

OVERLOOK

Cook County Historical Society

WINTER 2010 - 2011

FEDERAL FIRE TOWER WOMAN

A true pioneer, Vivian “Vee” Johnson worked for the U.S. Forestry from 1946-1960. She was one of a few women at that time to serve as a fire tower lookout, the first in the Superior National Forest. Born

Vivian Morris in Wisconsin in 1898, her family moved to the Cramer area in Lake County in 1910 living along the Alger-Smith railroad. She graduated from the Duluth Teachers College and taught her own brothers and sisters in their one room school house for a short time in the 1920s.



*Vivian Johnson of the United State Forest Service
Photo courtesy of the Schroeder Area Historical Society*

She and her husband Tord Johnson then moved to Wilson Lake, 25 miles from Schroeder the nearest town, and stayed for the first 20-25 years of their marriage. They lived simply and delved deep into the back country, hunting, trapping, and fishing as they hiked, canoed and explored the woods. In the 1940s they moved to Schroeder and both worked for the Forest Service.

(Continued on page 6 as VIVIAN JOHNSON)

LEADED OR UNLEADED?

FROM GAS TO JAVA WHERE HIGHWAY 61 AND WISCONSIN AVENUE MEET

The building that now houses the Java Moose Coffee Shop in Grand Marais was for many years a Shell gas station. Originally built by Homer Underwood and Val Dalbec, the station was run by F.C. “Cac” Hussey starting in 1936 but closed in the early part of World War II. Fritz Lindquist reopened it in 1944.

Lindquist emigrated to the U.S from Sweden in the 1920s to pursue religious freedom (Sweden had a state church until 2000). After graduating from Bethel Seminary in 1930, he came to Grand Marais and became the pastor of the First Baptist Church (and served as chaplain at the area CCC camps). He was also the Clerk of District Court for 12 years eventually giving it up to run the Shell station in 1944.



Fritz's Service Station c1946: Fritz Lindquist, Kenny Lovaas, Gordon Lindquist, Carl Eidnes

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According to Fritz's son Gordon, business was “thin”

in those early war years because of the gas rationing. But with better times, the business improved, and the family eventually even branched out into a charter fishing service

(Continued on page 4 as SHELL STATION)

COOK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Alta McQuatters	President
Dean Einwalter	Vice President
Bob Pratt	Secretary
Eleanor Waha	Treasurer
Jo Ann Krause	Johnson Heritage Post Gallery Director
Pat Zankman	Museum Director

Historical Society Board Members:

Duane Ege, Don Davison, Eric Humphrey, Doug Anderson, Wayne Anderson, David Peterson, Leonard Sobanja, Hal Greenwood, John Morrin, Gene Erickson, Mildred Thoreson, Irene Malner, Bob Pratt, and John Jacobsen

Honorary members:

Howard Sivertson and Herb Hedstrom, Jim Johnson, County Representative

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CHIPPEWA CITY CHURCH RE-PAINTED

The Chippewa City Church, St. Francis Xavier's got a fresh coat of paint this summer, thanks to a grant from Valspar and the Northland Foundation that provides paint to beautify Minnesota. Special care was taken to scrape and prepare the surface of the church, on the National Registry of Historic Places. The church is 115 years old built in 1895 by Frank Wishcop a local Ojibwe carpenter.



Carl Foster on cherry-picker

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

End of the year: Things have slowed down, but now we are into boxes and many paper articles to be separated into smaller files by names, part of county, claim to fame, etc.

Watch for our "Small Talks" this winter. You still have time to sign up to do your story!

Stop in at JHP for our new show. The new addition there is moving right along.

We are planning on a CCC exhibit grand opening day when we open up the Spring. Our large posters are almost done and ready for printing.

Thanks again to everyone who helped make this a great year.

— Alta McQuatters

JHP'S NEW ADDITION

Groundbreaking for an addition to the Johnson Heritage Post took place on October 12th, 2010. The new construction, made possible by a grant from the Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation, will provide much needed storage of the art gallery.



