

ladies has proven quite a story and so we asked Wm. Burnson to relate a few details of their lives.

William A. Burnson

Historians commemorating the feats of our pioneers always pay tribute to the bravery, determination, and character of the men who blazed the trails, the bold and restless males who were our early settlers. This is all well, save that it does injustice to a brave contingent of women who with less strength, except in character, faced frontier dangers with quiet fortitude and moulded family and community life into a force for the good which lays its beneficial imprint on the country today.

Three such women came to the Whitefish Lake settlement more than half a century ago. They were Mrs. N. R. Bowman, Mrs. Chan Heath, and Mrs. Rufus Heath. The Bowmans moved here from Swanville, Morrison County, in 1897. The two Heath families arrived in 1900. They came from Round Lake, Minnesota. The three families homesteaded within a mile of each other.

These women all had large families and plenty of work to do. Nevertheless the logs in their dwellings were scarcely up and chinked before these ladies considered community needs. From this point through their lifetimes spent in friendship and harmony, each of these pioneer women spearheaded one sphere of influence.

Mrs. Bowman, first upon the Whitefish scene, chose the field of education as her metier. She had the honor of naming the township, and characteristically named it Ideal. With her husband, she worked for the formation of a school district and within a year School District 55 came into being and a log school was built.

Before the school was well launched, the Walker Indian uprising of 1898 and ensuing Battle of Sugar Point sent sheer panic flashing across Cass and Crow Wing Counties. Almost all of the settlers gathered their families and rushed for safer parts. Mary Bowman helped her husband cut gun ports in their log barn. They fortified up for the duration of the scare. Mrs. Bowman was the only woman in this area who stayed at her own home during this time.

Aunt Mary, or Grandma, as Mrs. Bowman was known to all, spent 24

religious and entertainment activities in the community.

Another Aunt Mary, Mrs. Chan Heath, supervised the religious life of the community. She organized the first Sunday School and lovingly performed the duties of Sunday School superintendent for more than thirty years. Many youngsters from the locality grew to adulthood with saintly "Aunt Mary" Heath always gently guiding their religious life.

The homesteaders were a hardy lot, but sometimes they got sick, and of course it was a day of large families and many babies. Mrs. Rufus Heath, Aunt Ad to the community, claimed good works in home doctoring and midwifery as her obligation to her loved friends in the settlement. Throughout her active life, until the day when doctors were readily available, Aunt Ad was on perpetual call to the neighborhood. She was always on hand in times of severe illness. And when the babies came you couldn't tell Whitefish youngsters the stork flew them in. They knew that Aunt Ad brought them, because she was always around when a baby arrived.

Aunt Mary, Mrs. Chan Heath went to her reward a few years ago—a saintly woman loved by all who knew her. Aunt Ad, Mrs. Rufus Heath is hale at 98, still active and doing needlework. The other Aunt Mary, Mrs. N. R. Bowman, is 91. She has recovered from a long pneumonia seige, and is now in excellent health for one her age.

These ladies—and ladies they were—performed their lifetimes of community work so quietly and with such self-effacement that few people outside of the Whitefish area knew that their lives were devoted to community service.

Some measure of their characters can be gleaned by the fact that they worked together almost half a century, always as friends, and at all times in unbroken harmony.

So dedicated were these pioneer women, so selfless in their years of service to their friends and neighbors, that it is right for a larger theater to know of them. Their lives were conducted on a plane of such fine honor that old time Whitefish residents cannot remember when the finger of complaint or reproach was ever placed upon any one of the ladies by anyone who knew them.