

A SHORT HISTORY ON CHOWEN CORNER'S 1853-1967 by Barbara M. Sykora

I think many people would be surprised on how one family, the Chowen's, owned some much of Deephaven and Minnetonka property at one time.

In 1852 James Shaver, Jr¹ was employed in the building of the Minnetonka Mills saw mill. His son and wife Sarah Chowen Shaver (d.o.b 7/5/1824) arrived at the Mill in November, 1852, making them the first settler family to live in the lake area.² In 1853, the family moved west of Minnetonka Mills and into their unfinished cabin. Sarah Shaver became the 1st white woman to give birth in the lake area to twin boys, Baynard T. and Bernard G. Shaver in August, 1853. James enlisted in the army on August 27th, 1864. Sarah died in 1884. In 1885 he moved away to Alexandra, Minnesota and was in the furniture business. He married again after the death of first wife.

William S. Chowen, (born in Delaware County, New York.³)who was Sarah Chowen Shaver's brother, arrived here and soon built a log cabin on the southwest corner at the lot lines' "crossing" at 101 and Minnetonka Boulevard. He was born in Green County, New York on June 22nd, 1826 William married Mary M. Frear on May 25, 1855 and they had 6 children⁴.

It is said that William came to St. Anthony Village in 1850 and purchased sites for himself and his family: brother Joseph Chowen, sister Mary C. Chowen and brother⁵ George W. Chowen. He also bought land for his brothers in law, James I. Shaver and Amos N. Gray. From what I have researched, Amos Gray was the first of the Chowen family to get to the General Land Office and register his claim for 140 acres on January 15th, 1856. Joseph (160 acres, according to the 1857 census, Joseph was living with William and Mary), George (103 acres in two locations), William Chowen (160 acres) and James Shaver(83acres) all registered their claims on April 2, 1857. Local history reflects that William donated land in 1854 for the first schoolhouse in the area. (The first school was across the street from the present Groveland School). He was in the Minnesota legislature in 1857-58. He enlisted in the Army on August 3, 1864 and had the rank of a Sargent and reported to Fort Snelling.

The Land Act of 1820 required full payment at the time of registering your land and the law abandoned the credit system for buying public lands. Now as little as 80 acres could be purchased. Also, the 1841 Preemption Act established preferential right to settlers and squatters on public lands. Under the conditions of building a home, settling on the land and

¹ Shaver was born in 1829 at Wyoming Valley, Pa. He was 5'10", blue eyes, black hair.

² D.L. Rodum, Sun Sailor, 9/30/1985 (courtesy of the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society).

³ He was 5'4", black hair, Eyes: hazel

⁴ George E. Warner, Charles M. Foote, *History of Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis*, 1881, Page 243

⁵ "Chowen Boys of East Remembered in Naming Streets", date of article & newspaper unknown. Article has George arriving here in Minnesota in 1850. The article mentions William arriving here in 1852, after receiving a letter from his cousin George, telling him of the glowing opportunities here in Minnesota. In another article, date & newspaper unknown "Chowen Home is Landmark of Minnetonka History", Annie Chowen mentions in the article, George W. Chowen as her uncle. (both newspaper clippings courtesy of the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society).

“improving” it, a claimant could buy up to 160 acres at not less than \$1.25 an acre. All you had to be was the head of a family or widow or single man over the age of 21. So I am not sure who got here first in the Chowen family but I feel that the families were probably improving their land before they fully purchased their property.

By the 1870's, the corner of 101 & Minnetonka Blvd was a real corner with a developed wagon road where Minnetonka Blvd is now. 101 ran north & south, but there was no bridge at Gray's Bay until 1887. The corner of 101 & Minnetonka Boulevard took on the name of “Chowen”. Also by the 1870's, the area east & of Chowen and south of Gray's Bay took on the old school district No. 53 name, “Groveland”, which was in turn adopted by the nearby graveyard (since 1871). In 1882 William was appointed the postmaster of Chowen, a Hennepin County Post Office which was in home till 1891. The first “Chowen” corner took on the name “Groveland Corner” probably by 1890. The William and his wife Mary Frear Chowen (1828-1884) lived there until 1908 when they built a frame house south of their log cabin.

George Washington Chowen (1822 -1887) lived in Minneapolis with his wife Susan Hawkins Chowen and their three children. His occupation was an abstract agent. He was the first Deputy of Registrar of Deeds in 1850 in Hennepin County.

