

“Homesteaders Club” the Beginning

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Seeing that past history is not one of my favorite subjects, I had to go to some of the old minutes of meetings past. After reading of our early efforts, I could say with the old “hyacinth squirrel” (skunk) who backed into the wind, it all comes back to me now. (Maybe we ought to adopt that as our theme song.)

On March 9th, 1976 the “club” was launched. 14 members. Our first meeting was held in the basement of the French River Lutheran Church. And to give us direction and purpose were people from county social services. Not the least, Maggie McGillis. Offering aid and encouragement at the early meetings was Helen Budaslavitch. But it was really a home grown community project and (to) the people of the community must go the credit for its following success.

Because of problems to the elderly in using the church stairs especially it was evident we needed a more suitable home. However that’s getting ahead of our story—it was at the third meeting of the “club” that the name HOMESTEADERS was chosen at the suggestion of Gunnar and Florence Johnson, residents of the Homestead Road. Thus we petitioned for use of the town hall and did meet there for a time. The membership growth again dictated we needed a more modern and warmer facility.

When a room at the North Shore Elementary School was vacated, we petitioned for that and were given permission for its use in the future. To protect the school in the event of injury to any of our members, the club was incorporated as a state approved unit and registered as such, with proper constitution and by-laws. Shortly prior to that we had become a member of the Sr. Citizen Coalition of N.E. Minn., a combined organization of some 60 clubs, urban and rural.

To bring the school building up to Federal standards as required by law, our club undertook to make the necessary improvements — ramp for wheelchair patients, toilets properly assessable, etc. Volunteer labor was the greatest item and was totally furnished by members of the club. After two years, the room was again needed by the school and we were again homeless. The energy and enthusiasm of our people was not subject to disappointment. At a meeting at the home of Roy and LaVerne Gravelle, we decided to petition to town board to apply to *IRRRB* for funding to totally remodel and restore the town hall, basically a sound structure. In time, that became a reality, and is our proud and present home, for a club that has now grown to about 140 members.

But back to history—we have made donations in dollars to many worthwhile causes in the area. We have helped those in need to have hot lunches in school, we have sent youngsters to training camp at Isabella each year. We have contributed to worthy needs in the area which I will not at this time mention. To put it bluntly, we’ve made Duluth Township a better place to live. Blood pressure screening, weekly bus service through the Arrowhead transit, information on services available to the elderly are a part of our program, weatherization of homes have helped several in the area. Several homes have been improved, one well installed and all to make life easier for all.

As to officers past, I will not dwell on, past history may of course be interesting but its really the future history we must concern ourselves with. No organization ever stands still, it goes forward or it goes back. So long as we plan future projects we will always have a future. A suggestion—school will soon be out, how about a junior homesteaders club? A young peoples’ chorus for example. One of my own projects just prior to a first heart attack was to have the Boy Scouts carve a totem pole depicting the steps in scouting. Can we help them?

I know there are far too many people who deserve our undying thanks for making the Homesteaders the organization it is, however to name all would be impossible. To the ladies, God Bless 'Em, whom we couldn't do without — To the Editor (*Patti Hellman*) of the local paper, "*Landmarks*", I'm sure there are those of us who will be proud to say in a few years "I knew her when she started out." A sincere thanks to all from the officers past and present to you who have made it all worthwhile.

I want to close this article with the words our director in the service had on his desk: "*As you journey thru life you will find three kinds of people: 1. The man who knows not and knows that he knows not—he is a student, teach him! 2. The man who knows not, and knows not that he knows not—he is a fool, shun him. 3. The man who knows, and knows that he knows, he is a teacher, follow him.*"