

August - grandfather
William - father
Ralph - son.

Donna Heath's note for Cemetery
Pictures of artifacts

THE FAMILY FARM SINCE 1887

When Ralph Ausmus' grandfather ^{August} ~~William~~ purchased his farm on Lake Pokegama in 1883 he was only 17 years old--too young to buy the property in his own name.

"Great grandfather had his name put on the deed and later deeded the property back to grandpa in 1887 when he came of age," Ralph said.

"An old Indian told grandfather there had been a mission on this land. No one seemed to pay much attention to the information until evidence began to surface," Ausmus said.

Three generations of Ausmus families have lived on that same ~~ten~~ farm and artifacts associated with the days of the Pokegama Mission from 1835 to 1847 continue to appear.

"We always keep our eyes open for anything unusual," Ausmus said.

Ann Vach, local historian, has a collection of correspondence between the missionaries who founded the Pokegama Mission and their Bishop. Those letters are on file with the State Historical Society.

One letter from missionary Fredrick Ayer to Rev. David Greene dated April 3, 1835 stated,

"I have visited the Indians in the Pokegama Lake region on the Snake River and have obtained their cheerful consent to our locating among them."

The Chief has assured Ayer he would settle his tribe near the mission as he wanted to have his children educated.

Ayer told many stories of his encounters with different Indian families.

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Many wanted the mission because of the educational advantages but not everyone was eager.

Ayer related in detail the problems he had with an aged Indian widow. Her grown sons were very anxious to locate at the mission but she was violently opposed to the move. She seemed to fear losing a hold on her family.

"The Indians who trade at the post are called the Snake River Indians and are about 40 men divided into two equal bands. The two bands are pretty extensively connected by intermarriage," Ayer said.

Ayer convinced his superiors that a mission could be supported at Pokegama cheaper than at Yellow Lake. Being nearer a trading post transportation costs would be cut, the land was better so larger crops could be raised and wild rice, a prime food source, was abundant and much cheaper.

Timber for firewood was plentiful and there was more than a fair chance that the Mission would have year round students in the school.

On May 6, 1836, the Presbyterian Mission received a grant of land from the Snake River Indian Chief and Reverend Ayer and his wife Elizabeth established the Pokegama Mission.

It was built of logs with stone fireplaces and mud chimneys. A bark roof completed the 22 x 30 foot building and all the materials were available on the site. Living costs were nominal.

The mission was the first school in Pine County and opened with 12 students and four teachers.

William Boutwell joined the mission staff in 1838. While

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While other missions were closing, Pokegama was gaining converts and growing.

In 1839 the Indian Bureau hired Jeremiah Russell, a farmer, to the Pokegama station to teach the Indians how to clear land and cultivate. He also established a blacksmith shop near the Conners Trading Post.

It was these very 30 acres ~~see~~ the Indians had cleared that attracted young ^{August} William Ausmus to the land on Lake Pokegama so many years later. A piece of land ready to cultivate in a heavily wooded area was considered a prize indeed. ^{another piece of land clear, across the lake on southern point - Thomas Conner Post}

The lake was also valuable as a food source as well as for its beauty. Seldom did a homesteader build his house so the parlor faced the lake. They didn't seem to be interested in the view.

When Ralph and Dorothy Ausmus were married in the 40's he built a home on the farm down the road from his father's place.

^{three} ~~the~~ "When we dug the basement we discovered a burial ground with ~~the~~ graves. We notified the State Historical Society and they said as long as our building was started we should go ahead," he said. "If that had happened today we would have had to stop immediately until the Historical Society made a thorough sifting of the area."

Ausmus still has articles that were found buried with the remains of a young Indian girl. His display includes a doll made of smooth stones strung together. It was dressed in a scrap of calico. There was a thimble, a berrypan, and a sharpened stone probably used for scraping deer hides.

When plowing his fields Ausmus uncovered a tomahawk head, oxen shoes, clay pipes including part of a peacepipe, an old key that was probably used in a door at the old Mission.

He also uncovered a penny dated 1828, a large dime dated 1832, a medal made of a two and a half dollar gold piece and a coin dated 1742 with a hole in the center. *Information given to Donna from my manuscript & pictures of Ausmus Col.*

"Scavengers swarmed to this place trying to find bits and pieces of things which indicated a link to the past," he said.

Much of the property has now been platted into homesites and is known as Maple Knoll Addition.

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