

# Vilas County Lumber Co., Company Town - Winegar, WI

A company town is a place where a practically all stores and houses are owned by one company that is also the main employer.



Fosterville/Winegar was a “Company Town.” The VCLCo printed and coined its own money that could only be exchanged for goods at the company store, the Winegar recreation hall, and other company enties.

Company tokens (or called gensing by residents) served several purposes, simply as pay, employee benefit, profit maker, or as an expeditious means of bookkeeping. The VCLCo “Company Store” handled employee accounts and dispensed the tokens.

The use of tokens as pay was a benefit to the employer. Tokens used for payment removed the need of the employer to have cash on hand. The use of tokens necessitated using the company store for most, if not all, purchases, which were usually at higher prices than could be found elsewhere. In this situation, the Company Store had the advantage to the employee, do to the village of Fosterville/Winegar’s the remoteness which precluded traveling to the nearest town (Mercer) to buy goods. Therefor employees usually saved money in the long run by buying at the company store, not having to travel or pay for a train ticket and overnight lodging.

In 1912 William Draver an employee of the VCLCo was fired by W. S. Winegar for buying by mail with *Rail-Way Express* delivery from Montgomery Wards in Chicago, instead of the VCLCo “Company (general) Store.”

J. J. Foster (first VCLCo President) had two round aluminum tokens. W. S. Winegar (second VCLCo President) issued one round bimetallic token with a brass rim with an aluminum insert. William Bonifas and Joseph Gorman (purchased the VCLCo from W. S. Winegar) issued three round aluminum tokens.

Loggers at the turn of last century were no different than wage earners of today, except they didn't have access to credit cards or a credit union. When their money ran out they could obtain an advance in tokens, to be deducted from their next months salary. The tokens were usually non-transferable (to prohibit gambling, or selling at a cash discount), and were many times only deducted from an employees account when they were turned in on purchases. By this means, a lost token was not deducted from wages; only a spent token was accountable. Some companies discounted tokens as much as 20% for cash.



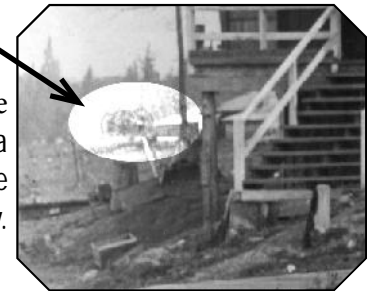
The prospect of working in the lumber mill or on the railroads lured people into this area. The stability in a Company Town, with housing provided was attractive to many families, this was the goal of the VCLCo. Such facilities enable the VCLCo to hire a larger percentage of married men (married workers were considered more stable than single men).

People came to Fosterville/Winegar because of job advertisements put out in newspapers. Many came from economically depressed areas such as Kentucky. The company controlled much of their life including the color of their homes. Perhaps the influence of the company on the lives of the residents helped them to feel united and protected. The company paid supervisors to enforce prohibition. Some might now call such actions intrusions into employee privacy. And, yet when Winegar asked his laborers to continue working without pay until the end of WWI, (because his was the only mill in the area with dry lumber) they did. W. S. Winegar eventually paid his men off. The company took care of things, and the townspeople seemed very loyal in return.

Noise from the mills would drown out all but your thoughts. It was a forward moving community; - two churches, - Hotel de Foster/Fremsted boarding house (up the hill to the left of the mills), - a community recreation Hall, (across the street and a bit further from the Hotel) which housed 3 pool tables, 5 or 6 slot machines, a player piano with a saloon/bar on the main floor, a barber shop in the back (where C. Childers shined shoes for the men attending the Saturday night dances). The large hall above was the "town hall" where weekly dances and an occasional silent movie were held. Wooden sidewalks were present to keep pedestrian out of the muddy streets.



Winegar's Recreation Hall is on the right hand side of the street. Looking down at the end of the street is the first frame school house.



Look closely to the left of the Hotel de Foster, you will see a couple Big Wheels which were used to skid logs in the Pinery.

There were few cars in town, mostly horse-drawn wagons. The town had postal, railway express, telegraph, and telephone as part of its amenities. The big homes on the hill belonged to the VCLCo President, Superintendent and C&N-W Ry Section Foreman. These were the village mansions. Waiting for the train from Mercer you could stop at the Fremsted boarding house for breakfast of ham, eggs, pancakes and 15 different pies or a huge lunch after the train arrived. Many lived outside of town and raised their own vegetables, poultry and cows.

Water was bought from the VCLCo. They would come around with a great tank pulled by a team of horses and fill barrels at 25 cents apiece or company tokens.

