

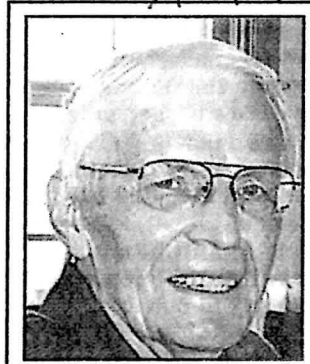
# Two family businesses in Washburn

The stories of two family-owned businesses exemplify the dedication to public service displayed by the men and women of Washburn's business community over the years.

The Gustafson Diamond Well Drilling Company was established in 1919 by Walter Adolph Gustafson and his wife, Alta Shipley Gustafson. He was born on May 7, 1895, in Rhinelander, the son of Charles and Angelina Gustafson. The family homesteaded in Cumberland, farm work preventing him from completing his schooling. Before the Great War, the father sold the farm and entered the well drilling business with his son, locating in Bayfield.

On July 9, 1917 Walter enlisted in the Navy and was trained as an aerial gunner, serving with a Navy bombing squadron in England and France for 11 months. Returning to Washburn in 1919, he borrowed money to establish his own well drilling business. He married Alta Marie Shipley on May 8, 1920, in Duluth, Minn. Together they operated their well drilling business for 40 years, with drilling contracts in northern Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan.

Among the many wells he drilled in the Chequamegon Bay region were the Bayfield city well, the Fish Hatchery well, and the wells in Thompson Park (the "flowing well") and Memorial Park. He was an active member of the American Legion Post, serving as commander,



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and later district commander and state vice commander of the Legion. He was instrumental in the development of the American Legion Park, dedicated in May 1934, contributing his time and labor to the project. In 1932 he organized an all-Native-American American Legion Post at Odanah and was adopted as a member of the Chippewa tribe. He was also active in civic affairs, serving as a member of the city council, the county board of supervisors, and as chairman of the county committee of the Republican Party. Walter was active in the conservation and good roads movements, and an early advocate of water resources conservation. He was a member of the Knights of Pythias fraternal lodge. He died on January 22, 1967.

Alta Gustafson was born on January 4, 1897, in Elliott, N.D., the daughter of Alvah and Lucetta Shipley. She graduated from Duluth State Teacher's college, teaching

school in St. Louis County for five years. She was active in the Methodist Church and in civic affairs, including the Girl Scouts, the Bayfield County Children's Board, the Legion Auxiliary, the Washburn Hospital Board, and women's clubs. During World War II she was chairwoman of the county Red Cross chapter and in 1945 was appointed acting postmaster, serving in that capacity for 14 months. She died on October 7, 1981. The Gustafsons operated their well drilling business from their home at 22 Third Street East.

The Johnson Chequamegon Bakery was opened in June 1936 by Earl Phillip Johnson and Catheryn Peterson Johnson. Earl was born on August 23, 1906, in Amery, the son of Carl and Rosa Gatzke Johnson. He grew up in Richmond and upon graduation from high school attended the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, graduating in 1925. From then until 1936 he served as a principal in grade schools in Stanley, Fifield and Ondossagon. He married Catheryn Peterson on August 12, 1930, in Stanley.

In June 1936 he and his wife came to Washburn from Ondossagon and opened the Chequamegon Bakery (on the southwest corner of Bayfield Street and Second Avenue West) that became one of the leading businesses in the city.

In 1946, he developed a

small airport on the western edge of the city, establishing the Washburn Flying Service with four other Washburn men to provide air transport service and pilot training. In September 1946 Earl made four hazardous emergency flights, taking critically ill polio patients to Minneapolis for treatment. On Thanksgiving Day 1946 he was severely injured when he crashed while taking off from his airport. He remained unconscious for two weeks, but was eventually able to resume a normal life. He gave up flying, however, and the Washburn Flying Service went out of business.

He was a member of the Masonic fraternal lodge, and his extensive community service included terms on the city council, the Washburn Hospital Board and Washburn School Board. In 1971 the Johnsons sold their bakery and retired. He died on April 30, 1988.

His wife, Catheryn, was born on September 12, 1906, in Stanley, the daughter of Otto and Kern Peterson. She was active in community affairs as a member of the Women's Civic Club, the Washburn Parks and Recreation Committee as well as other organizations, and on many homecoming committees. She researched and compiled two books, "Washburn Memories," in 1983, and "Washburn Pioneers," in 1986, and was a prominent member of the Washburn Area Historical Society. She died on January 4, 2004.