

Fred A. King, Early Entrepreneur and Politician in Northern Minnesota

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Editor's Note: *This article is excerpted from a family history written by Steven Jonnes. A previous excerpt, establishing that Fred A. King was the son of Stephen W. King of Ohio and Michigan, was printed in the Spring 2016 issue of Minnesota Genealogist.*

Fred A. King died 25 July 1920 in Cass Lake, Minnesota, after a colorful government and business career that started in Michigan and ended in northern Minnesota. He was County Clerk in Saginaw County, Michigan, lobbied to bring a minor league baseball team to Saginaw, established a successful real estate business in Grand Rapids, organized the Grand Rapids Building and Loan Association in Minnesota, became a prominent politician in Itasca County, served as Receiver in the U.S. Land Office in Cass Lake, and acquired Louis W. Hill's former houseboat and converted it to a cabin on Star Island.



Fred A. King

Born 18 July 1857 in Saginaw, Michigan, Fred A. King married Caroline "Lena" Miller (1860-1932),¹ in Saginaw, Michigan on 15 May 1879. He was 21 and she was 18. In an interesting twist, they shared the same birthday – July 18.

Lena was the daughter of a well-known construction company owner and sometime politician, Charles C. Miller (1822-1885), who had emigrated from Germany in the late 1840s. His brother Henry Miller (1829-1917) was a captain in the Union Army and served as sheriff of Saginaw County for many years. Lena's mother was Caroline S. Whaley (1830-1888), whose parents emigrated from Colmar, France around 1828. Her ancestry was Alsatian.²

The marriage recorded Fred King's occupation as "news dealer." This term usually refers to someone who sells newspapers and magazines, so Fred likely operated a small business enterprise in Saginaw – a news stand or a small store that sold newspapers and magazines – or maybe it just means he was a newspaper salesman. The good press he received later in life may have arisen out of newspaper connections he developed during this period.

Fred and Lena King had three children:

Charles Miller King (1880-1947)

Earl Stevens King (1884-1950)

Mabel Alicia King (1885-1938)



Charles, Mabel, and Earl King, about 1888

¹ Family records indicate that Caroline's middle name was Salsbery/Salisbury. Documentation proving this has not yet been uncovered, although "S" is indicated as her middle initial in certain census and death records.

² Genetically speaking, the Alsatian connection is especially meaningful because the author's MtDNA haplotype is H7b4 and is derived from his Alsatian 4th great grandmother Rosalie (Reist) Whaley (1801-1890) through her maternal line.

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The author is descended from Fred's daughter Mabel Alicia King, whose daughter Helen King Vermilyea (1909-1994), provided most of the family's oral history.³ Helen was the author's maternal grandmother and is also referred to here as "Grandma Bonn."

A Young County Clerk

Little is known about Fred A. King's life during the 1870s, a period during which Fred and his siblings were struggling in the wake of their father's death (see previous article⁴).

The 1880 U.S. Census provides an early snapshot of Fred's young family, but gives no hint of the direction Fred A. King's life would soon take. Enumerated with his wife and 5-month old son on Bates Street in Saginaw, Fred's occupation was recorded as "Works in Mach. Shop."⁵

38	270 303	King Fred	22	Male	1	Works in Mach. Shop.
39		Lena	20	Female	1	Keeping House.
40		Charles	5 months	Male	1	Son

1880 U.S. Census, Saginaw, Michigan: Fred King family

However, Fred emerged from the shadows in a major way in 1884. He ran for the county clerk position in Saginaw County and won. From that point forward, Fred's life is chronicled in dozens of news articles in Michigan and Minnesota local newspapers. He seems to have been an active, popular public figure, someone who was an organizer and spokesman for the businesses, clubs, and social entities in which he was involved. His opinions were often quoted.

It would be interesting to know how Fred rose to prominence as an elected politician at the age of 27. His 1880 machine shop job hardly sounds like a position requiring administrative or political skills. However, despite the early death of his father, Fred was well-educated. The

1880 census indicated he had attended school through at least age 12.

The county clerk had diverse administrative responsibilities. The clerk issued and recorded marriage licenses, death records, and numerous other filings; commissioned notary publics; processed passport applications; swore in county officials; and acted as the clerk of court for the local circuit judge, which involved documenting legal decisions. Fred accompanied the circuit court judge on his travels around the county to hear cases and record and register the proceedings, so he became familiar to many citizens. The county clerk also served as the chief election official for the county and supervised all elections.

Fred won three successive two-year terms as Saginaw County Clerk in 1884, 1886, and 1888. He did not run in

1890. His deputy as county clerk for most of that time was Thomas W. Busby. Two of his wife Lena's younger sisters, Rose Miller (1867-1934) and Emma Miller (1869-1901), were his only other staff employees for most of his tenure. Both women were teenagers when first employed in the office.

Firm vote totals for the three elections have been hard to locate, but it appears that Fred's popularity increased over time. His vote total in the 1884 election was 889.⁶ The vote totals for his opponents cannot be located, but winning candidates for other offices that year had higher totals (for example, the winner of the contest for sheriff received 1,291 votes and the winner of the contest for treasurer 1,750). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that Fred

3 See the pedigree chart *Minnesota Genealogist*, 47:1 (Spring 2016), p. 6, or view author's "Jonnes Family Tree" on *Ancestry.com*.

