



The Saga of Jim Jordan's Buck

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with major contributions from
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Jim and Eachus

When Jim Jordan and Eachus Davis set out to hunt deer on the morning of Friday, November 20, 1914, they had no idea they were embarking on a 60-year saga that would result in a world record.

Jim Jordan was born in Hinckley 1892, two years before the Great Hinckley Fire. In 1896, the Jordan family became the first white settlers in Ogema Township which borders on the St. Croix River in eastern Pine County, when they moved to a log cabin located 2 ½ miles south of today's Highway 48 and Alma Razor Road.

By 1914, Jordan was 22, was married to Lena, and was living in Danbury, Wisconsin in a small house at the edge of town on Peet Street.

The young Jordan was a hunter, trapper and logger, kind of a jack of all trades. His daughter Bertha recalled a story of one of Jim's early jobs. He was hired to blow stumps out of Danbury's Main Street.

"Daddy didn't know much about dynamite," Bertha said. "On his first stump he used a little too much and, besides the stump, he blew out the windows of nearby businesses."

Jordan's friend, Eachus Davis, was about 10 years older and a family man with six children. The family farm was located on the north side of Minnow Lake, about seven miles west of Danbury. In 1912, when the Soo Line Railroad came to town, Eachus got a job as a section hand and moved his family to a small house on Center Street. Ruby Wells, Eachus' daughter, recalled, "Dad's job was the hottest in the summer and coldest in the winter, but he did it for 40 years. He inspected the tracks with a handcar between Danbury and Markville twice a day, every day, rain, shine or snow."



This house, at the end of Peet Street, is where Jim and Lena Jordan lived in 1914. The house has been added on to and remodeled, but it is still located on the edge of town, next to forest and a large hay field.

Danbury in 1914

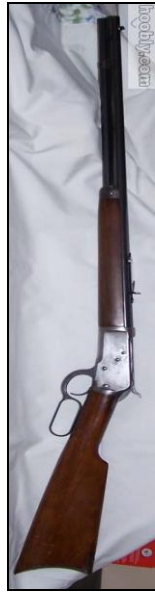
Ruby, who was 94 and living in Ogden, Utah when I spoke with her, painted a very pleasant picture of Danbury in the early 1900s. "Life was a lot better then. We had plenty to eat, although most of our meat was venison and other wild game like squirrel and bear. On special occasions our parents would buy beef or pork from the butcher shop. We had activities going on all the time, like square dances and basket socials." For the basket socials, each young girl would bring a picnic lunch packed in a basket to the town hall where it was auctioned off. The high bidder was the basket owner's lunch companion for the day. "I always made sure my boyfriend bought my basket," says Ruby with a giggle.

A favorite summertime activity for all the kids in town was swimming in the Yellow River. Ruby said, "Mostly we swam in the Old Swimming Hole," which was a deep spot in the river just past the south end of First Street, where the power plant is today.

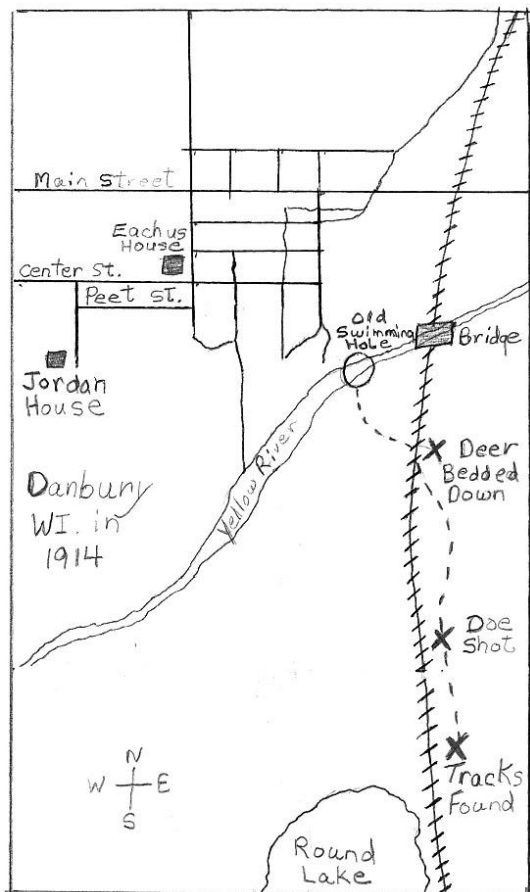
In 1914, the railroad was the main form of transportation to the outside world. With several daily trains, a person could leave for Duluth or St. Paul in the morning and be back by evening.

