



Benton County

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An Impulse For Here

by Cecil Wade

Right now, we are but one decade from the twenty-first century. And in the nineteenth century, Augusta Dropps Swalboski walked three miles each school day to Popple Creek and three miles back home at the end of the day.

Interestingly enough, Augusta is walking yet.

On the 24th of January, Mrs. Swalboski will be one hundred years old.

In 1949, she bought from Hazel Snavely a small house back of the St. Paul Lutheran Church where Mrs. Snavely's mother Mrs. Smart, had lived for several years. For the next forty years until Augusta had surgery which offered her the help of a pacemaker to keep her heart beating, she was a citizen of the town where she now lives in the nursing center.

That major surgery marked the first and only trip to a hospital for this centenarian and at this time, her diminished vision the only physical problem she speaks of.

One hundred years!



Augusta Dropps Swalboski
100 years old



Mike Swalboski
Home From Canada



5 Generations: Standing, Karen Miller, Seated, Caroline Bolz, Norma Hatch, Jennifer Miller

Born in St. Paul, Augusta moved with her parents to Gilmanton Township when she was two years old, to the southwest corner of section 31. Her family farmed there. She recalls the chore of breaking ground, removing tree stumps for a garden; in each of several years time, a plot about half the size of the room she now shares at the nursing home was newly broken.

Gustie learned to speak English at the school at Popple Creek. She smiles broadly at the memory of hiking through the wild fields to school, walking through hazel brush and grass and small forests to the settlement near the high banked Elk River where both the Popple Creek school and the St John Lutheran parish gathered. For her school lunch, she recalls, a piece of bread was brought from home.

In 1909, Augusta married Mike Swalboski, who died in 1937.

In 1921, Mike was working near Bemidji in a lumber camp when he was encouraged to go to Saskatchewan to farm. He was urged by his sister, already in Canada, to bring his family and homestead a section of prairie ground. He and Augusta were truly pioneers, and they and their children planted and harvested wheat, oats and barley under the wide sky above the northern prairie.

Julia Hennek, their daughter, remembers Mike meeting harvest hands at the railroad station, bringing them home to the fields where his threshing machine hummed through the weeks of gathering up the grain. Augusta, of course, was in charge of feeding the crew.

When the family moved back to Minnesota, they farmed in several areas of Benton County and when Gustie moved to Foley in 1949 she left the farm she loved best, near Oak Park.

Of her seven children, six are living: Fred, Caroline Bolz, Julia Hennek, Ed, Walter and Jean Kaeding. Martha Hagedorn is dead.

At one time, Augusta had five brothers, two sisters, three half-brothers and one half sister in her family circle: only one brother, Emil Dropps is living today. Emil is in a nursing home at New Hope, Minnesota.

Mrs. Swalboski worked long hours on the farm, of course, with little time for socializing and cultivating close friendships, but her move to Foley forty years ago changed that. Her church and her neighborhood meant that she was never alone. With special fondness she speaks of her closest neighbors, the Walter Pohls.

She has opinions, and speaks them. Her "good" presidents were Franklin Roosevelt and William McKinley. She likes bright colors, especially red and blue.

We ask her, "Did you like to dance?"

"Never had time for that!"

We laugh and she reminds us that in her lifetime the world saw three major wars and some conflicts not regarded "major". She lived through three bad droughts and three times when far too much water covered the region where she lived.

Life was perhaps too grim, Gustie?

Not at all! For instance, in 1910...eighty years ago!...this grand lady was a cook at the Foley Hotel, built where the Dewey Apartments now stand. She cooked there, meat and vegetables for the hotel guests, for the high old sum of 5 dollars a week. Good job? Good pay?

"Yes", she says. "And I did a good job, too."

An accomplished seamstress, Augusta sewed her own dresses always and still has some of her own making. Long, long before quilting was a craft, those she stitched together were recognized as lovely pieces of art.

She (along with theologians, philosophers and all people with vision) chides us for "abusing" the world. We waste, we want everything now, we have no time for anything but fulfilling our own selfish needs.

We don't question her about her opinion this time. We know she's right.

We sit back and think about the changes she's known and we can't quite gather in more than a small number of the sights she's seen, miles she's walked, decisions she has made.

one seen, miles she's walked, decisions she has made.

Like all of us who have left quite a few decades behind, Augusta Swalboski thinks often and speaks often about the past. That is not to say that her hindsight and insight keep her from appreciating the present.

"I'm doing better since I've got a room down here", she says, looking around the Foley Nursing Center. "They let me walk to my meals. I have my own phone. My eyes are not good, but it's my years".

We remind her that the church at Popple Creek will be celebrating 100 years of history this year. "So will I", she smiles.

Having seen in her lifetime, 36,525 days, we wish the 24th of January to be one of the grandest days of all.

Happy Birthday from the town that has taken note of you for years and pauses now to salute you.

Hayland Reunion like an Earlier Reunion: Ruth and Norma Bolz were Augusta's grandchildren. They both graduated from District 25. Caroline Bolz was Augusta's daughter and Norma, Ruth and Chuckie's mother. About 1980, Augusta sat in the Milaca North Park, now called Reineke Park, with a reunion of her Swalboski family. She just sat there shaking her head. She was asked: "What are you thinking?". She replied "to think I started all of this". That was about 90 years after her birth in 1890. Now in 2012, about 110 years after the Hayland school was established by our first classmates parents, we can say "to think they started all of this.".