

## **Frank J. Lake: from Peddler to Prominent Businessman Part I - Founder of Scandia's Commercial Center**

*Compiled by Mark McGinley and polished by Dawn McGinley, August 2019*

It was a long but exciting journey by horse and wagon to the Farmer's Store and back to stock up on supplies and dry goods. The new store was across the street from the early Scandia church and cemetery in what was then Marine Township. It was little more than a wooden shack, but offered basic staples and a few novelty items. The location became a gathering place for the growing community of mostly Swedish settlers. There, residents attended worship services and picked up their mail, frequented the store, and caught up on current events and happenings. This intersection at Oakhill Road and Olinda Trail, is still the heart of Scandia today.

Before the Farmer's Store, ambitious 'peddlers', as Anna Engquist referred to them, travelled house-to-house selling their wares throughout the countryside, or residents travelled the distance to Center City or Marine Mills to purchase their supplies. Center City was a well-established village by then, as was Marine Mills with its stores, hotels, saloons, livery, and blacksmith, catering to the lumber industry boom starting some 40 years prior.

Frank J. Lake was one of those early peddlers in the nearby Bone Lake area. Lake immigrated from Sweden in the 1860's as a young boy with his parents Magnus and Brita Lake. Magnus Lake was a farmer settling on 40 acres just south of Scandia, near the location of the Swedish Methodist Church. He was a member of the early Elim church in Scandia.

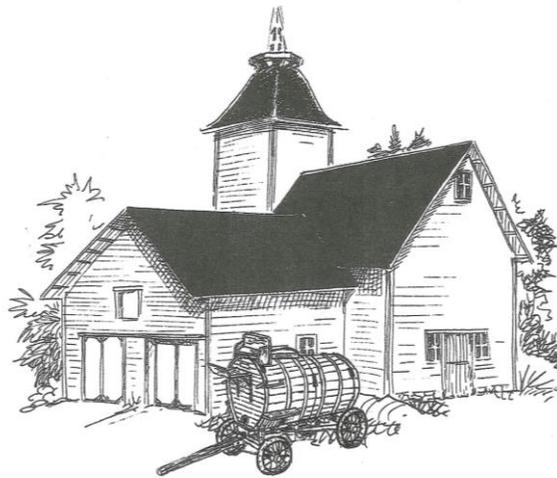


In addition to his door-to-door sales, as a teenager Lake gained business experience involving himself in a grocery store and undertaking parlor in Center City. He established his own Farmer's Store in 1879 at the age of 18. It was the first-known commercial business in what would become New Scandia Township in 1893, some 14 years later. Merchandise arrived to Lake's store via steamships on the St. Croix River, along with the travelers and immigrants coming to the area. From the river landings, goods were picked up and hauled by horse and wagon to the store.

Engquist described Lake in her book 'Scandia – Then and Now', "The one man most often mentioned as having 'made' Scandia as a commercial center is Frank Lake. An energetic visionary businessman, Lake was

intimately involved in the formation of several long-surviving Scandia firms.” As the store grew, a larger building was constructed, along with a barn and multiple additions over time. Engquist wrote “eventually the store was a rather imposing complex of sheds, storage areas and even a barn in addition to the two-story structure where merchandise was displayed and sold.”

The barn was added by Lake around 1880 as a livery for the horses and wagons used to haul goods. Within a few years a well was dug in or adjacent to the barn by Magnus Nelson of Marine Township. According to James Taylor Dunn in his book ‘Marine on St. Croix -150 Years of Village Life’, Nelson was one of Minnesota’s most successful well diggers who began his business in 1877. The well supplied water to the store as well as to local residences. A water tower was built with a windmill at its top, and a pump and elevated tank erected within. The boom high on the north side of the water tower allowed a horse-drawn water wagon – a huge wooden barrel on spoke wheels – to pull up underneath to fill and haul fresh water throughout the area. The driver made deliveries to the homes and farms in the area and would fill the cisterns of those without wells.