Roads were poor, suitable more for horse and buggy than for automobiles. The only span over the Yellow River south of Danbury was the Soo Line Bridge.

The only way across the St. Croix was on one of several ferries operated by Native Americans along the river. One ferry was at the foot of today's Wisconsin Ferry Road which crosses Woodland Trails' property a mile north of Highway 48. The charge for crossing the river with a horse and buggy or automobile was 25 cents. However, in 1914 a new bridge was under construction at the point where Wisconsin highway 77 and Minnesota highway 48 meet today. When it was finished in 1915, the ferries in this area went out of business.



A Winchester .25-20 like the one Jim Jordan used on hunting day. The cartridge for this rifle is so small, it is illegal to use for deer today.



Hunting Day

On the morning Jim and Eachus went hunting, the ground was covered by six inches of newly fallen snow, making for ideal tracking conditions. The two walked the few blocks from Eachus' house on Center Street to the Soo Line tracks. They followed the tracks south, crossed over the Yellow River and on toward Round Lake about a mile further south.

Both men were ill-prepared that morning. After crossing the river, Eachus realized he'd forgotten his hunting knife. He also was without a deer hunting license because he couldn't afford the 50-cent fee.

Jim Jordan was carrying the only rifle he owned, a Winchester .25-20, which shoots a cartridge so small it is illegal to use for deer today. Jim was also short of ammunition, with just five bullets loaded into the six-shot magazine.

As they approached Round Lake a mile south of the bridge, Jim and Eachus headed into the aspen woods on the east side of the right-of-way. They encountered deer tracks in the new snow and began following them back toward Danbury. The friends surmised the tracks were made by two does, two fawns and a very large buck with one lazy hoof.

After just a few minutes the hunters spotted one of the does which Jordan brought down with one shot from his 25-20. Thinking of the meals Eachus and his family could enjoy from the venison, Jim offered his knife to Eachus, so he could field dress the deer. They agreed that Eachus would drag the deer back to town while Jim continued following the tracks of the big buck.

The buck led Jordan north on a line parallel to the railroad tracks. About a quarter mile from the bridge, the tracks left the woods and went out into the waist-high grass and weeds adjacent to the raised tracks. A stretch of woods on the other side separated the tracks from the Yellow River.

Jordan paused, searching the bank of the raised right-of-way for deer tracks that would indicate his prey had continued past the opening. No tracks. The trail that he followed to the edge of the woods meandered into the opening, but maybe the deer doubled back into the woods, he thought. He knew the deer had to be nearby. As he scanned for tracks, a train approaching from the south blew its whistle, making Jordan's heart jump.

Jordan saw the train in the distance and decided to wait for it to pass while he pondered where the deer could have gone. He looked left. He looked right. He looked behind as the train approached. Jordan recalled later that he tried to think like a deer and figured that the river would be the best place to escape from a hunter.

The train whistle blew once more to let the people in Danbury know it was coming. Jordan's eyes suddenly opened wide as deer heads started popping up out of the snow-laden grass less than 50 yards ahead. The deer had been out of sight all that while but now one, two, three – maybe four, he never did remember exactly how many – nervously showed themselves as they rose and broke into a run across the opening and over the tracks. Then one more deer appeared out of the weeds and Jim knew it was the one he'd been following. The rack was huge. As the big animal followed the others up and over the tracks, Jordan shot three times. "I thought I hit him solidly," Jordan would say later, "but the buck kept going."

