

Velma Kunschke (Nelson) Narrative

Velma was a resident of the Presque Isle Township before Fosterville. In 1936 she wrote the following narrative of the areas history.

The first families of this (Presque Isle) township bought several acres of land and settled on nearby lakes. Among these early settlers, my father was one of the first. Others still reside here. When out of supplies, they had to walk to Marenisco, the nearest town and carry their provisions on their backs if they had no horses.

Then, in 1904, the North Western railroad was laid and logging camps were built every few miles. There were 12 of these and quite a few men worked in them.

Later that same year, Mr. Foster bought some land, and, after building several houses, tried to induce families to move here. Two brothers, Howard and Douglas Rogers, put up a store with the post office adjoining. A portable mill was used that year by John Hatch, until a bigger and better one could be constructed. Three families already lived here and more continued to come. A boarding house was built. It was run by Mrs. Fremsted then but is now run by Mrs. McKenzie.

During the fall, a teacher was hired to teach what few children there were. She taught in a private home down below what is now "The Garage Hill." Among the first of the scholars that year, our school board director, Mr. Fairfield, was one of the six that attended.

An interesting joke is told of a minister who came to Fosterville. As he was about to get off the train, he asked of a group of people, "Is this the jumping off place?" Mrs. Ira Fairfield suddenly replied: "Yes, this is the end of the world!" It probably did look as though it were, for this was a secluded place. The main road then was nothing but a trail with dense, virgin timber on each side.

Everything except the depot and one house was completely destroyed by fire in the autumn of 1905. Until vacant until the town was rebuilt, the post office and store were in the depot.

After this was done, a school house was built in 1906. It was the same building to which we Junior high students attend but it then faced south. A town hall was also built. It was used for this purpose for years, but as the population continued to increase, more room was necessary for education, therefore the hall was made into a school. A partition divided it into two rooms. The school for the primary and intermediate grades in the same building.

In 1911, the town hall was rebuilt; this time above the pool room. By the year 1913, 47 houses had been built and every one was occupied. While more were being put up, it was necessary for two families to share the same house.

That same year a man from grand Rapids bought the small sawmill town from Mr. Foster. The mill had been completed in 1906. The town was then named "Winegar" after its new owner. Mr. Winegar added 25 more houses to the town, making a total of 72. None was vacant until 1926. Winegar was at its height during those years. Vast amounts of timber were cut and logged. Oxen, too, were used for this purpose.

Mr. Winegar owned a large island on Oxbow Lake where he spent weekends or else weeks at a time.

During the World War men were taken from their work. However, the work was not undone, for their wives and other women did it for them. They would work long hours each day; driving the horses and piling lath on the trams. Mrs. Calkins, who was then Miss Galvin, was known as the "Star Teamster of the Kicking Mule." Others who could not endure such strenuous work sewed. and knitted for the men who were so faithfully fighting for the freedom of us Americans.

In 1914, a small school was built for the Presque Isle children who had. That same year a man from no way of getting into Winegar. Because of the severe cold weather and so much snow, the teacher (formerly Miss Devine, but now Mrs. Finnegan) had to dress in breeches and other heavy clothing and wear snowshoes in order to get to school. The little school has been closed because we have a bus which delivers the children to Winegar.

Mr. Bonifas and Joe Gorman bought Winegar in 1926. Because the wages were so little, Winegar has been decreasing rapidly. Last year and this year people have moved until the population has decreased to one-half the amount it formerly was. Practically the whole town is receiving relief, simply because there is no work whatever for them.

Last spring most of the mill machinery and lumber was moved to Lake Linden by trucks.

No families from other cities would want to move here, because the streets and yards are so untidy and the houses are practically ruined. All interest seems to have been lost in the up-keep of Winegar, which has a great deal to do with the downfall. Tourists no longer desire to come here because of these reasons.

We hope that some day Winegar may be as it formerly was but of course there is no need to look forward to this, for it is too far gone. Thus is Winegar today.

Photo to the right is the 1930, 4th grade class in Winegar, published in the Lakeland Times on page 14 in 1995.



The original 1930 fourth grade class from Winegar school. Top row (l-r) Della Steinback, Ann Elm, Irma (Dolly) Peterson, Miss Meda Bessey, teacher and Velma Kunschke. Bottom row (l-r) Geraldine Miller, Leonard Anderson, Violet Elm, Dorothy Eschenbauch, Fred Houle, Jack McKenzie and Nick Kanios.

Is either of the above young ladies in the left photo, Velma?

Don't know.

No.

Yes.