had flourished since the 19th century, was sold in the 1950s to the Zenith Co. For a time the brothers worked traditional jobs. Martin sold furniture on the road. Louis was an investment manager and manufacturers' representative. They spent summers at Beaverdam Lodge.

By 1961, however, the older generation had passed on, not only the parents but also a childless uncle and the aunts. Secure with inheritances, which they invested wisely in blue-chip stocks, the brothers moved to Wisconsin permanently. After her divorce, sister Anne moved here, too.

"The city is a dreadful place," Louis explained at the time.

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SETTLED into Wisconsin's forest, the Hansons set a challenging pace for themselves, often arising at 4:30 a.m. Dawn remains Martin's "reading time," when he does his homework on whatever environmental issue he is working on. Self-educated in environmental science, Martin is respected by professionals, and he still is called on to narrate his wildlife films.

By 1962, Louis was Democratic Party chairman of northern Wisconsin's old 10th Congressional district. That year, also, he ran against the wily Republican congressman Alvin E. O'Konski, who spoke like a Democrat when it suited his career and who spent virtually all his time in Washington seeking pork-barrel funds for his district. In these ways, he had held the seat since 1942. Louis lost, as would four later O'Konski challengers. Finally, David Obey defeated O'Konski in 1972. Victory was sweet; Louis managed Obey's campaign.

Shortly after moving to Mellen, the brothers became friends with Gaylord Nelson, then Wisconsin's governor and soon to become its junior senator in Washington. Nelson fit naturally into the Hanson brothers' "free resort" in that he embodied the interests of both, politics and environment.

As governor, Nelson already had built a national reputation as an environmentalist, although that word was not yet in vogue. In that time, Nelson was a "conservationist," but he was a conservationist who was breaking new ground.

His Outdoor Recreation Act Program was enacted in 1961; it set up a \$50 million fund to buy natural areas over a decade. Nelson had approved the Wisconsin Regional Planning Act, which set up a method to assess the impact of development on resources before development occurred. The idea of an Ice Age National Trail was nurtured in Madison when Nelson was governor; later, as a US senator, he would see its passage by Congress.

Nelson has visited the Hanson northern retreat scores of times. Since his defeat for reelection in 1980, he has served as a counselor for The Wilderness Society. He and his wife, Carrie Lee, were at Martin Hanson's as recently as last July 4. They stayed, where else, in the "Gaylord Room," a cottage separated by a short walk from Martin's house.

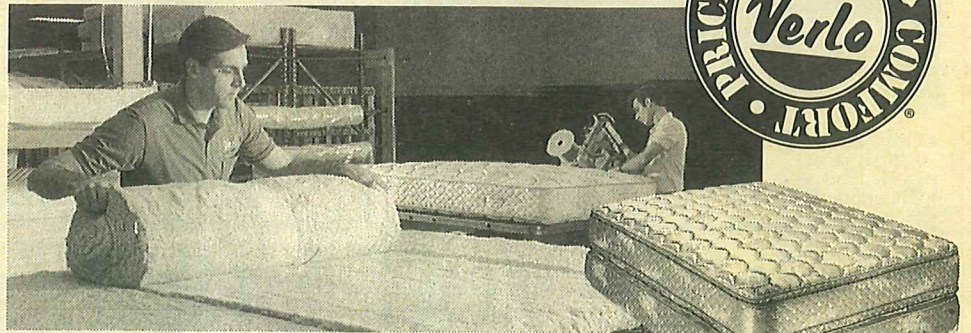
"Did he show you the Goldwater Room?" Nelson asked during our interview. "In 1964, when Barry Goldwater left the Senate to run against Johnson for president, Louis was out here [in Washington] and walked past Goldwater's empty office. There was his name on a door, 'Sen. Barry M. Goldwater.' Louis snatched the plaque, took it home and put it on the front of one of the bedroom doors."

From the start, Nelson said, the conversa-

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tion at the Hansons was "politics or conservation or both and hardly anything else. You might possibly spend five minutes discussing football on Sunday but no more than that."

Among those in attendance over the years would be every Wisconsin Democratic governor, including John Reynolds, Patrick Lucey, Martin Schreiber and Anthony Earl; most Democratic Congressmen from Wisconsin; several governors or congressmen from other states; Charles Stoddard, the Minong, Wis., native who had been director of the US Bureau of Land Management; Harold (Bud) Jordahl, chairman of the Wisconsin Board of Natural Resources; the late John Reddin, an editorial writer for The Milwaukee Journal.

Also David Carley, former candidate for governor; Frank Zeidler, former Socialist mayor of Milwaukee who became a Democrat to serve on Gov. Reynold's cabinet; the late Morris Rubin, publisher of the *Progressive Magazine*; Ben Lawton, former president of the Marshfield Clinic and the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents; Orrin Rongstad, UW professor of wildlife ecology.