4 Searching for the Parents of Fred A. King of Saginaw, Michigan," *Minnesota Genealogist*, 47:1 (Spring 2016) 8-11.

5 1880 U.S. census, Saginaw County, Michigan, population schedule, Saginaw City, p. 28, dwelling 270, family 303, Fred and Lena King; digital image, *Ancestry.com*; citing NARA microfilm publication T9, roll 602.

6 "The Official Count," *Saginaw Evening News* (Saginaw, Michigan), 14 November 1884, page 3.

won by a narrow margin in his first electoral run. In 1886, however, Fred not only increased his vote, but received the highest vote total of any county clerk candidate in Saginaw County history. This outcome suggests a man who was widely popular and speaks to some degree of competency. The *Saginaw Evening News* endorsed his candidacy on 29 October 1886.

“Fred A. King, the present Clerk of this county, has made a good officer – he has been renominated by the Fusionists and will poll a large vote, having added a great many friends during his term of office to the large number he already possessed.”⁷

After the election, the *Saginaw Evening News* proclaimed:

“Fred King, of Saginaw City, who was re-elected County Clerk, had the largest majority ever given for a candidate for that office. He is deservedly popular.”⁸

Fred won handily again in 1888, receiving the highest vote of any county office seeker.⁹

One controversy during Fred’s six-year tenure as county clerk is worth mentioning. During the campaign of 1888, Rev. C.W. Stephenson, pastor of the First Methodist Church, publicly accused Fred of pocketing fees from the sale of licenses. The *Saginaw Evening News* reported the accusation:

“... (Stephenson) accuses County Clerk King of charging \$1 for the issue of license fees when the law is alleged to provide only for a fee of 50 cents. The communication concludes by advising all honest people to oppose Mr. King at the polls for this reason.”¹⁰

The *Evening News* asked Fred about the charge and reported:

“Mr. King was seen today and explains that he has not exceeded the legal fee for any charges to persons

securing marriage licenses. The regular fee of fifty cents is charged when only the license paper is to be issued ... but when the County Clerk is asked to fill out these answers and swear the parties to their truthfulness an additional fee of twenty-five cents for the work of filling out the answer blanks and twenty-five cents for administering the oath is charged. This brings the entire charge in such cases to \$1.00, but in no case has more than fifty cents been asked for the license.”¹¹

Fred also provided a legal opinion on the matter from a local law firm to support his position. This seems to have defused the dispute because, as we know, Fred ended up easily winning the 1888 race.¹²

An amusing incident occurred during a March 1890 municipal election. Although Fred was not on the ballot, he was still the supervising election officer.

“An irate voter charged Fred King at the polls yesterday with being responsible for the imposition of the dog tax. The same charge was laid up against Judge Brucker. As these gentlemen had nothing whatever to do with that matter, the spreading of such reports for political effect shows to what extremes some men will go.”¹³

One more political news story from this period is worth sharing. A rather cryptic comment about Fred probably raises more questions than it provides answers, but it is intriguing. A long article about the proceedings of the February 1890 Democratic Party county convention, closed with a whimsical list of comments about specific participants, including Fred.

“Wasn’t it a corker?
It will be Judge Barry.
The laboring class was out in force.
Rudolph Bruske wore a satisfied air...”

7 “The Candidates: For Clerk,” *Saginaw Evening News* (Saginaw, Michigan), 29 October 1886, page 2.

8 “The City and Vicinity,” *Saginaw Evening News* (Saginaw, Michigan), 11 November 1886, page 2.

9 “In Saginaw County: What the Voters Did by Their

Ballots Yesterday,” *Saginaw Evening News* (Saginaw, Michigan), 7 November 1888, page 3.

10 “Marriage Licenses: County Clerk King Answers a Charge Made by C.W. Stephenson,” *Saginaw Evening News* (Saginaw, Michigan), 29 September 1888, page 7.

11 Ibid.

12 What an innocent time! If only political controversies today were limited to whether a public official is honest about a 50-cent difference.

13 “Notes,” *Saginaw Evening News* (Saginaw, Michigan), 4 March 1890, page 7.

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James Harris made an excellent secretary.
Hon. Charles H. Camp presided with dignity.
Harmony! It was there in solid chunks.
Leander Simoneau's friends rallied to his rescue.
D.K. Halsey had the clearest enunciation on the floor.
Fred King was there. He looked wise and said nothing.
Henry Youmans did not make much of a hustle for office.
There wasn't an inch of room in the big hall unoccupied...
I never saw so many Democrats in my life, said an old-timer..."¹⁴

Less is known about Fred's personal life in Saginaw. One news item shows that the Kings were comfortable enough financially to take a family vacation in 1890.

"Fred King and wife, Mrs. Chester Record, Mrs. Thomas Busby, the Misses Emma and Rose Miller, Miss Hattie Paine, Miss Carrie King and M. McArthur left at noon today for a trip to the "Soo" [Sault Ste. Marie] and Georgian Bay for a ten-days recreation trip."¹⁵

New Opportunities in Northern Minnesota

The year 1891 was pivotal in the life of Fred A. King. That is the year he moved his family from Michigan to Minnesota and began an entirely new career. He chose not to run for reelection as Saginaw County Clerk in November 1890, even though the record suggests he would have won easily. Instead, Fred and close friend Edward August "E.A." Kremer (1856-1938) collaborated to open a real estate business in northern Minnesota.