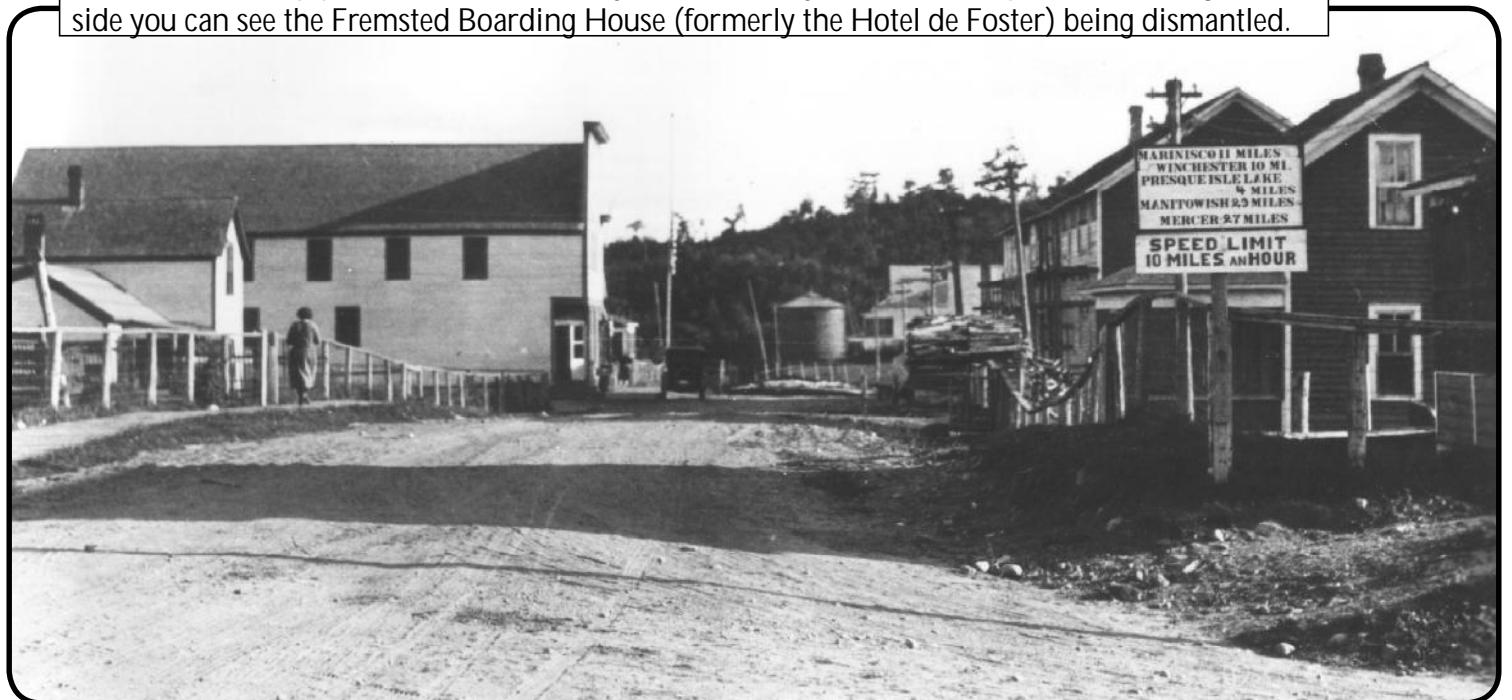
On some days it was possible to count the smoke of a half dozen fires burning in the slashings of the "Stump Pastures". At night their ascending flares cast a red glow along the circle of the horizon. If the fires got too close, some attempt was made to check the progress; but usually they burned on entirely out of control until the next rain came. So large were these fires at times, the air was blue with drifting smoke and peoples eyes would smart from the irritation. The hot days of summer always held the threat of roaring forest fires. Forest fires were just part of summer. Though most of the areas had been burned over many times stumps would burn as each fire passed, then char black and go out to wait for the next fire. There were many tall, dead pine trees standing as they had no commercial value. They looked like tall candles when they burned at night. The tongues of fire creeping upward along the aged trunks made a weird, glaring, grandiose spectacle as they went up in great billows of pitch-black smoke.



I believe every car in town showed up for this photograph. End of the street is Henry Daily's (Mill Superintendent) home.



Looking down main street towards the C&N-W Ry terminal in Fosterville/Winegar. Note, there are no autos in the top photo of Fosterville. If you look closely at the bottom photo on the right hand side you can see the Fremsted Boarding House (formerly the Hotel de Foster) being dismantled.