President Alta McQuatters, Steve Netland (Thorsen's Excavator), Mildred Thoreson, Gene Erickson, Robert Pratt, Duane Smith (General contractor), and Don Davison at groundbreaking

JOHNSON HERITAGE POST SCHEDULE

15 WISCONSIN ST. (218-387-2314)

Opening	Last Day	Exhibit
November 19	January 12	Sawtooth Elementary and Cook County High School Student Art Exhibit, curated by Mary MacDonald, art instructor

*Exhibit Openings & Receptions are on Fridays. Last days are on Sundays.
The Gallery is closed on Mondays and between Exhibits.*

STUDENT ART EXHIBIT AT JHP

The Johnson Heritage Post will be hosting the work of local students during this holiday season.

“The art in this exhibit represents the work of students grades 3-5, 7-8, and high school at Cook County Schools. I am continually impressed with the quality of work that comes from the students of all ages. Our students have great imaginations and are very creative and skilled in how they solve a variety of art situations. It is important that we continue to provide them the opportunity to express themselves in creative ways.

I want to thank the Johnson Heritage Post for honoring all the art students with this exhibition. It is important that art students not only solve creative problems, but that they also show the results of their efforts in public forums. They will reach a whole new audience with this opportunity.”

Thank you for your support!

Mary MacDonald, K-12 Art Specialist,
Cook County Schools



Art by Cook County High School student, Amber Todd

WINTER SMALL TALKS AT THE MUSEUM

Since the summer series of Small Talks were so popular, we have decided to schedule a few this winter. The first two are on December 4th and January 22nd.

David Holmes author of “Salt of the Earth: A History of Hovland, Minnesota, and Its People” will speak on **Saturday, December 4th** at 3:00 p.m. in the Community Room (new addition) of the Museum.

Tim White, Beth Gagnon Drost, Arleigh Jorgenson, and Bruce Kerfoot will present a round table discussion on the history of dog sledding in Cook County Saturday, January 22nd at 3:00 p.m. also in the Museum’s Community Room. Look for a display in early January featuring educational panels, photos and other interesting items related to the winter activity.

All are invited to learn and share the exciting history of Cook County!



Sled dog race 1977

(SHELL STATION, Continued from page 1)

from a dock adjacent to the station. *The Sea King* and *The Sea Queen* would take tourists out into the deep waters of Lake Superior, often returning with 100 pounds of lake trout. The Lindquist children took turns working for the family business. Gordon said, “Essentially, that gas station put us all through college.”

Kenny Lovaas, who worked at the Shell station in those days, said that after the war, travelers were out on the roads. He remembers it like a big celebration with the station very busy with people touring. Later, he got into the gasoline business for himself operating the Shold and Lovaas Mobil for 40 years. According to Lovaas there were 11 gas outlets in Grand Marais for a period in the late 50s through the 60s!

Peter Floe was the next to run the Shell Station. The sign across the building read: “Stop here for Pete’s sake.” Floe, from South Dakota, had been a teacher for seven years before he entered the Immigration Service which eventually brought him to the North Shore in 1948. Retiring after 25 years, he took over the Shell station managing it from 1956 to 1971.

Peter Floe III told a story from his days working at the Pete’s Shell. Val Dalbec still owned the Shell Station and was also the Standard Oil bulk dealer. “We stored the Standard truck inside (the bulk truck). And in the morning when we opened up, we would always drive it out and park it alongside the road facing west. And so one morning, I did that and when Val wanted to get it (we always left the keys in it)... a lot of times [he] wouldn’t come in. He would just get in the truck and go. And we were working on something. I think I was working inside and I heard a truck start up and go, and didn’t think nothing about it. I think about an hour later here comes Val and he says, ‘Where’s the truck?’” The truck had been stolen. “A sailor... ended up in Grand Marais with no way back to Silver Bay. So he was just going to hitchhike I guess. And he saw the truck, saw the key and they stopped him in Silver Bay.”

In 1972 Jim Holaday had a Gulf Station in the building. This would be the last time it was used as a gas and service station. There are reports of a number of other businesses that occupied the place for time: a jewelry and gift shop, a United Farm real estate agency, a bike shop, Carl Smith’s propane repair shop, and so on. The Linnell’s appliance store Almost Home took up residence from June 1993-March 2002, for a time sharing the space with Trico Propane.

In May of 2002 the Gunflint Trail Tourism Association and the Java Moose coffee shop moved in and shared the building for 5 years. In the fall of 2010, Ann and Gary Jorgenson of Java Moose purchased the property. The corner of Highway 61 and Wisconsin Avenue is busy again. It’s a community meeting place for locals and tourist alike. Fueling up on fancy coffee might seem a far cry from the days of rationed gasoline, but the remains of oil pans and car hoist still lie under the rugs of the Java Moose.