Reportedly, it was E.A. who persuaded Fred to join him.¹⁶ In March 1891, the two men traveled together to Aitkin, Minnesota, some 60 miles north of Minneapolis, to

transcribe Itasca County real estate records. Probably, the men also stopped in Grand Rapids, another 50 miles north, to scout the village, introduce themselves, and arrange future lodging. After a short return to Saginaw to wind up their affairs, King and Kremer moved permanently to Grand Rapids, departing Saginaw on 18 May 1891. Their families followed four months later. In Grand Rapids, Fred and E.A. established a real estate "abstracting"¹⁷ company called Kremer & King, Inc., which remained Fred's primary occupation for 23 years – a huge life decision that turned out extremely well.

One wonders, though, why Fred would give up his secure, salaried political job in Saginaw, a large, thriving, established community, to move to what was still practically a wilderness in bitterly cold northern Minnesota.¹⁸ Potential financial gain must have been a factor. Possibly, Fred had an entrepreneurial spirit that he could not satisfy in a civic position. He may also have shrewdly assessed the economic prospects of Saginaw. The wider Saginaw area, including Bay City, boomed from the 1850s to the 1870s due to its access to timber and the city's ability to ship lumber to market via the Saginaw River and Lake Huron. However, lumber production peaked in 1882, and although salt production was also important, both industries were in decline by 1890.

Another factor affecting Fred's decision to move might have been the recent deaths of family members, weakening familial ties that might have kept them in Saginaw. Lena's parents, Charles C. Miller and Caroline (Whaley) Miller died in 1885 and 1888, respectively, and Fred's only brother, Henry Burton King, died in 1890.

But why Grand Rapids, Minnesota? Itasca County was still so undeveloped and unpopulated that a county seat

¹⁴ "On the Side," *Saginaw Evening News* (Saginaw, Michigan), 28 February 1890, page 7.

¹⁵ "Chat," *Saginaw Evening News* (Saginaw, Michigan), 19 July 1890, page 2. (Note that Fred is the only male in this group.)

¹⁶ *The Kremer Family: A Northern Minnesota Legacy*, by Barbara Sanderson, October 1987. A copy of this wonderful family record was provided by the Itasca County Historical Society (ICHS) and serves as an important source of information for this report. It has a lot of rich detail about the early history of Grand Rapids and mentions Fred by name several times.

¹⁷ This appears to be the 19th century term for what we today would call a real estate title company.

¹⁸ While the average low temperature in the month of January for Saginaw, Michigan is a cold 15° F, the average low for Grand Rapids, Minnesota in January is a brutal -3° F, nearly a 20 degree difference!

had not yet been designated, and Grand Rapids was not yet incorporated. (The Village of Grand Rapids was incorporated in 1891). County records were kept in Aitkin, more than 50 miles south. Grand Rapids was little more than an overgrown trading post for local Indians and a growing number of lumbermen and miners. E.A. Kremer reported in May 1891 that its population was about 400.¹⁹ It was probably half that only a year or two earlier. The surrounding countryside was a vast wilderness of lakes and pine forest.

Circumstances began to change in the late 1880s. The first Mesabi Range iron ore mine opened nearby. Then in July 1890, the Duluth and Winnipeg Railroad reached the vicinity of Grand Rapids.²⁰ It was the rail line that really accelerated the area's growth and local leaders began to advertise for newcomers. The author of a Kremer family history described the times this way:

“Grand Rapids was hailed by local promoters as the northern wonder of growth and development ... Maps and advertising supplements were distributed.”²¹

E.A. and Fred must have decided to take advantage. Both men had expertise in county-level documentation in Saginaw – Fred as county clerk and E.A. as the registrar of deeds. In Saginaw County, this also meant registering all real estate transactions, such as the filing of deeds. This is likely how Fred became familiar with real estate and probably what led him to an eventual career in real estate sales and abstracting. In Grand Rapids, where the land market was set to boom, the arrival of two experienced public administrators was probably welcome news.

The move was also big news in Saginaw. On the evening of Friday, 16 May 1891, two days before their departure, Fred and E.A. were feted at a farewell dinner at Saginaw's opera hall by their friends and associates. The event was described

in a newspaper article, quoted at length here because it gives a flavor of the times:

“The banquet tendered to Fred A. King and Edward A. Kremer last evening at Teutonia Hall ... was an occasion which would be difficult to surpass. There were about 65 gentlemen present, among them ... State Senator Fridlander ... and Representative Orth ...

“The company assembled about 9 o'clock and after an hour had been spent in social intercourse ex-County Treasurer Ross stepped forward and addressing Messrs. King and Kremer, extended to them the heartfelt wishes of the assembled friends. He reviewed the pleasant associations of the past, and assured them that the best wishes of their many friends would go with them to their new home ... He then informed the gentlemen that he had been delegated ... to present them with tokens of their esteem, and accordingly presented each gentleman with a fine shot gun, of the most approved make and pattern, adding that as they were going to a land where game was plenty they might need the weapons for protection, as well as amusement. Mr. King and Mr. Kremer both responded in an earnest and feeling manner, and heartily thanked their friends for the honor and kindness bestowed upon them, and stated they would cherish the gifts highly. The happy gathering then surrounded a table loaded with viands, etc. ... Messrs. King and Kremer were seated at each end of the festive board, in front of them being placed a large and elegant boquet [sic]....

“Vocal music was heartily indulged in, and during the evening each gentleman present was called upon to express a few words in honor of the occasion. It was not until a late hour that the happy gathering dispersed. The News joins in wishing the departing guests a prosperous future, interspersed with health, joy, and long life.”²²

19 “Their New Home: Messrs King and Kremer on the Way to Minnesota,” *Saginaw Evening News* (Saginaw, Michigan), 18 May 1891, page 3.