Boxcars and flatbeds rumbled by as the young hunter took a few breaths of the chilly air and tried to calm his pounding heart. Jordan walked over to the spot where the deer had been bedded down in the grass. He found a confusing maze of hoof prints but could easily pick out the tracks made by the monstrous buck. They led Jim over the tracks and into the woods on the west side. He resolved he wouldn't let

anything distract him from catching up to what he knew was a trophy-of-a-lifetime.

Jordan found a bit of blood from the buck. It was heading north and west toward the Yellow River. Several times he thought he saw the buck up ahead but didn't want to take a chance with his last bullet.

Finally, Jordan caught up with the buck as it was crossing the Yellow River near the old swimming hole. When the buck paused on the far bank, Jordan shot one final time, dropping the trophy.

With adrenaline rushing through his veins, Jordan waded across the river in icy, waist-deep water. He examined the monster buck and knew that, even if he had his knife to field dress the buck, he wouldn't be able to drag it home alone, so he decided to go for help.

Jordan hiked to his home which was just several blocks from where the buck had dropped. He changed clothes and walked over to Eachus' house where the Davis family was butchering the doe. They hitched Eachus' horse to a buckboard and, with Howard and Stewart, two of Eachus' sons, went to retrieve the buck.

As they approached the old swimming hole, Jordan's heart sank. The biggest buck he'd ever seen was gone!

After a short, frantic search, they spotted the buck about 200 yards downstream, just past the railroad bridge where it was washed up on a rock in the middle of the river. Jordan and Stewart waded out into the frigid water and pulled the buck to shore.

Years later, Jim Jordan recalled they weighed the deer at the feed mill but he couldn't remember whether it weighed just over or just under 400 pounds. Either way, it was a monster. Today, experienced hunters say a really big field dressed buck weighs about 225 pounds.

Jim's daughter, Bertha, recalled family stories about how tough the meat of the old buck was. "Dad cut it up with an ax and gave most of the meat to Aunt Grace who made stew with it."



Seen from the railroad bridge over the Yellow River, the far bank is the approximate spot where Jim took his last shot that downed the trophy buck. When Jordan returned later with Eachus and his two sons, the buck had washed downriver to just past the bridge.



Eachus and Phoebe Davis with their family in a photo taken at their Minnow Lake farm about 1908. The two boys in front are Howard (left) and Stewart.

George Van Castle

Deer hunters in the early 1900s were mostly interested in the meat. Still, a deer the size of Jim Jordan's drew the attention of the town's people. One of the admirers was George Van Castle from Webster, a town 10 miles south of Danbury. Like Eachus, Van Castle worked for the Soo Line Railroad, but he was also a part-time taxidermist. Van Castle offered to mount the buck for \$5. Jordan agreed, paid in advance, and Van Castle took the head back to Webster on the same railroad that had played a part in the hunt. Jordan had no way of knowing that he wouldn't see his buck again for nearly 50 years.

Van Castle's wife had been ill and seemed to be getting worse. When they heard there was a doctor in Hinckley who might be able to help, they sold their house in Webster and moved everything, including the buck, to a house on Grindstone Lake. This lake is about 10 miles northwest of Hinckley and directly west of Sandstone, Minnesota.

A few months later, when Jordan went to Webster to find out what was taking so long with for his trophy deer to be mounted, he was shocked to learn that Van Castle and his deer were gone.

Nowadays, it would be an easy ride to drive from Danbury to Hinckley and up to Grindstone Lake. Back then, the bridge over the St. Croix was just completed but the road was still very poor. Jordan didn't have the two or more days it would have required by horseback or buggy to travel to Hinckley in search of his deer. He eventually gave up hope of ever seeing it again.

After a year in the Grindstone Lake house, Van Castle's wife's health worsened, and she died. Three years later, in 1919, Van Castle remarried. His new wife longed to be near her relatives in Florida so the couple boarded up the Grindstone Lake house and moved.

The house stood vacant for 40 years, until it was sold for taxes in 1959.