A busy day at Fritz’s Shell Station



*Peter Floe and Peter Floe at work in 1956,
Photo courtesy of Peter Floe III*



Photo of Shell Station in November '58 storm was sent out by the associated press and published in newspapers around the county. October 2010 gave us a similar sight with waves depositing debris and boats on the shores of the Grand Marais Harbor.

EARLY HARBOR PLANS

The storm of October 27, 2010, again illustrated the fact that the harbor at Grand Marais can be vulnerable. The River and Harbor Act of March 2, 1907, provided a plan to rebuild the piers at Grand Marais and enlarge the basin. Cook County Attorney D.B. McAlpine wrote in support; "As it stands now, the harbor is made considerably smaller than it would otherwise be by the fact that the east pier points into the harbor instead of out, and the boats must turn around this pier in order to get out of the harbor." Of concern also was the difficulty of safely entering the harbor during northeast storms due to the shoaling on the western side. McAlpine continued, "Very recently three lumber boats came to this port, and in getting to the dock all three of them went aground.....it simply shows the harbor in its present condition is entirely inadequate..." Correcting the position of the east pier was considered necessary.

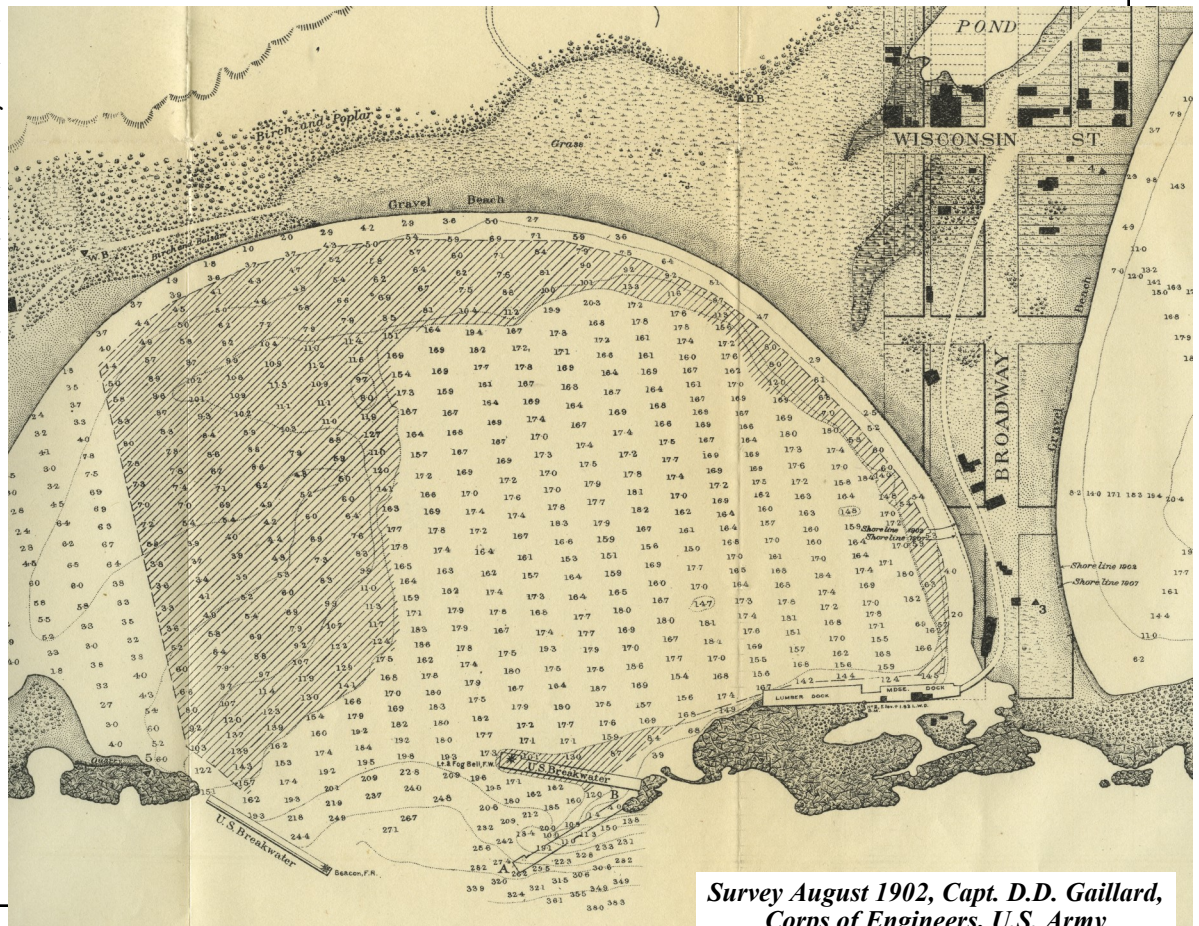
The storm of 1905 had eroded the shoreline of the East Bay (near the Coast Guard Station) as much as 10-15 feet in places. A 600 foot concrete wall protected by riprap was recommended but eliminated as the cost of \$8,400 could not be justified. As an alternative, the materials dredged from the harbor were to be deposited "by running scows inshore until they touched bottom" and dump their loads systematically. Wave action would then build up the shoreline.