20 Until the rail line was built, the Mississippi River was the village's primary connection to the outside

world. The location is notable for being the uppermost point on the Mississippi River open to steamboat travel in the 19th century.

21 *The Kremer Family: A Northern Minnesota Legacy*, by Barbara Sanderson, October 1987, copy provided by ICHS.

22 “Royally Entertained: The Banquet at Teutonia Hall Last Evening,” *Saginaw Evening News* (Saginaw, Michigan), 16 May 1891, page 3.

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Lena and the children did not join Fred in Minnesota until September 1891, four months after he departed. Their arrival in the dead of night is a famous family story. Grandma Bonn often recounted what she had been told – that her grandmother arrived on the train with the kids and was greeted at the end of the line by Fred. The train actually dead-ended outside of town on a platform surrounded by woods. They arrived at night and were frightened by the wild conditions – it looked like they had arrived in the “middle of nowhere!” Fred had to transport them along a dirt road into town on a buggy and they lived in the only hotel available until a house could be built.

The actual chain of events may have been somewhat different. A 9 September 1891 Saginaw news item stated:

“Mr. and Mrs. Fred King returned last evening from Grand Rapids, Wis. [sic] Ed Kraemer returned the first of this week. Both gentlemen will remove their families to Grand Rapids.”²³

Based on this, Lena must have visited Grand Rapids ahead of the children, most likely to reassure herself that it was safe to move and that the lodging and schooling arrangements were suitable. The final departure of the whole family from Saginaw would have occurred in mid-to-late September. E.A. Kremer and his family are known to have departed for Grand Rapids on 21 September.²⁴ Possibly the two families traveled together, almost certainly via Chicago by train. In any case, regardless of whether Lena made one trip or two, the story of their arrival in Grand Rapids was a dramatic event, especially in the eyes of the children, and the story must have been retold in the family many times.

Business and Home in Grand Rapids

Itasca County and the town of Grand Rapids are very important to the family history. Grandma Bonn (Helen King Vermilyea) was fond of her childhood there and loved

to talk about her experiences growing up. She bragged about her upbringing and how special the local communities were. Actually, Helen never lived in Grand Rapids itself. Rather, she lived in the nearby towns of Marble and Coleraine, but she spent considerable time in Grand Rapids because that was where Grandpa and Grandma King lived.²⁵ She was born at Grandpa King’s house in January 1909.

Despite its small size, Grand Rapids prospered because of its status as the county seat and its central location serving the local lumber and mining industries. Investments made by early residents demonstrated an expectation that Grand Rapids would be an important and desirable place to live. The preeminent example is the building of the Old Central School in 1895. Local leaders – with the fervent backing of residents – spent nearly \$30,000 to hire a nationally known architect, Fred Hollister, to design a three-story school in the Richardson-Romanesque style and then paid for the school’s construction. All three of the King children attended Old Central. The school has remained the architectural centerpiece of Grand Rapids. It served as a school until 1972 and was restored by the community in the 1980s. It is currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Old Central School, Grand Rapids – 21st century

23 “Personal,” *Saginaw Evening News* (Saginaw, Michigan), 10 September 1891, page 3. The reference to Wisconsin rather than Minnesota is an obvious mistake.

24 “Personal,” *Saginaw Evening News* (Saginaw, Michigan), 22 September 1891, page 3.

25 Her father, David Mead Vermilyea (1882-1950), came to northern Minnesota in 1902. After two years as an assistant cashier at the First State Bank of Grand Rapids, he became head cashier in nearby Bovey 1904-1909, then was bank cashier in Marble 1909-1919, and finally in Coleraine,

where he served 29 years with the First National Bank. Coleraine and Bovey are six and seven miles, respectively, east of Grand Rapids. Marble is 14 miles east of Grand Rapids.

Such expenses were typical, however, across the Mesabi Iron Range. Because of the wealth being generated by the iron ore mines, these small communities built the finest schools in the state.²⁶

According to Grandma Bonn, the King family initially lived in the only hotel in town – the Hotel Pokegama, named after the local lake. Fred built a house sometime thereafter, probably within the first year.²⁷ The first census record for Fred’s family after their move is the Minnesota state census of 1895. Fred is listed as an “abstracter,” age 38, living in Grand Rapids, Minnesota. No street location is provided. His wife is listed as Lena S. King, age 36, and the children – Charles M., Earl, and Mabel – are listed in order at ages 15, 12, and 9.²⁸

The business Fred A. King established with E.A. Kremer – Kremer & King, Inc. – was the center of Fred’s professional life from 1891 until 1914. In the early years, Fred and E.A. must have held a monopoly of sorts on the titling of real estate transactions in Itasca County. They were experienced land managers and knowledgeable about the legal technicalities of how to record land deeds and prepare real estate titles. They also understood local government procedure. They would have been the go-to agents for anyone wanting to ensure they had safe title to their land, and fees those transactions would have provided a stable income for King and Kremer.

The line between public and private activities was perhaps not as clear then as it is today. Fred and E.A. both held various public office positions in Grand Rapids, and the activities of Kremer and King, Inc. likely overlapped or complemented their public duties. The first meeting to establish the Grand Rapids village council in 1892 actually

occurred in the offices of Kremer & King, Inc.²⁹ There is also a reference in a 1907 business directory that describes Kremer & King, Inc. as the “county abstract office,” so it is conceivable that their private enterprise was also the designated public titling agency.³⁰



Kremer & King, Inc. logo design on a real estate title document, year unknown; courtesy of Itasca County Historical Society



Hotel Pokegama, 1892; photo courtesy of Itasca County Historical Society

26 Minnesota Encyclopedia, Minnesota Historical Society. “Immigration to the Iron Range, 1880–1930.” Accessed October 4, 2015. <http://www.mnopedia.org/immigration-iron-range-1880-1930>.

