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Bowers, Frank (1863 -)

Virgil Chirhart

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Frank Bowers was born on December 1, 1863 in Argentine, Jansee County, Michigan. He was the son of John and Mary (Cole) Bowers, pioneers in this country. His father was born in New York state about 1812 and his mother, also in New York state about 1818. In all there were seven children in the family four boys, Wallace, Roswell, James John, and Frank, and three girls, Mary, Laura, and Elisa. Frank is the only living one left.

Frank was schooled in Shiawanee County, Michigan, he attended school, going as far as the eighth grade. He then helped his father on the farm. In 1882 his brother, Roswell and sister Mary came to Minnesota and settled near Clear Lake. Two years later in 1884 Frank came to Clear Lake by train, and a few months later his parents followed him and also settled on a farm near Clear Lake.

In 1897 Frank was married to May J. Reed, she was born in Chicago, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Reed. Reverend E. V. Campbell of Saint Cloud performed the wedding ceremony. After his marriage, Frank bought a store in Clear Lake and this he operated until 1906 when he moved to Saint Cloud.

In July 1906 Mr. Bowers started work at the state reformatory. At this time there were about two hundred and thirty inmates and there was no stone wall surrounding the institution. Frank was put in charge of a construction crew and work was started on the wall which now surrounds the prison. This wall is said to be the second longest stone wall in the world. The great wall of China is first. This wall took about seventeen years to build as it was impossible to work on it during the cold winter months. The wall itself is about one mile in length, the foundation in the deepest place is about eight feet below the surface of the ground. "In some places," Mr. Bowers said, "the wall is

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built upon solid rock which laid on the surface of the ground. All stone used was quarried in the reformatory quarries."

"The height is twenty-one feet, base thickness four and a half feet and it's thickness at the top is two and a half feet. In all there are eight guard towers on the wall. Since granite weighs about a hundred and forty-five pounds per cu. Ft. you can see that the wall has a tremendous weight."

Mr. Bowers went on to say, "I can remember one prison break, this happened when there was a board fence around the prison yard. Four prisoners knocked a board off the fence and fled. They were fired upon by guards but escaped, only to be recaptured a short while later with the use of blood hounds."

At the time of Frank Bowers employment there in 1906 Frank Randall was superintendent. Later C. Reed was appointed, to be followed by H. J. Scott, then C. Vasley and at the time of this writing Mr. Whitier.

Mr. Bowers was retired in March of 1935 at this time there were about eleven hundred inmates. This is eight hundred and seventy more prisoners than when he started working there. In 1906 the inmates were allowed to talk at all times, now they cannot even whisper except with permission while they are working in the prison.

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Bowers have one son, Myron, born August 7, 1901, at Clear Lake, Minnesota. He is a pharmacy operator (druggist) in Chicago. He is single.

Interviewed: Frank Bowers
Date: July 8, 9, 1936
By: Virgil Chirhart

FROM THE RECORDS IN THE STEARNS COUNTY COURT HOUSE

FOR THE FRANK BOWERS BIOGRAPHY

MARRIAGE RECORD BOOK C. PAGE 7226

Frank Bowers and May Reed

Married February 3, 1897

By: Rev. E. V. Campbell

Witnesses: Vida Reed and H. G. Hauff