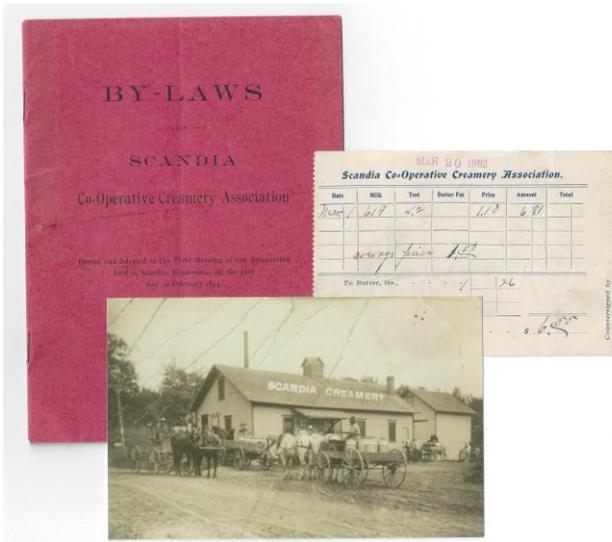
The late Louella (Magnuson) Johnson remembered the water wagon, and told a story of when it was rigged up with a spray boom to keep the dust down on the dirt streets around the store and church during hot dry summers, especially before the horses and buggies arrived for church on Sunday mornings. The late Glenn Shaleen recalled that over the years, the Scandia Fire Department also filled its water trucks from the well.

Throughout the 1880’s, the Farmer’s Store would flourish and Lake’s business interests would expand. Before the railroad tracks were laid east of Scandia, Frank Lake’s horse-drawn delivery wagons were making frequent round-trips between Marine Mills’ steamboat landing and as far as Center City, Stillwater, and St. Paul.

As the construction of the railway by the Minneapolis & St. Croix Railroad (later known as the Soo Line) was completed in 1886, this robust means of transportation provided new opportunities for rural growth and local businesses. Beyond selling dry goods, flour, feed, groceries, coffins, and other general merchandise, Lake added a full line of farm machinery and equipment. He also became an agent for the celebrated White sewing machine, no doubt adding yard goods to the store.



the possibility of a cooperative creamery in Scandia. Mr. Frank Lake was the only merchant in Scandia at the time, and he is what you can call one of the wide-awake fellows. Whenever a project came up for the betterment of the community, Frank Lake was right there, pushing and pulling till the thing went through.”



After months of work, sixty shares at \$50 each were sold to raise the money needed to build and equip the Scandia Cooperative Creamery. It was established in February 1894 with elected officers, including many of the same township founders: F.J. Lake, president; F.C. Morrison, treasurer; A.E. Morrison, secretary and manager; Solomon Swenson and C.A. Peterson, directors. The late Wendell Johnson said “[The creamery] was established by this gentleman Frank Lake, and he was a real go-getter. He started a lot of businesses. “

During the 1890’s the population of Scandia continued to grow, and two more stores are opened: Magnuson Brothers & Co. and Mattson Brothers. Wagons

ran to and from the Copas railroad depot bringing a wider selection of goods and providing Lake with friendly competition. After the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Lake diversified his interests and established more businesses in the surrounding towns of Copas and Marine, as well as in Scandia.

Lake’s keen interest in staying at the forefront of change made him a key figure in the development of not only the rural community, but modern farming practices as well. As an entrepreneur, he understood the significance of transitioning from horse and buggy to automobile and to engine-powered farm machinery and the opportunities therein.

Some of Lake’s buildings and businesses remain in Scandia today; some are long gone. The Scandia Water Tower Barn, originally built by Frank Lake, has been torn down but will be raised again as a tribute to Scandia’s heritage and rich culture. The Scandia Heritage Alliance is a non-profit organization focused on preservation projects to provide opportunities for the community of Scandia and its visitors. For more information visit <https://scandiaheritage.org> or email ScandiaHeritageAlliance@gmail.com.

**Author’s Note:** As important as Frank Lake was to the establishment of Scandia, we do not know the whereabouts of his living descendants. We believe Lake left the area by the late teens or early 1920’s. Yet Scandia must have held a very special place in his heart for he and his entire family to return to the community and make it their final resting place. If you have any information about Frank Lake, contact Mark McGinley at mcginley194@frontiernet.net.

**Sources:**

“Scandia - Then and Now” by Anna Engquist, ©1974

“Scandia - Then and Now” video, Scandia Civic Club, ©1996

“Marine on St. Croix, 150 Years of Village Life” by James Taylor Dunn, ©1989

“Marine on St. Croix, From Lumber Village to Summer Haven” by James Taylor Dunn, ©1968

“The History of the St. Croix Valley” by A. B. Easton, ©1909

Frank Lake photo provided by the City of Scandia.

Thank you to those individuals that took the time to verify records and documentation.

Copyright Mark and Dawn McGinley, August 2019, published originally in the Messenger.

Published by Scandia Heritage Alliance with permission from the authors, March 2022.

Photos and documents are from the Private Collection of Mark and Dawn McGinley.