27 Whether the family ended up living in more than one house over the span of their life in Grand Rapids, we cannot say. What is known is that by 1900, the family was living in a house on Houghton Avenue, which may have been Fred and Lena’s primary residence until their move to Cass Lake in 1914. The name “Houghton Avenue” no longer

exists, however, because almost all the streets in Grand Rapids are now numbered. During an August 2014 visit to Grand Rapids, ICHS researchers identified 602 3rd Avenue, NW as a possible location for the lot on which the **Fred A. King** family would have lived, based on the identification of 3rd Avenue NW as the current name for Houghton Avenue. We visited that location, but the house on that lot was built in 1924 and would not have been the King family’s actual residence even if the location is accurate.

28 1895 state census, Fred A. & Lena S. King, Grand Rapids, Itasca County; *Minnesota State Population Census Schedules, 1865-1905*. St. Paul, MN, USA; digital image, *Ancestry.com*; citing Minnesota Historical Society reels 1-47 and 107-164.

29 *The Kremer Family: A Northern Minnesota Legacy*, by Barbara Sanderson, October 1987, copy provided by ICHS.

30 *Minnesota, North and South Dakota and Montana Gazetteer and Business Directory, Part 2, 1906-1907*, page 22.

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Originally, Kremer & King, Inc. operated out of the county courthouse, but the business moved in 1894 to the rebuilt Hotel Pokegama.³¹ Whether their business moved to another location later is unknown.

Fred A. King and E.A. Kremer seem to have been active, hard-working businessmen who were involved in a wide range of business interests. Real estate was by no means their only source of income. According to a Kremer family account, they branched out into insurance, and bought and sold pine, mineral, and farm lands. They also served as agents for thousands of acres of railroad land, promising to “double customer’s money in the twinkling of an eye.”³²

Fred also went into banking. In 1903, he was involved in the establishment of the Grand Rapids Building and Loan Association and served on its board of directors until at least 1916. At the eighth annual board meeting in 1911, which was held in the offices of Kremer & King, Inc., Fred was re-elected secretary. The local newspaper described the venture as follows:

“The Grand Rapids association is strictly a home concern. No one outside the county is interested and the only salary paid is to the secretary, \$20 per month. There is no charge for office rent and therefore it is rated by the insurance commissioner as one of the best concerns of its kind in the state. The association has over 100 stockholders at the present time and over \$30,000 in outstanding loans.”³³

King Family Takes Root in Minnesota

The King and Kremer families were not the only Saginaw residents to move to Grand Rapids. Numerous families followed them and commercial and social ties between the two cities became important, despite the distance. Two

of E.A. Kremer’s brothers and one sister moved to Grand Rapids during the early 1890s. The three brothers, E.A., George, and Arthur Kremer, were all prominent in Grand Rapids society. The Kremer family historian explains,

“Strong ties between Saginaw and Grand Rapids were to remain for not only the Kremer families but for many others as well. George, E.A., and Arthur, along with their families, spent several weeks most years with families and friends in Michigan. In addition, relatives from Saginaw... were frequent visitors to Minnesota. Many of these visits brought together young people of marriageable age and a good many unions ... resulted. Business interests between the two cities also dovetailed from time to time.”³⁴

As far as is known, none of Fred’s relations moved to northern Minnesota, but several members of his wife’s family did. Lena’s brother, Charles C. Miller, Jr. (1862-1915), moved his family to Grand Rapids in 1893. In fact, they lived only four houses away from Fred’s family in 1895, according to the state census. Lena’s sister Rosa (Miller) Carson (1867-1934) and her husband Francis Carson (1858-1937) moved to Grand Rapids around 1894. Baby brother Fred W. Miller (1873-1902) moved in 1896, but died in a tragic shooting accident in 1902. Oldest sister Augusta (Miller) Spindler (1853-1930) and husband George Spindler (1855-1922) moved to Itasca County sometime after 1910.³⁵ It was George Spindler’s Saginaw construction company that won the 1895 bid to build the Old Central School in Grand Rapids.³⁶ Lena’s remaining siblings, Doretta (Miller) Ferguson (1864-1945) and Emma Miller (1869-1901), never moved to Minnesota. Saginaw newspapers routinely referenced events in Grand Rapids, Minnesota, for at least 30 years after Fred and E.A. first arrived in 1891.

31 The hotel burned down in March 1893 and was reopened in November 1894.

32 *The Kremer Family: A Northern Minnesota Legacy*, by Barbara Sanderson, October 1987, copy provided by ICHS.

33 “Building and Loan Association Meeting,” *Duluth News-Tribune* (Duluth, Minnesota), 18 October 1911, page 3. I have the sense from the newspaper

articles that Fred was the driving force behind the savings and loan.

34 *The Kremer Family: A Northern Minnesota Legacy*, by Barbara Sanderson, October 1987, copy provided by ICHS.

35 In later life, Aunt Augusta lived in Coleraine with David & Mabel Vermilyea, and died there. Caroline Vermilyea Sisler was still sharp enough one week

shy of her own death in August 2014 to remember that it was she who found Aunt Augusta lying in bed dead in 1930, when Caroline was only 6 years old!

36 *The Kremer Family: A Northern Minnesota Legacy*, by Barbara Sanderson, October 1987, copy provided by ICHS.

