

Chicog-Then and Now for December, 2024
JoAnn Malek

WOULD YOU CONSIDER taking a position on the county Aging and Disabilities Resource Committee board? Meetings are held in the Shell Lake Government Center four times during the year. Before her move, Cathy Peterson represented Chicog, kept the board up-to-date on our work, and was the link to bring county news and opportunities to our township. Contact ADRC director Linda Hand at (715) 635-4460 for more information.

“I KNOW A WHOLE BUNCH OF STUFF!” That’s not surprising when you’ve lived for 104 years. I was delighted to meet Agnes Jorgenson a few weeks ago. She is quirky and dear.



Agnes was born and raised in the Chicog area. Her parents were Gilbert and Ettie Mae Mack. She was the middle child in a family of ten children. Her youngest sister, Etta-Mae Rothenbuhler, is her only living sibling. Etta-Mae is 92 years old and lives in Spooner. Agnes resides in a care facility in Hayward.

“We all did chores, with no complaints. I was ornery though.” Not just as a young one, some folks might declare. Once Agnes crawled into a butter churn and got stuck. Butter churns are narrow on top. They tried but couldn’t pull her back out and had to break the churn to free her.

Agnes attended Stuntz Brook School which was located on Bramer Road, the current site of the Louiselle home. Later she attended Red Brick School, located on the southwest corner of County Roads K and F. Schools had to be nearby so children could walk there. But there was this bull they had to pass. It must have been pretty frightening as Agnes still mentions the huge animal. “We carried our lunch in a pail. Mother shined up those pails. I think he liked that shiny thing.” Their dog Gruff wasn’t cowed by him though. “Gruff would grab that bull’s nose. He was a wonderful dog. But he got old.”

Agnes and first husband, Earl Swearingen, were proprietors of the Buck and Wing, on Nancy Lake Road. This establishment, which is now Gruzy’s Italian Beef House and Pub, is on the west side of Pokegama Lake. Later Agnes, and second husband Jerome Jorgensen, owned the McClain Lake Tavern, a bar plus three cabins on the south end of McClain. The bar burned to the ground, but Agnes was surprised to learn that the trailer they lived in still sits on the property. There were no children born to her, but she has plenty of nieces and nephews.

“That was a long time ago. I got to think back” replied Agnes when I asked her to reminisce about childhood Christmases. Sure, they’d go to the woods to cut a tree. They’d drag the tree home, but if it was too big they’d bring the horse to pull it. The family would string popcorn and cranberries for decoration. Yes, there were candles. One year when her next youngest brother, Gilbert, Jr., was small he reached out to grab a pretty, lighted candle. “We were sent to the cellar for potatoes, which were sliced and used to suck the fire out of his hands. He never had scars.”

“We’d go to Uncle George Pierce’s home for Christmas dinner. We rode the eight miles in the horse-drawn sleigh.” Pa always carried a gun because wolves were known to attack the horses. Rocks were heated and wrapped to keep feet warm but “my feet would get so cold. ‘Get out and run behind,’ pa would command. But that never warmed me.”

“Ma made all of our clothes. Even fancy things. One year I had an organdy dress for Christmas. She made all of our Christmas presents, too.”

It is fascinating to visit with a woman who has gathered memories from an entire century. It is important to listen to those who have decades of living and stories they are still able to remember and relate.

IMPORTANT DECEMBER DATES

Thursdays, 12/5,12,18, 11-3, Walkabouts, town hall

Wednesday 12/11, 6pm, monthly Chicog meeting

Wednesday 12/11, Namekagen Transit Service

Thursday, 12/12, 11-1, Bibliodragon, town hall

Tuesday, 12/18, 10:30-12, Books&Bread, Beaverbrook

Town Website: www.townofchicog.com

Thank you for reading Chicog-Then and Now