Meanwhile, Jim and Lena moved to a small Minnesota spread on top of the Crooked Creek Hill, about 5 miles west of the St. Croix. Jordan kept hunting, took quite a few deer, but never saw another one that came close to his 1914 buck.



Grace Ludwig with the buck in about 1961. The antlers are magnificent but the head appears scrawny, thanks George Van Castle's crude job of taxidermy.



Jim Jordan's bar as it looked in 1968. While it has been converted to a private home and extensively remodeled, the building still stands on Highway 48 at the top of Crooked Creek Hill, about 5 miles west of the St. Croix.

Bob Ludwig

In 1959, local DNR forester Bob Ludwig was browsing in a Sandstone second hand store when one of the clerks told him, "Some people bought a house out in the country and they brought everything in here and it's all for sale."

As a woodsman, avid hunter and collector of antlers, an old mounted deer head caught Ludwig's eye. The taxidermy job was very crude. The lips and the hide on the back of the neck were sewn together with what appeared to be bailing twine. The antlers were almost black with dirt but they had 10 points, were solid and symmetrical. They were by far the biggest antlers Ludwig had ever seen.

"How much for the deer", he asked.

"Two dollars," was the reply.

Ludwig brought the deer home where his wife, Grace, set to work cleaning it up. When she got it reasonably clean, the couple hung it on their living room wall.

Months later, Ludwig became curious about how these antlers would compare to others in the record book. He got hold of a score sheet from the Boone and Crocket Club and measured the antlers according to the club's system. He sent the score to official measurer Bernie Fashingbauer in St. Paul. Fashingbauer thought Ludwig must have made a mistake so he made arrangements to come to Ludwig's home to measure the rack himself. Using the complicated Boone and Crocket measuring system, Fashingbauer came up with a score of 206 5/8 which, if correct, would be a new world record!

Fashingbauer's measurement was checked by a panel of experts from the Boone and Crocket Club. They found the measurements were accurate but there was an error in addition which, when corrected, made the official measurement 206 1/8, still a world record.

Was Jim Jordan the Hunter?

By now, the crude taxidermy job had been disassembled. The hide had been removed, leaving just the antlers which were still attached to the skull.

When Bernie Fashingbauer first measured the antlers and declared them large enough to be a world record, Ludwig called friends and relatives to share the good news. Among the people called was Grace Ludwig's uncle, Jim Jordan.

"Bring 'em over," Jordan suggested.

Ludwig brought the antlers into Jordan's bar and dance hall, located on Highway 48 at the top of Crooked Creek Hill. Jordan took one look at the antlers and exclaimed, "That's my deer!" It is possible one doesn't forget a magnificent animal like this deer, even after 50 years. However, knowing of Jordan's penchant for telling stories, Ludwig was skeptical of the claim.

Jim Jordan was a great story teller and his bar and dance hall made the perfect forum.

Jordan would tell patrons, "We have two kinds of beer: Grain Belt in the bottle and Grain Belt in the can. We also have two kinds of cigarettes, straights and ones without filters."

The kids loved listening to Jim Jordan too. He'd tell them, "Today, kids, we have two kinds of ice cream, plain or vanilla."

After he learned of Ludwig's trophy, any stranger in the bar who asked about deer would hear the story of how Jim bagged his big buck.



Jim and Lena with two bar patrons. Jordan served two kinds of beer, Grain Belt in the bottle and Grain Belt in the can. These fellows opted for the bottle.



This photo of Jim Jordan was taken by Grace Ludwig outside the Ludwig home. The hide had been removed from the Van Castle taxidermy job but notice the skull is still in tact.

Jordan would say in his slow drawl to his wife, “Lena, get the man a beer.” Jordan knew he could sell at least two beers before the story, which changed in detail with almost every telling, was finished.

One of Jordan’s neighbors in Ogema Township was Donald Kramer. A farmer and religious man, Kramer said, “Jim’s lifestyle and mine were different but I sure enjoyed listening to him tell his stories.” One of the lifestyle differences Donald referred to had to do with Jordan’s favorite beverages, which during Prohibition included moonshine.