The 1900 U.S. census is the last which found all three children at home. The family lived on Houghton Avenue. Charles, age 20, was listed as an “apprentice jeweler,” while Earl, age 15, and Mable, age 13, were still in school. Lena’s younger brother, Fred W. Miller, 26, was living with the family as a boarder.³⁷

One photograph of the Grand Rapids family survives. It was probably taken in the family’s home on Houghton Avenue in about 1900 or 1901. From left to right are Fred, Earl, Charles, Lena, and Mabel. This is the only known image of Caroline “Lena” King. Grandma Bonn was just as close to her grandmother as to her grandfather. In fact, she thought that Lena was even more talented than Fred. Reportedly, Lena was a much respected member of the community, highly intelligent, and compassionate. She had artistic talent and was known for her painting of chinaware. She was also an accomplished musician and taught piano for many years.³⁸

At the time of the 1905 Minnesota census, Mabel was the only child remaining at home.³⁹ She married David Mead Vermilyea 2 July 1907. Charles had married Ella Brooks 20 January 1904. Earl’s whereabouts in 1905 are not known. By 1910, Fred and Lena were at home alone. He was 52 and she was 49. His occupation was reported as “real estate.”⁴⁰

Fred King’s Minnesota Civic and Political Career

In addition to his commercial enterprises, Fred was an active community leader and maintained his interest in political and civic affairs, much as he had in Michigan. When the village council was first formed in 1892, E.A. Kremer became the county auditor and Fred A. King became the clerk of the circuit court, according to this Saginaw news story:

“John P. Hemmeter is in receipt of a letter from E.A. Kremer and Fred A. King, formerly of Saginaw, now real estate dealers doing business at Grand Rapids, Minn., which brings the news of Mr. Kremer’s appointment to the position of county auditor, while Mr. King has secured the clerkship of the circuit court, both of which are desirable berths. They write that thermometers there have been 48 degrees below zero.”⁴¹



L-R: Fred A. King, Helen King Vermilyea, David Mead “Bud” Vermilyea, and son-in-law David Mead Vermilyea, 1913.

Fred A. King continued his affiliation with the Democratic Party after moving to Minnesota and ran for elected office often.⁴² He was successfully elected to key village positions several times. In addition to being the original clerk of the circuit court in 1892, Fred was village recorder for at least one year, from 1899 to 1900. He may have held this position in other years because a news article in March 1898 lists him as running that year for recorder on the

37 1900 U.S. census. Census Place: Grand Rapids, Itasca, Minnesota; Enumeration district: 0084; Fred A. & Lena S. King; digital image, *Ancestry.com*; citing NARA microfilm publication T623, roll 771, Page: 2B.

38 Lena (Miller) King died on 25 April 1932, less than 24 hours before her great grand-daughter Beverly Bonn was born. Grandma Bonn often

said that daughter Beverly reminded her of her grandmother. On her death bed in 1994, she even mentioned that she felt Beverly was Lena’s reincarnation – a surprising statement because in principle she did not believe in reincarnation.

39 1905 state census, Fred A. and Lena S. King, Grand Rapids, Itasca County; *Minnesota State Population Census Schedules, 1865-1905*. St. Paul, MN, USA;

digital image, *Ancestry.com*; citing Minnesota Historical Society reels 1-47 and 107-164.

40 1910 U.S. census, Itasca County, Minnesota, population schedule, Grand Rapids, p. 15B, enumeration district 0066, Fred E. and Lena King; digital image, *Ancestry.com*; citing NARA microfilm publication T624, roll 707.

Fred A. King, Early Entrepreneur and Politician in Northern MN

Democratic Party ticket.⁴³ A colorful newspaper story reported his 1899 victory.

“GRAND RAPIDS, March 15. – There was a hot time in the old town last yesterday, the occasion being the regular spring election for village and township officers, in many instances the interested parties coming almost to blows. Township chairman ... The following is the new village ticket: Recorder, Fred A. King; president, John S. Bernie; trustees, John F. O’Connell, John Hepfel, Luke I. Anjon; treasurer, C. F. Aikin; constable, Peter Foley.”⁴⁴

In addition, it appears that Fred served multiple times as one of the three Grand Rapids village trustees. The trustees served as a mini-legislative body while the mayor and other officers like the recorder and treasurer managed specific functions. Fred is known to have won election as a village trustee in 1910, 1912, and 1913 and was on the likely winning ballot in 1911. He probably served as a trustee from at least 1909 through 1913. All village positions were one-year terms. Here are the election results from March 1910:

“A. C. Bossard was unanimously chosen village president by a vote of 431; George Arscott, with 377, Fred A. King, 348, and George Shook, 313, the caucus nominees, won over Keo Lerouv, 128, S. E. King, 46, and E. M. Remer, 30, for trustees.”⁴⁵

Fred was involved in a tense labor situation in 1907. Apparently, after arrests were made by Sheriff William Hoolihan in the mining town of Nashwauk during a

labor strike, complaints filed asking for the sheriff’s removal. Minnesota Governor John A. Johnson expressed his full support for the sheriff, but turned down a request from the county attorney to send troops. A Duluth newspaper printed a telegram sent by Fred A. King sent to Gov. Johnson.