The late Mary Lou Burg of West Bend, who had been deputy chairman of the national Democratic Party, was a Beaverdam regular, hunting grouse in the fall with Martin.

Louis had a rule about the dinner conversation, which sometimes deepened into loud arguments: No matter what was said or how angrily, it was to be forgotten the next day.

Nelson remembers an instance when the rule was violated. John Reddin was visiting with his young son Jon and Jon's wife, Mary, and some other young people. Lyndon Johnson was in the White House and the Vietnam War was tearing apart the country.

The young people "jumped on me over Vietnam. I told them that I was among three senators who voted 'no' on the Vietnam appropriations." The young people still insisted that Nelson was not doing enough. Then the elder Reddin entered the argument against Nelson.

"I said, 'Goddamn it, John, all you're doing is pandering to the young folks.'" Nelson said. "He didn't speak to me for two days."

About the same time, Louis refused to run

again for state Democratic party chairman because he opposed Lyndon Johnson's policy on Vietnam.

THE strategy for naming the St. Croix and Namekagon as national scenic rivers took form at the Hansons. Opposition to nuclear power plants jelled at Beaverdam Lodge. Part of the campaign that led to a ban on the pesticide DDT in Wisconsin was fashioned here. The strategy for saving the Apostle Islands in Lake Superior was hatched at the Hanson table.

By 1963, President John F. Kennedy was thinking about re-election. That summer, Louis, then chairman of the Wisconsin Democratic Party, and Nelson called on the White House. They emerged to announce that Kennedy had agreed to a five-day "conservation tour." After a first stop in Pennsylvania, he was to fly to northern Wisconsin, where he would board a military helicopter.

Along with Nelson, Wisconsin's Gov. Reynolds, US Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall and Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman, the helicopter took aboard Martin Hanson, who knew the Apostle Islands as well as anyone and who acted as Kennedy's guide.

"On the helicopter, I was lecturing to the president about the Apostles. I said you could get them cheap, but he didn't seem too interested. Then he saw a big group of sailing boats and his eyes lit up. Here was the Massachusetts

sailer seeing some of the best sailing water around," Martin recalled.

Two months later, Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. But his support gave the Apostles project a needed boost. In 1970, President Richard Nixon signed Nelson's bill to create a 42,000-acre Apostle Is-



Louis Hanson (left) and Gaylord Nelson (right) convince President John Kennedy to visit Wisconsin in 1963.

land National Lakeshore that preserved 20 of the 22 islands.

Anyone who remembers the effort, including his opponents, says it was Martin's tenacity that got the job done locally. Theron P. Pray, an Ashland lawyer who opposed the plan, told the Senate committee considering the bill in 1967: "I know that the person who has probably done more to generate enthusiasm for the bill by local organizations is Martin Hanson, the younger brother of the Wisconsin Democratic Chairman Louis Hanson."

Martin had perfected his style by this time: First he did his homework. Often he made a film, which he then narrated to local governments, conservation clubs, unions, social gatherings. He wrote letters, made personal visits and attended meetings, pushing his cause with polite intensity when others might weary. In this way, he built local support, and he did this by understanding whom he was speaking with.

"Chuck Stoddard used to call northern Minnesota and Wisconsin a 'colony,'" Hanson said. "The mining companies and the lumber companies take all the resources out and pay slave wages. All the money goes to Pittsburgh or someplace else."

That helps explain why the people of the north tend to liberal economic politics, but a species of liberality that does not mesh with the stereotypical downstate,

academic liberal.

"These are pro-life Democrats up here," he said. "They are Croatians, Finns, working-people Democrats. The people in Superior voted 83% for Obey, but gay rights, hippies, nudist colonies — that stuff doesn't wash. The Democrats up here were mad when Tony Earl appointed a gay to his cabinet."

IN 1963, after her divorce from Theodore Sorensen, then special counsel to John Kennedy, Camilla Sorensen and her three sons moved to Madison, where she became active in Democratic politics. She and Louis met in May 1965 and were married that August, after she had visited the Beaverdam property on July 4.

In 1967, Martin built his present house on a hillside. Down the hill, he built two ponds. From his combined living and dining room, three sides of which are glass,

he watches wildlife. His video camera stands ready on a tripod, and he films badger, flying squirrel, fisher, otter, barred owls, raccoons, a variety of birds, bear and deer.

As he fed the wildlife, he began to get regular customers: deer that returned night after night. He gave them names. It was at this point when he quit hunting deer. "If you name 'em, you can't shoot 'em," he said.

