

Mrs. Maude Johnson

A look back at the early years, say the first quarter century, after the Town of Spider Lake was carved out of the Town of Lac Du Flambeau includes many people who lived quiet and dignified lives without leaving much of a record.

One such woman, who did stand out in the community because she was an early official of the town--village clerk or treasurer--was Mrs. Maude Johnson. Our family came to know her as soon as we came to spend summers at our new cottage on Little Star Lake. She did our family laundry.

Our parents always taught us to address our elders as Mister or Mrs., but we children would have called her Mrs. Johnson anyway, for that was how much respect we had for her quiet dignity beginning with her soft almost scriptually white hair and her energy and ethic of hard work.

As a child I never learned much about her background but I seem to recall that she had come from Kansas and that there had been a marriage there.

When she first came to the Manitowish Waters area she lived at Woodchuck Hollow which at the time was like a log leanto. With her was her young son whom she called not Robert or Bob but Bobs. She took in washing probably all her years here--that is how we came to know her as we accompanied our parents to pick up the wash. She did not drive and when she lived at Woodchuck Hollow she got around by walking, from back on what is now Alder Lake Road.

Eventually she acquired some frontage on Little Star Lake on the same shore as Little Bohemia but a few lots away, and she managed over the years to build four cottages or residences on it, beginning with her home where she did the laundry in its kitchen or porch.

She played a tiny bit part in the Dillinger episode of the early Thirties. She had read of the clothing sizes of the gang in the paper and she suspected that the party staying at Little Bohemia might indeed be Dillinger because all the clothes that they sent over to be washed were brand new, such as men on the lam would have to buy when there was no time to have their clothes washed. In fact when Emil Wanatka came over to drop off or pick up laundry, she told us, she asked Emil, "Who do you have over there, Dillinger?" She also noticed that when one of the members of the gang--I seem to recall that it was Baby Face Nelson--the whole time he was at her laundry he was careful that he kept her son directly in the line of fire between the man and her, so that if he had to shoot the son would be in the line of fire.

She built two rental cottages on her shoreline, and when she built a house in from the lake and out toward the highway that was better suited to her lifestyle and her laundry and she was able to turn her home on the lake into another rental cottage for her little resort, which as I recall, she called Deer Trail cottages,

One end of her new home was laundry space, and when we went over to drop off or pick up the clothes, it was fun to look for her discarded empty bottles from Little Boy Blue because they looked like little milk bottles, the kind that had the wide spot near the mouth where cream would rise.

Her new house also had a first for her, a garage, for she had bought a brand new green 1940 Ford pickup truck and taught herself to drive. Her son by that time had moved away and the house was designed just for her, and the garage had space for firewood besides the truck.

By the 1950s she had been left behind among our teen and college

age memories She had sold the resort and it was operated by others and still later a garage was built on the highway and still later the rental cottages were bought for remodeiling into summer homes.

The homes are still there but in her old age she moved into a nursing home, probably in Rhinelander. There she died in February, 1977, but in death was given a final home in the town cemetery almost in sight of her years on Little Star.

Michael Dunn

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