“Grand Rapids, Minn. – ‘Gov. John A. Johnson, St. Paul: Sheriff Hoolihan, acting under advice of county attorney, is doing his utmost to protect property, prevent acts of lawlessness, and protect miners who desire to work. During strike in the exercise of his official duty he has deemed it expedient to make several arrests of lawless persons in Nashwauk. All law abiding citizens are with him in this matter, notwithstanding reports to you to the contrary. – (Confidentially.) – John Rellis and Fred A. King.’”⁴⁶

In a separate matter in 1909, Fred sent a telegram to Gov. Johnson encouraging him to “veto (the) tonnage bill and earn the gratitude of northern Minnesota.”⁴⁷ Clearly, Fred’s political standing was such that he felt comfortable communicating his opinion to top state leaders about matters affecting his home region.

Fred A. King was also a party leader in Itasca County. He was to serve as secretary to the 1910 and 1912 county Democratic Party conventions, and in both years he was a delegate from Itasca County to the state party convention. The 1912 trip would have been particularly meaningful because it was a presidential election year, and Fred had the honor of attending as a Woodrow Wilson delegate.⁴⁸

41 “Chat,” *Saginaw News* (Saginaw, Michigan), 16 January 1892, page 3.

42 In Saginaw, Fred was a leader of the Greenback Party in the 1870s and early 1880s, a third-party movement, but later shifted to the Democrats. This is understandable given his family’s roots in the lumber industry. The state of Michigan routinely went Republican at the presidential level throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but Saginaw (as well as Detroit) was a Democratic stronghold, due to its industrial base (lumber and salt). The same can be said of Grand Rapids, Minnesota, which typically voted Democratic because of its strong connection to the working men in the mining and lumber industries.

43 “Grand Rapids Election. Three Tickets have been Nominated for City Officers,” *Duluth News-Tribune* (Duluth, Minnesota), 8 March 1898, page 2.

44 “Red Hot Election. Candidates for Office Almost Come to Blows in Grand Rapids,” *Duluth News-Tribune* (Duluth, Minnesota), 16 March 1899, page 6. (The article does not say who almost got into a fight.)

45 “By a Vote of 336 to 101, Grand Rapids Goes Wet,” *Duluth News-Tribune* (Duluth, Minnesota), 9 March 1910, page 3.

46 “Hoolihan in Right, Says Gov. Johnson. State Executive Stands by Itasca County Sheriff,” *Duluth News-Tribune* (Duluth, Minnesota), 1 August 1907, page 1.

47 “Veto of Tonnage Tax Bill is Confidently Expected. Gov. Johnson May Protect Iron Country,” *Duluth News-Tribune* (Duluth, Minnesota), 18 April 1909, page 11 (piece: two of two). A tonnage tax of mined iron ore had been enacted in 1881 and repealed in 1897. Minnesota Department of Revenue, *Minnesota Tax Handbook, 2010 Edition*, p. 32; online edition: <https://www.leg.state.mn.us/docs/2011/other/110250.pdf>, accessed 22 June 2016.

48 “Itasca County Dems Instruct for Wilson,” *Duluth News-Tribune* (Duluth, Minnesota), 30 May 1912, page 1.

A taste of Fred's political thinking may be gleaned from this news item from July 1912, when he and other Wilson supporters announced the formation of a local club to promote the ticket's chances:

"Itasca County Democrats already have a Wilson-Marshall club organized...

"Fred King, E. C. Kiley and other patriots who have worn the Democratic colors in other and less favorable times are at the head of the new organization, and say that already there are about 300 voters lined up for the Democratic nominees.

'The nomination of Woodrow Wilson is a victory for progressive Democracy,' said Fred King, in discussing the convention today, 'it is a victory for the principles which W.J. Bryan has labored for, and Wilson's election will mean progress toward the ideals of popular government.'"⁴⁹

Fred A. King was a leader in many local clubs and societies in Itasca County. In 1911, he was appointed by the Grand Rapids Commercial Club committee to solicit fees and advance the club's campaign for the construction of better roads in the region.⁵⁰ The Itasca County Agricultural Society elected Fred its vice president in December, 1911.⁵¹

Fundraising seems to have been one of Fred's specialties. Another news story from 1911 reports him raising \$500 from his fellow businessmen to pay for a drilling project in search of iron ore in "the creamery well." A 12-foot vein of high-grade ore was found at 180 feet, but only slate was found in the next 168 feet of the well.⁵²

Fred had been a member of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks in Saginaw, but in Grand Rapids he became

a Freemason and was active in the local Masonic lodge.⁵³ A Duluth newspaper article reported one of Fred's charitable acts in 1911:

"Word was received here yesterday that Clem John Smith, sent to the City and County hospital at St. Paul some time ago, to be treated for infantile paralysis, has so far recovered that he is now able to walk a few steps and will soon be able to walk around, as well as other children. Clem, who is 12 years of age, has been a cripple since infancy, due to the paralysis and Fred A. King, who interested himself in the boy's behalf raised sufficient funds to send him to the hospital."⁵⁴

It is not known which church Fred and his family attended. One newspaper story, reporting a meeting of the ladies of the Episcopal Guild at the King home in August 1911, offers a clue. Fred's daughter Mabel was married on 2 July 1907, but the wedding ceremony was held at home, not at church.

"The marriage of David Vermelyea to Miss Mable King took place today at the home of the bride's parents here. About 75 guests were present. Mr. Vermelyea is cashier of the Bank of Bovey, while Miss King is one of the most popular young ladies of this city. The young couple left this afternoon for the east, where they will spend several weeks."⁵⁵

Cass Lake: Receiver in Public Land Office

The high point of Fred's professional life was being appointed by President Woodrow Wilson to the position of Receiver of the U.S. Land Office for the Cass Lake District.⁵⁶ The December 6, 1913, letter of appointment was probably a formality; the news had already been announced in

49 "First Wilson Club is Formed: Itasca Democrats Jump to the Front with Organization for the New Jersey Man," *Grand Rapids Herald Review* (Grand Rapids, Minnesota), 4 July 1912, page 3.

