



Jul
06
2022
Page
B003
Clip
resized
31%



Gander, right, and his staff with bound volumes of the Vilas County News-Review photographed in February 1948. Some of those bound volumes still exist on-site and are used to compile Backward Glances weekly. —Contributed Photos

Olson library exhibit to honor artwork of longtime journalist

By MICHELLE DREW
News Editor

Art and history come together this month in a special exhibit by the Walter E. Olson Memorial Library featuring the artwork of lifelong Eagle River resident, Walter Gander (1890-1976).

Gander, longtime printer and newspaper man in the area and one-time owner of the Vilas County News-Review, will be featured not for his long history of bringing news to the people of the North Woods or his photography skills, but instead for his late-life hobby of painting.

Gander was born in 1890 in England. He immigrated to the U.S. with his parents, Walter Gander Sr. (1860-1946) and his wife, Lucy (1865-1935), and three siblings in 1898, at age 8 years old.

The family arrived in Eagle River Jan. 8, 1903. Gander's aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. James Morgan, had previously settled in Eagle River in 1873 and operated a bakery on Wall Street.

It took 11 days for the family to cross the Atlantic in the steerage of the ship, with Gander relaying to family members that he remembered how the steward stuffed his pockets with prunes for the long trip.

He attended Eagle River High School and played on the school's first football team in 1906, where he picked up the nickname "Bid."

After graduation, Gander began his 65 1/2 year career in the newspaper business. He spent one year living in Waukesha where he taught printing at the Wisconsin



Gander and a Vilas County News-Review employee in 1947 perch in front of a linotype machine.

Industrial School for Boys, then started at the Eagle River Review. He continued in the business when he and Carl Fredrichs merged the two Eagle River newspapers to form the Vilas County News-Review in 1927.

For several years he was co-owner, publisher and printer of the newspaper. He was considered a jack-of-all-trades, working as a news reporter, photographer, and covering sporting events for 25 years. He wrote two sports columns in the 1930s, "Around the Rim" and "Between the Goal Posts," under the name Bid.

In his later years with the paper, he was editor of the Backward Glances column as well as assisted with proofreading, copy editing and circulation.

He married Rose Johns on Sept. 21, 1916, who taught second primary in the Eagle River school. He

and Rose had three children, Robert, Carol and James, who were raised in the family home at 113 N. First St. The family home was located less than a block from the current library in Eagle River.

Always involved in the community, Gander was village clerk from 1922 to 1933, formed the first Boy Scout troop in Eagle River, and was scoutmaster in 1912.

He was Vilas County Jury Commissioner for five years as well as a charter member of the Eagle River Rotary Club. He was a member of the Eagle River Lodge No. 248, played the alto horn in the town band for 25 years, and sang in the choir of the First Congregational Church.

Gander had a passion for photography which included a complete darkroom in his home. He was adept at color or tinting photos by hand in the years before color film, as well as hand lettering and calligraphy. He was responsible for many of the hand-lettered white arrow directional signs that were ubiquitous at rural intersections across the North Woods.

In his later years, aside from his duties at the News-Review which he worked at until a year before his death, he was a prolific writer and avid reader of historical and biographical books.

In 1975, Eagle River Mayor Donald "Pike" Dyer named Gander, Eagle River Senior Citizen of the Year and gifted him a special plaque honoring his "contributions and concern for his community, his dedication and a journalist, his sharp sense of humor, and his spirit of determination and independence."

Gander took up painting fairly late in life. His first works were produced in the late 1940s — when he was in his late 50s — sketched with pencil and charcoal on paper. He moved on to learn watercolor techniques, and then graduated to painting with oil on canvas and various other materials.

Paintings include landscape works of the North Woods in the summertime, remembered scenes inspired by his childhood on the coast of England, and from his imagination, formed by a lifetime of observing the natural surroundings of northern Wisconsin seasons.

He gifted his paintings to family and friends as he completed them, and the library exhibit features samplings of his work that have been reassembled through the generosity of descendants of those family and friends.

The exhibit is on display through July 30 in the Community Room of the Olson library. Accompanying materials such as photographs, the artist's sketchbook and more will also be on display.

"We're so excited that Walt approached us with his grandfather's work!" said Sara Klemann, Director of the Olson library. "We're always delighted to highlight the talent and history of the Eagle River area, and this project has been a wonderful opportunity for a collaboration between the library, the Gander family, the Vilas County News-Review, and the Eagle River Historical Society."

A special open house with Walter Gander's grandson, Walt, will be held Monday, July 25, from 5 to 6:30 p.m. Light refreshments will be served.



Don Hall, front, and another unknown employee in 1947 use "hot type" steel forms to create newspaper pages.