

Chicog-Then and Now for February, 2025
JoAnn Malek

Cy Sipe was a master carpenter. He came to Chicog to work on a four-story lodge owned by C. Richard Titus. His task was to finish the cellar, adding public rest rooms and creating a bar to be dubbed *The Briar Patch*. Cy and wife Penny lived next door for two years, in the log caretaker's residence. Penny still wishes she had photos taken from the widow's walk on the top floor of the large house, one in summer, the other in winter. "It was a beautiful property."

Long before that, in 1922, Charles and Julia Hoinville travelled by train from Chicago, then in an open sleigh for twenty-six more miles, to view 1,200 acres owned by the railroad. After seeing its beauty they purchased the property and called it Hoinville Hills. Namekagon Lake was renamed Hoinville Lake. The home they built was topped with an open cupola, reached from the third story by an indoor ladder. The fireplace was made of stones collected from local fields.



Ahead of its time, the house boasted electricity and indoor plumbing. Firewood was used for cooking and heating. Ice for refrigeration was cut from the lake and stored in a separate ice house.

When Charles died in 1955, the property was sold to Paradise Sportsmen's Club headquartered in Chicago. Five cottages were added on the west side of Hoinville Lake. Armed guards were posted at the entrance. Rumor has it that this group was involved with the mafia.

Camp Adventure, Inc. bought the property in 1960. The owner sold three sets of 99-year leases, fraudulently, and subsequently fled to Mexico to avoid law suits.

Since then the property has been divided and has changed hands several more times. In the sixties and seventies owners were Northwest Suburban Council of the Boy Scouts from Des Plaines, Ill. Campsites, outhouses, activity building, shower house, and trading post were added. Hundreds of logs and tons of sand were put down to prevent the swamp road on the north end of the lake from washing out. Ten years after opening for wilderness camping nearly two thousand Scouts attended the camp, but by 1976 the high cost of gasoline rendered traveling the four hundred miles from Illinois unaffordable.

C.R. Titus owned the property for ten years beginning in 1978. In April of 1980 a 10,000-acre forest fire burned more than one hundred acres of the land south of the lake.

In 1988, Bethany Lutheran College of Mankato, MN purchased the property for educational purposes. It was renamed The Schwan Center. During their tenure five duplexes were built, later Eagle Lodge Conference Center and two hotel wings.

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans purchased the property in 2005, renamed it Heartwood Conference Center and Retreat. The mission was togetherness, learning, celebration, overall wellness. Capital improvements included addition of a third hotel, and the Welcome Center along Highway 77.

In 2019, the property was sold again, renamed Heartwood Resort and Conference Center. For the first time in decades, it was opened to the public. "The amenities on site are endless in the beautiful wilderness that is Heartwood Resort."

In January of 2024, another sale, to Minnesota Catholic Youth Partnership, and another name change. Trinity Woods Catholic Retreat Center is again a youth camp, with large groups of middle-school-aged children attending Extreme Faith programs each week throughout the summer. In other seasons the center will host Faith and Science classes and weekend retreats. The web of cross-country ski trails that many have enjoyed in the past will be maintained but will not be offered for local access.

When St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Clements, MN closed its doors for good, historic and fragile altar pieces were donated to Trinity Woods. A chapel was created on the lower level of Eagle Lodge. Ancient stained glass windows were installed, back-lighted to capture their beauty. Another touch of loveliness to a property that has been recognized as beautiful throughout the century.

It's just too bad that the remarkable Hoinville house isn't still part of the scene.

IMPORTANT FEBRUARY DATES

Thursdays, 11-3, Walkabouts, town hall

Saturday, 2/8, 8am, Wake Boat Ordinance Vote, town hall

Wednesday 2/12, 6pm, monthly Chicog meeting

Wednesdays 2/12&26, Namekagen Transit Service

Thursday 2/13, 11-1, Bibliodragon, town hall

Wednesday 2/26, 10:30-12, Books&Bread, Beaverbrook

Town Website: www.townofchicog.com

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