*“Back Home” by Chris Hardie*

**Abandoned properties have stories to tell**

Dotted across our rural landscape are haunting vestiges of what once was.

Abandoned houses and buildings always draw my curiosity. I once spent a day with a photographer roaming the countryside as we checked out numerous abandoned properties, with the goal of creating a photo story. We crept in and out of buildings, breaking trespassing laws and pushing safety boundaries by testing spongy floorboards.

It was a project that remained on the unfinished pile when I accepted a promotion in the company. But to this day I like to photograph old buildings — stopping short of inside exploration.

Each place has a story. Who lived there? When was it built? Why was it abandoned? Will anyone ever live there again?

Recently, I traveled to central Wisconsin along Wisconsin Highway 54. I passed several abandoned properties. On my return, I took a short stop in City Point, an unincorporated hamlet on the Wood-Jackson county line.

Next to the railroad tracks, about one block off the highway, is a house with weathered siding and broken windows, missing shingles. Decorative spindles grace the front porch. It had the look of what was once a fine building.

City Point was at one time a bustling village located in the township of the same name. Originally called Sulllivan after local resident John L. Sullivan, the town was in 1889 renamed City Point.

Black River Falls resident Darren Durman said his great-great-grandparents George and Mary Galloway lived in the house, which was once the post office. Mary was the postmistress.

Durman said the house has two front doors. One went into the post office and the other into the residence, which also served as a boarding house for travelers coming off the train. Many different businesses lined the street.

Mary Galloway died in the 1920s; a new post office was built across the street. Rail passenger service in Jackson County stopped in the early 1960s. Only a few old buildings remain. Today the area is part of the Pittsville Post Office.

I’m glad Durman was able to tell me some of the story behind the building. Those stories are often lost.

One of the houses I explored almost 20 years ago looked like the residents had just left that morning. The bed was still made. Dishes were in the cupboard. Yet the calendar hanging on the wall was dated July 1967 and only half the windows were intact.

It’s possible it was still in use by homeless travelers. Maybe the owner still came back to check on it. It was an odd feeling of being in a distorted time warp.

I drove past the location of the house late this past year but it’s no longer there. There’s only a barn to mark what was once a homestead. Perhaps that too will soon be gone.

*Chris Hardie spent more than 30 years as a reporter, editor and publisher. He was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and won dozens of state and national journalism awards. He is a former president of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association. Contact him at**chardie1963@gmail.com**.*