Joseph Chowen settled on his 160 acres, built a cabin and this area took on the name of “Chowen's Corner”. Joseph was born in Monroe, Pa on May 1st, 1831(died 1898). At 23 years old, he moved to Minnesota. He married Jane Fuller in March 1859 who died in 1872. He married again to Carolyn E. Gunn and they raised seven children in all, four being from his first wife⁶. His youngest daughter was Annie Chowen who lived in the family clapboard home, which was built in 1884 when she was 10 years old until it was torn down in 1955 and replaced by a store. She finished school at the 5th grade level. She was well known to the community and led an active social life. She died in 1961.

Amos Gray and his wife Susan Ann Chowen Gray (1828- 1904) house was built just to the west of the northwest corner of 101 & Minnetonka Blvd.

The Shaver cabin was located up 101 & Minnetonka Blvd from the northeast corner (Ty Abel's gas station) and the farmhouse and barn were across the road, near Shaver's Lake.

The business history of Chowen's Corner was started in 1906 when the Deephaven Store was moved to the corner of Northome and Minnetonka Blvd. The building was originally owned by W. S. Frear, father of Lake Minnetonka historian, Dana Frear. The building was built by Ed Eidam for a general store at Minnetonka Mills in 1879. It was moved from Minnetonka Mills by W.S. Frear⁷. Frear may have owned it in conjunction with Edward H. Eidam (maybe or maybe not depending on what you read). Frear opened the store in 1903 and ran the store for a number of years with his son Henry and then sold the building to John Mason, who had a lot to do with development of the corner. Mason was a builder and bought the building from Frear in 1920 and Harry Mason, John's son, bought land from Frear that same year to build a garage

⁶ George E. Warner, Charles M. Foote, *History of Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis 1881*, Page 243

⁷ *The Deephaven Argus*, June 25th, 1965, pages 1 & 8

and body shop behind the store.⁸ Mason subsequently sold it to Oscar Dahlberg and in turn he sold it to Clarence Laymen⁹. In 1926 Clarence opened Layman's Deephaven Market at Chowen's Corner. When Layman opened the store, the only business places at Chowen's Corner were Mason's Garage and the grocery store. Laymen sold the store to Paul and Marion Reifenberger after being in business for 22 years. The Reifenberger's lived above their business and ran the store until it was torn down in 1965.

John Mason also built the building known as Schroeder's Dairy. (The Creamery, Ted's Meats and Bumpershute, a woman's clothing store also occupied this building). He also built the restaurant and barber shop that stood between the dairy (the Creamery) and the Deephaven Store. The Log Cabin, was owned by Heinie Mueller and the barber shop was operated by Louis Vietz and then by Jerry DeVork.

In 1939, a fire completely destroyed the old Sand Service Station on Minnetonka Boulevard between 101 and Chowen's Corner. The building was a total loss. The fire departments arrived too late to do any good because there was no guarantee on the building and the matter had to be arranged with the fire department before the firemen would come and assist putting it out.¹⁰

Herb Miller bought the Mobil Station in 1940. People recall that there was also another station owned by Levi Derks, an all metal construction service station on the southwest corner of Minnetonka Blvd and Northome and that Mueller's original restaurant stood next to it, later moving the dairy site (Creamery).

A small article in the *Deephaven Argus* read: In 1940 Deephaven has opened their 13th business at Chowen's Corner. Deephaven newest store is the Deephaven Hardware in a story and a half building. The business is owned by Carlos F. Wheaton and will be managed by William St. Amant. The hardware store is the fourth business to open in Deephaven in the past year. Other business at Chowen's Corner are: Deephaven Grocery, Mobilgas Station, Deephaven Garage, Carter's Barber and Beauty Shop, Betty Mae Shaffer Nursery¹¹, Schroeder's Dairy, Elliott's Standard Service, Log Cabin Inn, Deephaven Service Station, Pullman, Pure Oil Station and Bassett Dairy. *The Deephaven Argus*: September 27th, 1940

In 1941, the Deephaven Hardware business was purchased by Leonard Heinecke of St. Louis Park. He purchased the entire stock from C. F. Wheaton. Mr. Wheaton, founder of Deephaven

⁸ Mason and his son also ran the Minnetonka Trailer Company which was started in 1933. They build an average of 10 trailers a year. John did the cabinet and finishing work and Harry built the frames, all the metal work and painting.

