

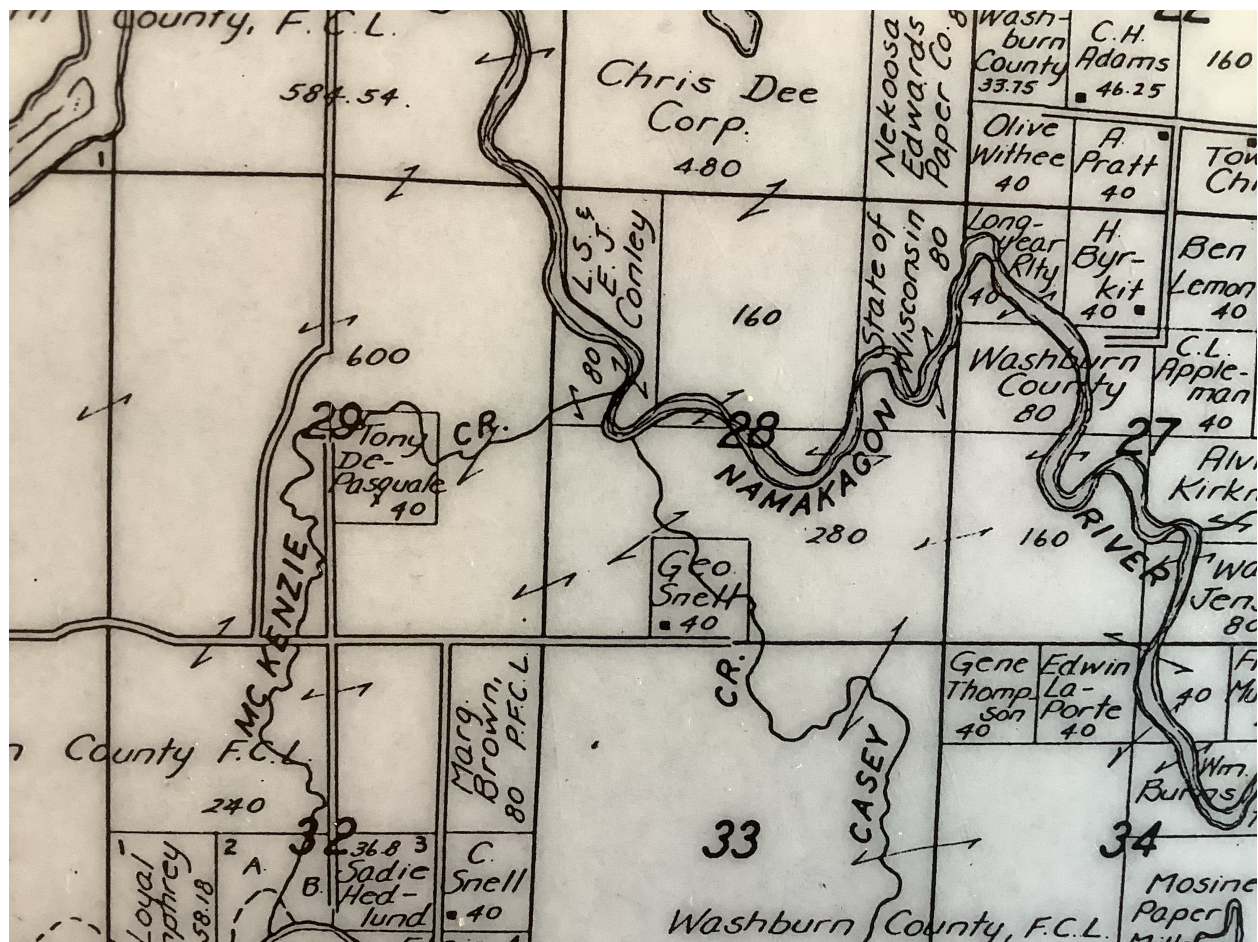
Chicog-Then and Now for April, 2025
JoAnn Malek

Early on a January day in 1938, a line of six heavy cars was seen traveling north on Island Lake Road. In Spooner, a stranger ordered coffee and one hundred sandwiches at the Buckhorn Tavern. Owner Chuck Trudelle commented, “We knew something important was going on.”

John Henry Seadlund was guiding FBI Agents and director J. Edgar Hoover to the dugout pit where he had left the bodies of his partner, James Atwood Gray, and their kidnap victim Charles Sherman Ross.

Seadland, dubbed “the nation’s cruelest criminal, the most cold-blooded, ruthless and atrocious killer” Hoover had ever encountered, was born in Cable, Wisconsin on July 27, 1910. He worked as a miner and a logger but leaned toward a life of crime, stealing cars, robbing banks, including one in Milltown, even kidnapping. That victim, wife of a Wisconsin cafe owner, was released after a couple of days.

While hunting south of the Namekagon River Seadlund found an old well pit on the Gilbert Mack homestead in Chicog. He lined a hole 4'x8'x6' with tarpaper and added rough lumber from a nearby abandoned log structure. Folks in the area realized he had been asking about a cabin, buying groceries, cutting pulpwood.



It was to this dugout that Ross was brought and held captive during the fall of 1937 while the kidnappers carried out their ransom plan. Several cans of gasoline were stored in the pit, enough for a trip to Lake Geneva where Gray had agreed to release Ross.

After successfully collecting the \$50,000 ransom Seadlund returned to the hide-out. In the fray that developed he ended up killing both of the other men. He then traveled the country, dispersing a trail of greenbacks. A filling station attendant in Cameron, WI found one of the ransom bills, identified by the serial number. On January 14, 1938 Seadlund was apprehended at the Santa Anita racetrack. He confessed to the kidnapping, which had become a federal offense when Ross was taken across state lines.

Soon Seadlund was leading FBI agents, first to his hidden stash in Minnesota, and then to Chicog. But it was winter. Seadlund was confused by snow-covered trails and couldn't find the sawdust pile near the pit. Sam Swonger was recruited, and was able to pinpoint an old sawdust mound where Jay Grimm once had a sawmill. The dugout was located and the two bodies were uncovered.

Sheriff Robert Willis and Coroner Harry Dahl, with their helpers, removed the bodies from the crypt, placed them in a box on Swonger's bobsled and brought them to a hearse and to Dahl's mortuary.

The son of an Ironton, MN miner was convicted of a capital offense due to the death of the kidnap victim. He pleaded guilty, preferring execution over a lengthy prison sentence. Jurors deliberated for just 90 minutes. Before his death Seadlund told an undertaker that he was sorry for what he had done.

The drama was front page news in the Spooner Advocate. The Superior Telegram scooped the story with a 7am EXTRA. It's reputed that thousands visited the hide-out and had their pictures taken standing or lying in the pit. There were some who wanted to buy the land and charge admission. Nearby neighbors made spending money by directing people to the trail or hauling them to the site. Entrepreneurs hoped to secure boards and reconstruct the crypt for the New York World's Fair, but the planks had been removed, either for evidence or by souvenir hunters.

By and by the hole disappeared in jack-pine growth. Advocate editor Ed Bardill pleaded, "Let's forget it all."

IMPORTANT APRIL DATES

Thursdays, 11-3, Walkabouts, town hall

Wednesday 4/9, 6pm, monthly Chicog meeting

Wednesdays 4/9&23, Namekagen Transit Service

Thursday 4/10, 11-1, Bibliodragon, town hall

Wednesday 4/23, 10:30-12, Books&Bread, Beaverbrook
Town Website: www.townofchicog.com

CHICOG FUN FEST: Save the date-Saturday, August 23.

Contact Darcie with ideas: townchicogmail@yahoo.com

Thank you for reading Chicog-Then and Now