

The DECLINE IN POPULATION OF OSKAR

The highest population in Oskar was maybe in 1900 with maybe 350 people according to Henry Garnell.

Jack Ruohonen shares in his document of the history of Oskar: Lumbering was completed section by section.. as the forest began to disappear so did the level of business. A lot of Finnish families remained in the houses in which they had lived for years. Some purchased 40 acres, others 80 and started to clear the land and began planting potatoes, grain, and strawberries.

As the stumps rotted and disappeared new settlements appeared - Liminga, Heinola, North Superior, and North Entry. All these communities emerged from Eliassen's woodlands where there are now large herds of cattle and big potato and strawberry fields. There are good roads along which have appeared all kinds of businesses such as gasoline stations, garages and a liquor store worthy of mention.

The Gazette (11/7/1975) says:

One event was a large forest fire in 1896 that was fed by warm winds from the West. In 1897 the Eliassen family stable and 21 horses were destroyed by fire. He rebuilt on a smaller scale.

Jack Ruohonen shares this about forest fires in his history of Oskar: The depression started in 1895 and also great oppressions.

In 1896 came the huge forest fires blown by a strong west wind toward the village. The residents collected their clothing and buried them. There was no chance for escape except to go across the lake. (Canal). But when hundreds of men fought night and day they were barely able to save the village. A half-mile south from there was the enormous log piles right on the lakeshore containing one and a half thousand cords of wood. They would have been destroyed had there been no help forthcoming and so they were saved at the last moment. The logs belonged to Burkman. Four fire trucks arrived from Calumet, Lake Linden, Hancock and Houghton. Water was readily available so the logs were saved.

Then in the same year there was another big fire at Eliassen's farm where his large stable went with 21 of his own horses and a team owned by K. Makela. He had just purchased these. There was no insurance in those days to cover the horses.

One would think that this was the end of these misfortunes but not yet, as we shall find presently. As soon as the fire had been cleaned up work was started on a new barn. It had fewer horses because lumber operation was carried on on a smaller scale. Also due to the fact that the demand for firewood was down due to increased use of coal. Still the sawmill kept operating as well as supplying firewood for city dwellers.

The third large fire occurred in 1900, June 4th when the sawmill was in operation. Suddenly a fire sprung up in the oil room and spread to the attached sawmill. The mill was full of flammable material so the fire spread quickly and the workers had to run out and try to save the lumber stored nearby. After a couple of hours nothing was left other than a pile of ashes and a large block of boilers.

Fires continued. On the railroad the engine house burned in short order. Then

there was a big hay barn that was also used for thrashing. One night there was a severe thunderstorm and lightning struck the barn and its content of hay. Again there was no insurance and the loss was great.

Bankruptcy. In 1901 Eliassen's businesses went bankrupt. Creditors came and sold whatever they could find in the house as well as the farm and equipment. The farm was large almost two sections in area. Everything went except the laborers.

But still he did not give up. (He is age 56). With Finnish Sisu (grits/guts) he continued.

The farm on which the mortgage was held by the First National Bank in Hancock was leased for 5 years, and again horses were bought as well as forests and continued the same firewood and charcoal business. It was run under the name of Oscar Eliassen's wife Elsa. In 1907 the bank sold the farm to Frank Eilola from Hancock who moved to the farm and lived there until his death (1950). But Mrs. Eilola is still alive (at time of his typing 1953) with her two daughters.

The Gazette article goes on to say...

In 1907 Frank Eilola bought the Eliassen farm. One story is that it was the middle house today on the Ruohonen road to the right past Betty and Norm Ruohonen's home. Irene and Teddy Ruohonen are on the left and Marino's are on the right. Another story was that it was where today Dave Jukari lives. humm.

To compete with coal, Oscar Eliassen started a charcoal kiln but was not successful and led to bankruptcy in 1901. Eliassen moved to Minnesota and died in 1931.

With no thought to conserving forestland and with forest being farther away from transport it was not profitable. Families moved away. Those that stayed cleared stumps and bought 40-60 acre plots and planted potatoes, oats and wheat.

Henry Garnell shares on his 1977 WMPL Heritage line interview: After logging came farming in approx. 1930. We had farmers growing hay, strawberries, potatoes, chickens and dairy to sell to others. Doug Solmonson had 25 milking cows, Lahti had 35, and McClellan on Johnson farm had 40.

We had August Lahnala's farm for 12 years.(Today is Kempe property). We took into town on delivery route our eggs, chickens, milk, cream, and potatoes. We had one customer Jean Nichols for 47 years. Our customers were Big Boy, Fraternities, Kaleva, and one grocery store we traded for groceries we needed.

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