Kramer went on to say, “Jim was kind of a b.s.er, but one you enjoyed listening to. In fact, I believe that, if he had had an agent, he could have been another Will Rogers.”

During their later years, Jim and Lena Jordan spent winters in a duplex they owned in Phoenix. Kramer recalls a spring day when a meeting was being held at the town hall as the Jordan’s drove up, having just arrived back home from Phoenix. “It didn’t take long before everyone forgot about the town business and gathered around Jordan’s DeSoto to hear stories of his winter adventures.”

One of Kramer’s favorite stories is the time Jim Jordan came back from Arizona and announced, “I’m going to move my mailbox.” It seems Jordan had been stopped by an Arizona highway patrolman for running a stop sign. When the patrolman examined Jordan’s drivers license he asked, “Dad, why does your license here say you live in Wisconsin but the plate on your car says Minnesota?”

Jordan said he spent a long time trying to explain to the young patrolman that everyone living east of Pine County Road 138, which was just a half mile west of Jordan’s bar and dance hall, received their mail from the Danbury, Wisconsin post office but were really Minnesota residents. So, rather than risk having to go through the same story for a future patrolman, Jordan dug up his mailbox and moved it a half mile west, so he could have a Minnesota address. “That lasted about six months,” says Kramer, “and after Jim got tired of the long walk to his mailbox he moved it back in front of his house and its Wisconsin address.”

Dorothy Grace, another Jordan neighbor, says that Lena was a big part of the team. She said, “It was Lena’s job to keep Jim in check and make sure he didn’t do or say anything that was too outrageous,”

The Skeptics

Among the skeptics who question whether Jim Jordan shot the buck is Bob Ludwig. “Every time I heard Jim talk about the buck the story changed a little bit. I think my deer might have been shot by one of the Kroschels who live out west of Sandstone. One time when Basel Irwin, the game warden, was at my place checking pelts from beaver I had trapped, he told me the buck looked like one he’d seen at the Kroschels’.”

Dorothy Hunter, Eachus Davis’ granddaughter, has another opinion. “I think grandpa shot the buck. The reason he gave Jim Jordan credit for it is because grandpa didn’t have a hunting license and didn’t want to get into trouble with the game warden.”



Lena and Jim about the time Ron Schara came to interview them. Neighbor Dorothy Grace said, "It was Lena's job to keep Jim in check and make sure he didn't do or say anything that was too outrageous."



"Lena, get the man a beer. I'm going to tell him about my buck....."

The Sale to Dr. Arnold

In 1965, the world record buck was entered into the Boone and Crocket book as being taken near Sandstone, Minnesota by an unknown hunter.

After the record book was published, Ludwig began getting calls from collectors offering to buy the antlers. "I got one call from a fellow in Texas who said he'd give me \$200 for the antlers but I turned him down," Ludwig said. "Then I got a call from a dentist in New Hampshire named Charles Arnold. He offered me \$1,500 which seemed like a good deal."

Before selling, Ludwig checked with a couple of people in the area to see if they would be interested in matching the dentist's offer. One was Greg Johnson owner of the Fishbowl Bar located two miles north of Danbury. The bar is still in business, being operated by Johnson's son, Burl.

Johnson said, "I told him, 'First of all, I don't have \$1,500 to spend on deer antlers,' even though I knew they were a world record, and 'Second, what would I want with a Minnesota Deer'? If it had been a Wisconsin deer, I would have thought a little bit harder before telling him that I wasn't about to spend that much money for antlers."

Ludwig sold the antlers to Dr. Arnold in 1968 and recalls, "With the \$1,500, I was able to buy 160 acres of land behind our home plus there was enough left over for a nice gift for Grace." Today, the Ludwigs still own the land which is undoubtedly now worth many times the price they paid.

The Final Verdict

Two hunters from the Twin Cities were among the bar patrons who enjoyed hearing Jim Jordan talk about his buck. They called Star Tribune outdoor writer Ron Schara and suggested he travel up to Jordan's bar and hear the story himself.