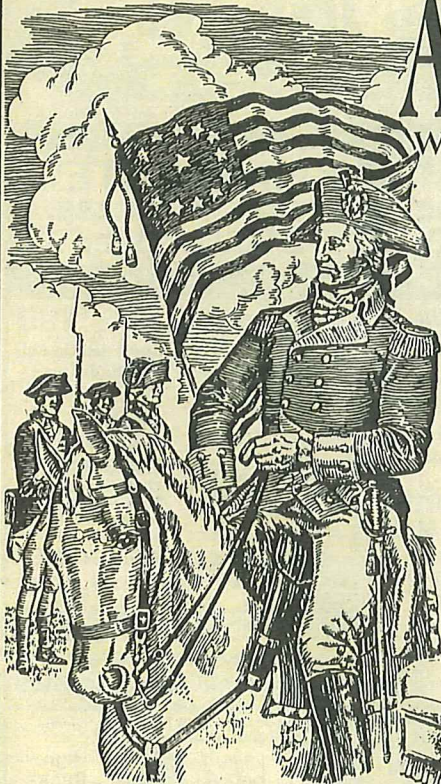
The Hansons' "free resort" hit its stride in the 1960s. The brothers split the costs and refused to let anyone pay for board or room.

In 1974, the Hansons' sister, Anne Hanger, moved from Illinois to Beaverdam Lodge after a divorce. Annie served as social coordinator; Louis presided at the table at night, often entertaining the group with his imitation of Winston Churchill. Martin was given to practical jokes, occasionally even pushing faces into cream pies.

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This impish quality persists, said US Rep. Obey. "Not many people I know will sit in the back of a meeting room with a squirt gun, shooting skyward, so that people in front wonder where the rain is coming from."

After breakfast, guests were on their own. Often they helped Martin on one of his projects, such as clearing out a beaver dam. Or they might drive into Mellen for lunch at Mary's Beehive, an informal headquarters for both Democrats and the Chicago Bears, reflecting the interests of owner and cook Mary Matusiewicz. The Beehive's walls today are adorned with giant portraits of Obey, Nelson, William Proxmire, JFK, former Chicago Bear coach Mike Ditka and a team picture of the Bears.

Or guests could take out the pontoon boat, named the Misda, short for "Missed the 400." Louis bought it

in Minneapolis while he was killing time after missing the old Northwestern Road's crack train, The 400.

Everyone would be back at the lodge by the 5 p.m. cocktail hour. For many years dinner was prepared by Annabelle Pope, whose husband, Gard, had been caretaker of the grounds. Later Florence (Floflo) Kocar, Mary Matusiewicz's sister, cooked at the lodge. She prepared prime rib, pork roast or turkey over old stoves, one of which burned wood, often serving 25 people or more.

"My most fun," said Camilla Hanson, "was getting Gaylord to tell tales of his childhood. Some people would groan; others would laugh."

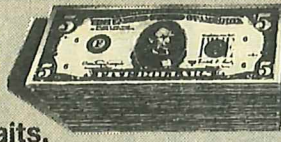
If there were newcomers at the table, Nelson would tell the story of the migrating turtles. Every important Wisconsin Democrat active in the 1960s and 1970s has

heard this story at least once. For posterity, here it is:

"In Clear Lake, Wis., where I grew up, Mud Lake was at the east end of Main St. You have to understand that Main St. was three blocks long then. At the end of it was a wonderful marsh and lake. Its bottom was mud, knee-deep, and it had loads of birds and muskrats, and lots of marsh and some open lake half a city block across.... Anyway, every fall the turtles migrated from Little Clear Lake and Big Clear Lake. Those were their names, although both lakes were pretty small. They were nice lakes on the other side of town.... The turtles had to go half a mile through the woods, then through town to Mud Lake. I don't know how many there were, but at any time in summer, you could count 60 or 70 turtles by looking at logs around the Clear lakes.

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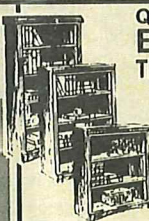
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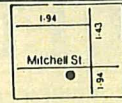
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"Every dog in town would go out during the migration, curious about the turtles. The turtles would shrink into their shells while a dog, its tongue hanging out, came around sniffing and panting. Occasionally, a turtle would grab a tongue. The more foolish dogs would shake their heads and lose a little bit of their tongues when the turtle flew off."

"My dog Sport was more clever. He would slowly pull his tongue back in his mouth, along with the turtle's head, and bite down."

"My old friend Sherman Benson and I were in grade school and we were always fascinated. We'd pick turtles up and spin around four or five times and put them behind a tree or a shed and point them back to the Clear lakes. Eventually, they'd stick their heads out and start off again. We never fooled a single turtle. How do they do it? I puzzled over that 65 years ago."

After a pause, Nelson added:

"I'm still puzzled."

