

# Historical Clippings

Three Lakes Museum

December 2021

## *Were Winters Really Colder and the Snow Deeper ?*

Violet Neu, the youngest of the six children of William and Sarah Neu, was born in 1905 and lived her whole life in Three Lakes. Her father William was born in the Madison area in 1867 and in 1888, at the age of 20, was sent by his employer to start a newspaper in Crandon to be known as the *Forest Leaves*. In 1890 he returned to Madison to be married and brought Sarah Clement from Sauk City back with him to the North Woods. She described her new life as living in "wild country". In 1892 William and Sarah established a grocery store on Main Street (now Superior Street) in Three Lakes which they operated until William's death in 1940.

Of his career in journalism Neu said, "The hopeful and persevering journalist has more than once tried his luck in Three Lakes. My newspaper was very successful financially, as all of the county work went to the county newspaper. However the mechanical part gave me a great deal of grief at times, especially during the hard winter months, when the ink and the rolls would freeze and I was kept guessing whether I would be able to get the papers out on time."

By 1904, after moving in and out of the newspaper business, he founded the *Forest Advance* which was his own Three Lakes newspaper that he published for many years.



William Neu Sr., far right, gathers with his friends and customers in front of his store and newspaper office. The year was 1907. To the left are the children of the village, among them, second from left in the front row, is Violet Olkowski, his youngest daughter.



Neu's store, 1925, included an ice cream parlor and advertising for their Dreamland Resort on the north shore of Maple Lake

In May of 1923, Violet Neu married Frank Olkowski. Frank was the Standard Oil Company agent who retired in 1960 after 39 years with the company. Starting in 1923 Violet was the Three Lakes News correspondent for the Rhinelander News newspaper. She retired in 1963. She was also the secretary for the Information Bureau starting in 1942 and retired there after 25 years. She also volunteered for the thrift shop and was a member of The Three Lakes Women's Club. Sometime during her years as the newspaper correspondent she wrote the following article.

### *When the Winters Were Colder*

*by Vi Olkowski*

*My father first came to Three Lakes from Madison, Wisconsin in 1888. The railroad surveyors had passed through the area about 10 years earlier. My father related that he found six white families settled in the area among about 300 Chippewa Indians. His first winter is often referred to as the winter of the deep snow as the average depth of snow on the level measured 7 ft and drifts were often 13 ft High. The stage man who contracted to carry the mail tri-weekly was unable to deliver the mail due to the deep snow, so an Indian was hired to bring the mail on snowshoes. Horses were unable to travel anywhere until about May 19th and most winter people were just isolated until the spring thaw came.*

*Folks were hardy people in those years and during the cold winters the problem was to heat buildings. It was a common occurrence for men to wake up in the morning to find their beards frozen to the pillow.*

*There is little doubt that our winters are getting milder and less snow falls as memories going back to childhood will recall the many winters with snow banks as high as telephone wires in the community. Years back a trip to Rhinelander would mean traveling through tunnels of snow higher than the car. Especially on the portion of the road between Sugar Camp and Rhinelander known as Brown's Farm.*