Schara did meet Jim and Lena Jordan and wrote a column on Jim and his buck in 1977. The column prompted officials from the Boone and Crocket Club, including Bernie Fashingbauer, to investigate the possibility that Jim Jordan was, indeed, the hunter who bagged the magnificent buck.

During the investigation, Fashingbauer came up to Pine County and interviewed everyone he could locate who might have information on the big buck. Being 85 years old at the time, Jordan's memory was beginning to fail but Lena's was still sharp. Their daughter, Bertha Falk, wasn't born in 1914 but could recall for Fashingbauer how her father retold the story of his buck endless times.

One of the people Fashingbauer interviewed was Stewart Davis, Eachus' son who helped his father, his brother Howard, and Jordan haul the deer home. Stewart, who was 14 at the time Jordan shot the buck, described the magnificent deer in detail, how they dragged it out of the Yellow River and hauled it home on the buckboard.

Despite the discrepancies, Boone and Crocket officials concluded the facts compiled by Fashingbauer amounted to a convincing argument in favor of Jim Jordan. At its December 1978 Records Committee meeting, the Boone and Crocket Club voted to officially recognize that the buck was taken along the Yellow River in Wisconsin in November 1914, not near Sandstone, Minnesota, and that Jim Jordan was the hunter.

The bizarre events that spanned more than 60 years ended with one final twist of fate. The December decision to officially credit Jim Jordan came two months after he died in October 1978 at age 86.

We should not, however, feel too sorry for Jim Jordan; great story teller that he was. That magnificent buck gave him endless fodder for his stories, particularly in the 19 years between the time Bob Ludwig discovered the buck in Sandstone and Jordan's death.



Bob & Grace Ludwig with the replica of Jim Jordan's buck that hangs over the fireplace at Woodland Trails Bed and Breakfast. This photo was taken in 2007, 48 years after Bob purchased the mounted trophy in a Sandstone second hand store for \$2.00



Officials of the Jim Jordan Chapter of the Minnesota Deer Hunters Association are, l-r, Gary Thompson, Gerald Schmidt and John Rabe.

Today

After more than 70 years as the world's number one typical whitetail, Jim Jordan's buck was surpassed by one taken by Milo Hanson in 1993 in western Saskatchewan, Canada. The Hanson buck measures 213-5/8.

It was thought at the time that both bucks would soon be surpassed by others because more hunters are following the principles of Quality Deer Management which includes passing on young bucks to give them a chance to mature. None have been harvested, however, leaving the Milo Hanson and Jim Jordan bucks in their positions as number one and two in the world.

Jim Jordan's buck is now owned by Bass Pro Shops. With other trophy whitetails, Jim Jordan's buck is taken on tour of the country to be exhibited at Bass Pro Shop stores and hunting shows.

When Bass Pro Shops obtained the mount in 2001, the purchase price was not announced but, based on other transactions of big bucks, \$250,000 is a good guess.

Pine County's Most Famous Resident

Jim Jordan was born in Pine County, Minnesota and lived 70 of his 86 years in the county. Thanks to one day of hunting in 1914, Jim Jordan might have established himself as the most famous person ever to have lived in Pine County.

Consider the other candidates for this distinction: Ralph Plaisted, arctic explorer who grew up in Bruno Township; Vern Mikkelsen, who lived in Askov from 6th grade through high school and went on to become a star of the Minneapolis Lakers basketball team in the 1950s; Hjalmar Peterson, who established the Askov American, was elected Lieutenant Governor and, upon the death of Governor Floyd B. Olson in 1937, served as Governor of Minnesota for four months.

While the exploits of the other candidates have faded in memory, Jim Jordan's name is known today by thousands of deer hunters throughout North America. In Pine County his name lives on through the Jim Jordan Chapter, one of the most successful units of the Minnesota Deer Hunters Association.

Yes, Jim Jordan is the most famous person to every have lived in Pine County, Minnesota!