LOUIS and Camilla moved to Washington, D.C., in 1975, where Louis served as Nelson's administrative assistant. That left Martin in charge of many projects at home. In 1976, he headed the Wisconsin campaign of Mo Udall for president. Democratic Rep. Morris Udall of Arizona was Stewart's brother. Udall lost by only 7,000 votes. Had he beaten Jimmy Carter in Wisconsin, history might have unfolded far differently.

For 13 years ending five years ago, Martin served as Obey's home secretary, or, as he referred to himself, "Anne Landers of the North," helping voters with any personal problems with the federal government, including Social Security, veteran's benefits, taxes.

During one county Democratic July 4 picnic at Beaverdam Lodge in the 1960s, featuring hot-dogs, swimming, speeches, flags and music, little Barbara Hanninen looked up at her mother and said, "I want to be a politician."

"Mother said, 'Look for something better,'" recalls Barbara, who today is married, a mother of two and is known as State Rep. Barbara Linton (D-Ashland), co-chair of the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee. Obviously her mother's advice was ignored and she followed the lead of "Uncle Louis and Uncle Martin" instead. They weren't uncles but treated her as such.

In 1984 Linton was elected to the Ashland County Board. Even though Louis was ill with cancer, he came out of inactivity to run Linton's Assembly campaigns in 1986 and 1988.

"Louis knew how to run a campaign," she said. "When the time came to file nomination papers, all I had to do was knock on doors; he did everything else. Every day Louis would tell me where to go, how many doors to knock on. At the end of the day, we'd discuss issues."

In 1988, Annie Hanson Hanger died of cancer. A year later, Louis died of cancer. Martin, with the help of Floflo Kocar, tried to keep the

"free resort" open but shortly gave it up.

TODAY Martin is occupied with reintroducing elk to northern Wisconsin. He has been at it for several years, and the battle hasn't been without its setbacks. He tried to generate support from Bayfield County but failed partly because apple growers feared that the elk would damage orchards. He succeeded in gaining local support for bringing in an elk herd to the Clam Lake area.

Martin went to Michigan, where elk were successfully reintroduced decades ago, to film the herd, and he began to travel Wisconsin to promote the reintroduction of elk. An ally is Floyd (Butch) Marita, superintendent of the eastern region of the US Forest Service, who grew up near the Hansons.

In Madison, State Rep. Linton's proposal to budget \$50,000 for an elk study was vetoed three years ago by Gov. Tommy Thompson. In December the \$50,000 was approved. Between the time he vetoed the first request and approved the second, Thompson had gone on an elk hunt.

In 1970, the Hanson siblings gave the bulk of their land and most of the Beaverdam shoreline to UW-Madison's arboretum to be used in research: For years, Orrin Rongstad brought his wildlife ecology classes to the Hansons' for field work. Refrigerators were stocked with beer and one free meal was provided by the hosts, Rongstad said.

Today, Rongstad, now a professor emeritus, still studies deer on the Hanson forest. Raymond Anderson, professor emeritus of natural resources at UW-Stevens Point, studies bear predation of deer fawns on the land. Former DNR chairman Bud Jordahl and his wife come up, and Bud helps Orrin Rongstad capture deer.

Even with all this, Hanson still fishes for tarpon in Florida several times a year. Last year, he led a party, including Michael and Barbara Linton, to Churchill in Manitoba, Canada, where they filmed polar bears.

While at home, he makes his rounds. He picks up his mail at the Post Office, drops in at Mary's Beehive two doors down to drink coffee and chat, calls on Butch Marita's mother, stops to talk to Barbara Linton's farmer uncle, visits Basil Kennedy, a lawyer and Democrat who ran against O'Konski in 1952 and 1954.

Still, life changes, and Martin reflects on this. Louis and Annie are gone. So are Ben Lawton, John Reddin and Mary Lou Burg. Camilla had a successful term on the UW Board of Regents and she's still active. Chuck Stoddard and Mo Udall are in nursing homes.

Although retired, Gaylord is still at it. David Obey, Barbara Linton and Butch Marita, all with close ties to Camelot North, are flourishing.

"Think of the fun I've had doing all these things and knowing all these people," Martin said.

Paul G. Hayes is a WISCONSIN staff writer.

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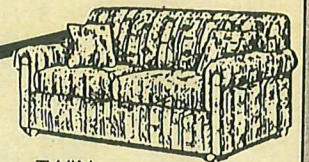
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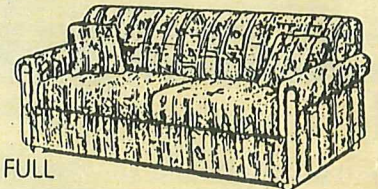
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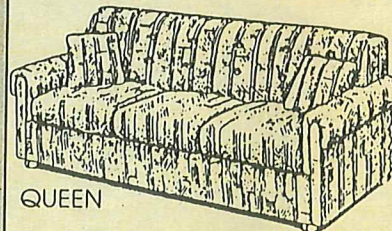


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