By 1907, the harbor at Grand Marais had 350' breakwaters on each side of the harbor and 26 acres of the harbor had been dredged to 16 feet; 42% of the total harbor. The Corp of Engineers recommended a plan that would relocate the east breakwater outward, a partial removal of the existing east pier, and dredging an additional 21 acres to 16 feet, leaving only the far western side of the harbor shallow. After review a decision was made to attempt the dredging first. Later dredging by Whitney Brothers increased the actual size of the harbor by "mining" the gravel beaches.

The harbor was seen as an important and rapidly growing commercial harbor as well as a needed harbor of refuge; it's lighthouse was the second oldest on the North Shore. Harbor traffic in 1878 showed 4 tugs and 5 schooners with 60 tons of cargo valued at \$6,000. By 1906 there were 1,224 clearances and entrances (612 actual boats) with a total of 30,910 tons of cargo valued at \$970,083. Received were 6,000 ton, basically food and "miscellaneous" merchandise. Most of the 24,800 plus tons shipped consisted of cedar posts and ties for railroads. 4,000,000 board feet of lumber was also shipped.

While the community felt commerce justified improvement, the Corp saw the important of the harbor as a refuge. "To sum up, the Board believes the Grand Marais Harbor worthy of further improvement to the extent of the dredging proposed by the district officer, which he estimates will cost \$70,416."

-D.W.W. Lockwood,
Col. Corp of Engineers.
60th Congress, House of
Representatives, Doc. 939



Survey August 1902, Capt. D.D. Gaillard,
Corps of Engineers, U.S. Army

(VIVIAN JOHNSON, Continued from page 1)

Johnson reflected on her forestry career in a 1978 interview with Earl Neiwald. She said during World War II, "They were short of men." In 1944, they asked her to work for the U.S.F.S. - Tofte District. She explained her role: "I worked with the men. I didn't just go up to the tower. On a day that was too humid to be in the tower, I went out with the crew releasing trees [thinning to give advantage to desired trees] and working telephone lines. The only thing I never did was to bury a dead man or climb a pole."

Vee spent much of May through October, 85 or so feet above the ground keeping a watchful eye out for smoke in the trees. She was first stationed at the Kelso tower where she could see the lights of Ely on a clear night. Next she worked the Onion Mountain tower for a year and a half and was relieved when she was taken off. She said, "I was tired of climbing that mountain!" Then she went to the Carlton Peak tower, where she had her longest assignment. It was just as Taconite Harbor was being built that she was then transferred to the Honeymoon tower, the last lookout in the Tofte District.

On her initial encounter with Kelso tower, Johnson said, "The first time I had ever gone on a tower, I said, 'Well, I'll try.' I got there and, my gosh, the ladder is on the outside. There isn't any wire around it, supposed to be something to keep you safe but you could fall right through it. When I got up there my legs were so weak they felt like cooked spaghetti and I couldn't bring myself to stand on my feet and go close to the window because it was so darn high above the earth."

Not only did she have to climb the towers, often she had to climb the mountain that the tower was perched upon.