Company Homes

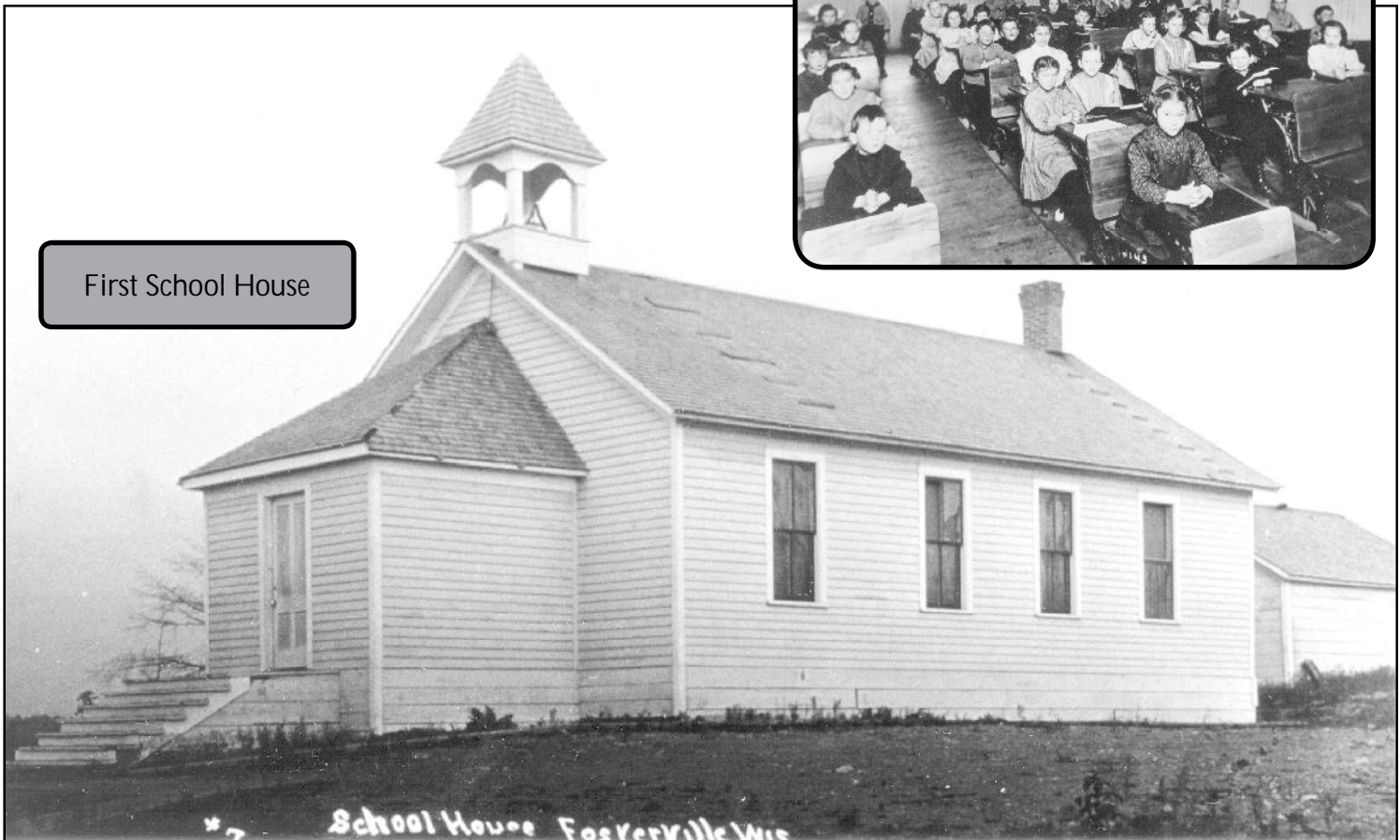
Note stumps left from first logging which was used to build the Sawmill. Also close observation shows the this home was built with poor quality siding that the mill would have had difficulty selling.



VCLCo President's home.



VCLCo Superintendant's home.



First School House

In the 1920's Spinney's was the only bar in Winegar. Gunnar's replaced Spinney's. Gunnar Larson was also the banker where you could cash a check and perform other financial transactions.

The development of the summer resort business after WWII went to compensate for the rapidly diminishing timber industry and has provided the basis of a new prosperity, of a more permanent kind. Prearranged local guides would still meet visitors and transport them by canoe, boat or horse drawn wagons to resorts and summer homes. Winegar was where you left your car if you drove. County road W was the only road, County Road B was just a fire lane.