50 "Good Roads Considered: Grand Rapids Commercial Club Starts Active Campaign for Better Highways," *Duluth News-Tribune* (Duluth, Minnesota), 15 October 1911, page 6.

51 "Annual Meeting of Agricultural Society," *Duluth News-Tribune* (Duluth, Minnesota), 14 December 1911, page 3.

52 "Find Vein of Iron Ore," *Duluth News-Tribune* (Duluth, Minnesota), 13 October 1911, page 3.

53 Several Saginaw news items link Fred A. King to the Elks, including a train trip to Cincinnati in 1888 for an annual reunion.

54 Cripple Child is Making Progress Victim of Infantile Paralysis, Unable to Walk since Infancy,

Recovering," *Duluth News-Tribune* (Duluth, Minnesota), September 15, 1911, Volume: 43 Issue: 132 Page: 3.

55 "Bovey Banker Weds Grand Rapids Girl," *Duluth News-Tribune* (Duluth, Minnesota), 3 July 1907, page 3.

56 "President Wilson Names Minnesotans to Office," *Duluth News-Tribune* (Duluth, Minnesota), 7 December 1913, page 3.

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Minnesota a few weeks earlier. Fred probably gained the appointment through the influence of Fred B. Lynch, the leader of the Minnesota Democratic Party.

“Fred A. King, of this place [Grand Rapids], will succeed E. B. Wood, of Long Prairie, as receiver of the Cass Lake land office. The decision has been announced by Fred B. Lynch, of St. Paul, after a spirited contest. D. C. Smith and Judge Pendergast, both of Bemidji, were also in the field for the honor. Alvah Swindlehurst, of Wadena, has also been appointed to the position of register in the same office, succeeding Lester Bartlett. The position pays \$2,700.”⁵⁷

While Fred’s professional credentials certainly qualified him for the job, the appointment was probably also a reward for his support of candidate Woodrow Wilson during the 1912 election. His attendance at the state party convention in 1912 had been an opportunity to network with party leaders and make new political friends.

Fred A. King moved from Grand Rapids to Cass Lake on 1 February 1914 to formally assume the new post.⁵⁸ Now a federal government employee, he promptly began the process of divesting himself of his business interests in Grand Rapids, including shutting down Kremer & King, Inc. For example, he returned to Grand Rapids on 3 April 1914 to formally transfer his management of the Grand Rapids Building and Loan Association to his successor, A. L. Sheldon.⁵⁹ Lena King joined Fred in Cass Lake in May. Friends presented her with a gold thimble and a souvenir spoon at a farewell party in Grand Rapids on 5 May, and she proceeded to Cass Lake the next day.⁶⁰

U.S. Land Offices, an extension of the General Land Office in the Department of Interior, were responsible for selling and leasing federal land. Two officials manned

each office. The registrar administered applications and maintained records, while the receiver handled funds. Some land offices during this period also collected livestock grazing fees and mineral royalties for the use of federal land. A 1915 news article documents Fred’s role in promoting sales of public lands:

“Fred A. King of Cass Lake, receiver of the United States land office, is here on business. He says there is now left in Cass Lake district over 400,000 acres of government land not yet entered. The district includes Koochiching, Cass, Beltrami, and Itasca counties... Mr. King also tells of the great demand for this land. The Cass Lake office has sold for entry over 30,000 acres during the last year and he anticipates that this spring there will be great sales from the remaining tracts.”⁶¹

Cass Lake is situated inside the Leech Lake Indian Reservation. The Indians there are the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, a band within the greater Minnesota Chippewa Tribe.⁶² Fred would have had extensive dealings with the Ojibwe, particularly since much of reservation land is inside the Chippewa National Forest. However, Fred was not employed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Both the GLO and BIA were components of the Department of Interior, but operated separately. Fred may have collaborated with BIA officials, but he was not an “Indian agent” as some descendants believed, and had no direct responsibility for managing the affairs of the reservation.

Nonetheless, Grandma Bonn’s recollection was that Fred had extensive interaction with local tribesmen and had many Indian friends. Even though she was only a summer resident at Cass Lake and spent most of that time at the family home on Star Island, she remembered local Indians being friendly to her when walking in town with Grandpa King.

57 “Grand Rapids Man Gets Cass Lake Post,” *Duluth News-Tribune* (Duluth, Minnesota), 20 November 1913, page 13.

58 “Leaves for Cass Lake,” *Duluth News-Tribune* (Duluth, Minnesota), 31 January 1914, page 13.

59 “King Turns over Reins of Office,” *Duluth News-Tribune* (Duluth, Minnesota), 3 April 1914, page 3.

60 “Mrs. F. A. King Given a Farewell Party,” *Duluth News-Tribune* (Duluth, Minnesota), 6 May 1914, page 3.

61 “King Says Entry Lands Rapidly Being Taken,” *Grand Rapids Herald Review* (Grand Rapids, Minnesota), 11 March 1915, page 3.

62 The term Ojibwe is synonymous with Chippewa, an anglicization used primarily in the United States, less so in Canada. The headquarters of both the **Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe** and its umbrella tribe, the **Minnesota Chippewa Tribe**, are located in Cass Lake.