Vivian Johnson found out early how to handle these treks. She said, "You have to kind of take a deep breath and say, 'Well now, I just walk straight ahead to the next place or I got to climb the next rock.'" Her years exploring the back country had given her the determination to reach her destination, no matter how difficult the journey!



Vivian Johnson rests on one of many canoe trips

TODAY'S CORPS

Progress on our CCC exhibit is moving along quite nicely. Check our website for the latest in our on-line exhibit featuring 1934 camp rosters. Also visit the Minnesota Digital Library web page, to see CCC photos we've submitted. www.cookcountyhistory.org www.mndigital.org

In September, we had the privilege of hosting a group of Conservation Corps Minnesota volunteers. Part of their employment requires that they do service projects, and they were drawn to the Cook County Historical Society after hearing of the CCC exhibit we are developing.

Their modern day conservation employment has its roots in the Great Depression era Civilian Conservation Corps. In the 1970s, the federal program redeveloped as the Youth Conservation Corps and the Young Adult Conservation Corps. In 1981 the Minnesota Conservation Corps through MN-DNR was created when federal funds were lost. Now a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, the Conservation Corps Minnesota presence has expanded to Iowa and other Midwest states. Their mission remains much the same as the 1930s: "Restoring resources and changing lives."

The four volunteers helped by giving our CCC exhibit space a fresh coat of paint, adding to the barracks replica exhibit, and creating a sign for the entrance to the room. In addition they spent time outdoors landscaping around the deck on the museum's new addition. We are very grateful for the help they provided and hope that others might consider us in the future as a place to perform some much needed service work.



MN, CC crew doing construction for CCC exhibit



Walter Sve, Lake Superior Commercial Fisherman

DINNERS A SUCCESS

A large crowd filled the Birch Terrace Restaurant for the 86th annual meeting and dinner of the Society. The crowd was charmed by commercial fisherman Walter Sve who talked of the joys and trials of his years fishing.

Winner of the Name that Bridge contest was Dale Saethre with his answer: Manitou Bridge.

We also had a wonderful turn out for our volunteer appreciation dinner in September. Thanks again to our team of volunteers!



Sawtooth Elementary student, Jessup Schlien, casts a vote for student council using a historic ballot box borrowed for the special occasion from the CCHS.

Become a member of the Cook County Historical Society Museum and/or the Johnson Heritage Post Today

COOK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

We invite you to join or contribute to maintain and support our museum, our ongoing projects. If you are interested in supporting our work, please join in a category below:

- _____ \$10.00 Single Annual Membership
- _____ \$15.00 Dual Annual Membership
- _____ \$25.00 Supporting Membership
- _____ \$50.00 Commercial Membership
- _____ \$100.00 Patron
- _____ Other Donation Amount: _____

Please clip and return this form along with your check to:
Cook County Historical Society, P.O. Box 1293
Grand Marais, Minnesota 55604

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

JOHNSON HERITAGE POST

ART GALLERY

Your memberships are very important to JHP. Membership privileges include free admissions, invitations to openings, newsletter mailings, and discounts on book sales. Join today.

- _____ \$20.00 Annual Membership (Single)
- _____ \$30.00 Annual Membership (Family)
- _____ \$50.00 Sustaining Membership
- _____ \$100.00 Sponsoring Membership
- _____ \$250.00 Patron Membership
- _____ \$1000.00 Lifetime Membership

Please send your membership check to:
Johnson Heritage Post, P.O. Box 35
Grand Marais, Minnesota 55604-0035

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State: _____

Phone: _____

Preserving Cook County's History for future generations.

OUR MISSION: The purpose of the Society shall be the collection, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge about the history of Cook County and to relate it to the history of the State of Minnesota.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY EVENTS

Everyone is invited to come share good stories and good food.

- ◆ **Saturday, Dec. 4 at 3:00 PM, David Holmes, author of “Salt of the Earth: A History of Hovland, Minnesota, and Its People”**
- ◆ **Saturday, Jan. 22 at 3:00 PM, Tim White, Beth Gagnon Drost, Arleigh Jorgenson, and Bruce Kerfoot on Cook County’s history of Dog Sledding**

For more information call the
museum at 387-2883
Updates visit
www.cookcountyhistory.org



COOK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. Box 1293
Grand Marais, MN 55604
218-387-2883
history@boreal.org
www.cookcountyhistory.org
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