1st

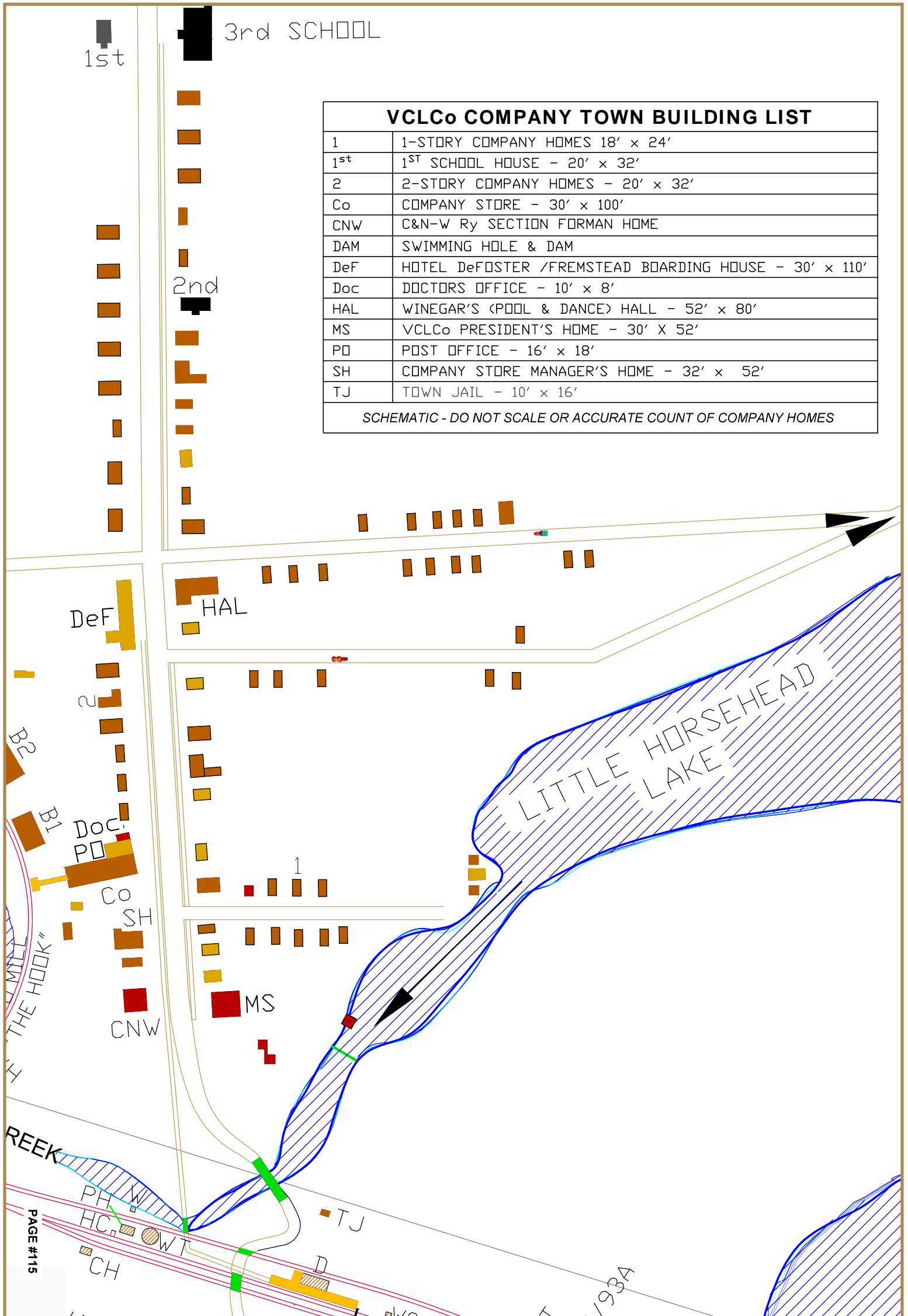
3rd SCHOOL

2nd

### VCLCo COMPANY TOWN BUILDING LIST

1	1-STORY COMPANY HOMES 18' x 24'
1 <sup>st</sup>	1 <sup>ST</sup> SCHOOL HOUSE - 20' x 32'
2	2-STORY COMPANY HOMES - 20' x 32'
Co	COMPANY STORE - 30' x 100'
CNW	C&N-W Ry SECTION FORMAN HOME
DAM	SWIMMING HOLE & DAM
DeF	HOTEL DeFOSTER /FREMSTEAD BOARDING HOUSE - 30' x 110'
Doc	DOCTORS OFFICE - 10' x 8'
HAL	WINEGAR'S (POOL & DANCE) HALL - 52' x 80'
MS	VCLCo PRESIDENT'S HOME - 30' X 52'
PO	POST OFFICE - 16' x 18'
SH	COMPANY STORE MANAGER'S HOME - 32' x 52'
TJ	TOWN JAIL - 10' x 16'

*SCHEMATIC - DO NOT SCALE OR ACCURATE COUNT OF COMPANY HOMES*



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