⁹ *The Deephaven Argus*, May 3rd, 1940: Clarence Layman worked with his father, Isaac Laymen, who had a store he opened in 1983 in Minneapolis. It was located near Cedar Avenue and Lake Street.

¹⁰ *The Deephaven Argus*, November 17th, 1939. You had to have a contract with the local Fire Department before they would save your building.

¹¹ Betty Mae Shaffer was university trained. The nursery itself is a Deephaven landmark, which began in 1910 when its first owner began raising plants and trees for sale there. One of the unusual features of the place is the large storage cellar where shrubs and plants can be kept there all winter. The temperature in the cave is always the same, just a few degrees above freezing. A large pine grove with many old trees helps make it one of Deephaven's more beautiful spots.

Hardware Company. He actively engaged in an air conditioning company and general equipment business in Minneapolis and store took too much of his time. Because of this, he decided to sell the business but not the building.¹² Another station, Buster Timmer's Pure Oil¹³, stood on the site of where Verne's Alignment and Brake Service at 18308 Minnetonka Blvd. In 1943 Peterson Shoe Repair opened at Chowen's Corners. They stayed in business for 49 years. In 1945 there were new proprietors the Deephaven Market. The Laymen's have retired and turned their business over to Mr. and Mrs. Norman Cornish.¹⁴

The Argus, January 10th, 1947: A new business opened next to Buster Timmers Station at Chowen's Corner. It will be called "Top of the World", a frozen food store. It will feature a complete line of frozen foods, including pastries, fruits, vegetable and prepared foods and frozen food packaging supplies.¹⁵

The Argus, October 31st, 1947: A new super market called the The Four Way Mart will open on November 15th, 1947. The new market will be 50 x 100 foot made of concrete block with a brick front and a 48 x 22 foot garage. It will be located on half block south of Chowen's Corner, next to the Tonkaway Cleaners. The market will be completely self-service.

At 18320 Minnetonka Blvd. was The Minnetonka Woodcraft Building. It was apparently owned and possibly built by Gerber Hoekstra. It once housed a drugstore and it also held a Red Owl Grocery Store and Mrs. Hoekstra ran a small restaurant there.

The Argus September 7th, 1956: Plans for a new parking lot came under fire by some property owners involved at the last meeting of the Deephaven Village Council meeting last Wednesday night. Village Engineer William Scholl displayed a detailed sketch of the proposed parking lot which consists of a 100 foot strip behind the stores extending from Minnetonka Blvd down past Anderson's Plumbing and its adjacent property with street access from two or three places. The lot would accommodate 97 cars. Most of the business owners admitted that Chowen's Corner could use some clean up but felt that the size of the lot was too large. They particularly balked at the suggested method of financing the \$18,000 necessary to buy up the back footage, level and asphalt it. The method suggested as most feasible was a plan whereby the village would buy the property, financing it by 10 year bonds and assessing each owner on the value of his property. The property value would be arrived at by going to the tax assessor's record and taking the assessed value and multiplying this figure by three. On the following Deephaven Village Council meeting, the proposed plan for the parking lot was turned over to the businessmen in the area.

Next to the Minnetonka Woodcraft-Sign of the Eagle building, was an old wood construction Pullman car that stood for years. Bill Thul operated a small luncheon restaurant there. It later

¹² *Argus*, June 20th, 1941

¹³ *Argus*, January 20th, 1956: Timmer's Service Station opened in 1925 was located at the northwest corner of the intersection. Five years later, the station moved its present location three doors south of the corner.

¹⁴ *Argus*, July 13th, 1945. Author Note: I read earlier that the Reifenberger's over the store in 1948? What's true? Maybe the Reifenberger's took the store over from the Cornish's.

¹⁵ *Argus*, 1951, The Four Way Mart changed names to Erhard's Red and White Food Store

was a pottery workshop. It was damaged in a gas explosion and removed. At one time, a small grocery store owned by John Mason's brother, Henry, was also operated the corner north of the Claudette's Building, which has since been removed.

The building that once housed the Plush Horse and the Boulevard Cleaners was originally a grocery store called Ramsey Grocery. Later it housed Deephaven Hardware in 1945 which was owned by Bert and Toots Kenyon until the hardware store moved to its location in 1967.¹⁶

¹⁶ Laurie Forsberg, 2/5/1975, "Chowen's Corners: In Business since 1906. (Courtesy of the Excelsior-Lake Minnetonka Historical Society).