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**PATTERNS FOR PROGRESS IN AGING**

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# A Rural County Cares For Its Aging



**CASE STUDY No. 17**

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE  
Administration on Aging

AoA No. 187

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PATTERNS FOR PROGRESS IN AGING

# A RURAL COUNTY CARES FOR ITS AGING

The Story of Aitkin County, Minnesota

Case Study No. 17

*by*

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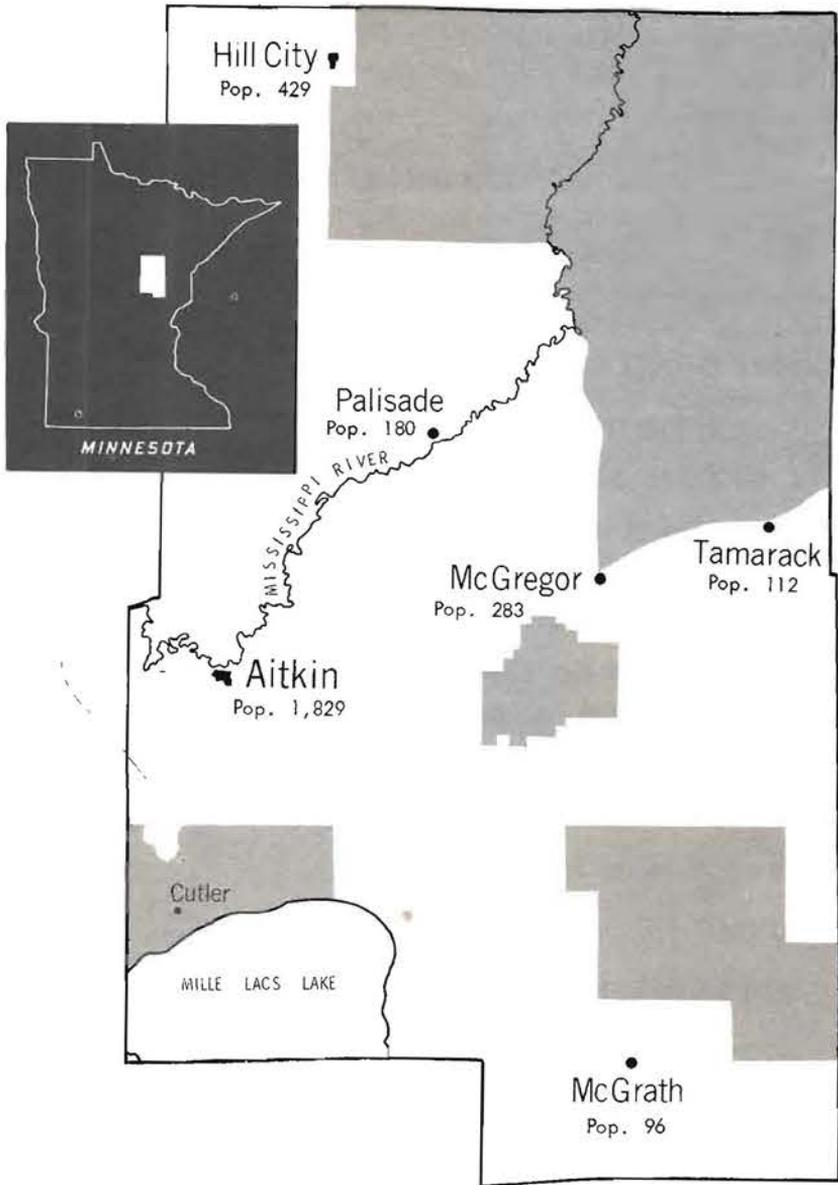
based on a report by  
Harvey H. Glommen, *Director*  
*Aitkin County Welfare Department 1960-1963*

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF  
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**AITKIN COUNTY, MINN.**

The shaded portions of the map are non-revenue producing public lands, such as State forests and wild life refuges.

## THE AITKIN STORY

### Saturday Night Is Dance Night

THE THREE PIECE ORCHESTRA struck up a two step and the first person on the dance floor was Mr. W, age 92. He had come 12 miles on this particular August night with four other persons to attend the regular Saturday night dance at the Senior Center in Aitkin, Minnesota. He was one of 80 "seniors" present.

Responsible for the dance, the Senior Center, and the many other activities for older people of the county is the Aitkin County Citizens Committee on Aging, appointed by the Welfare Board of the Board of County Commissioners.

Aitkin County covers an area of almost 2000 square miles of rural, unfertile land, dotted with lakes and swampy bogs. Many of its 1800 older people, most with low incomes, live in isolation, loneliness, and, in some cases, hardship.

The story of Mr. W's own 92 years in the county mirrors the changing history of Aitkin County itself. In his early days as a blacksmith, Mr. W shod the oxen which pulled the huge logs of the northern woods over ice to be floated down the river to the big sawmills in Minneapolis. Later, he worked in the small factories making wooden tubs, kegs, and buckets in which fish and dairy products were shipped from the county. It was a busy area.

But Mr. W. has lived to see the large stands of timber go out to satisfy the hungry builders of the Nation, and the area's ore mines empty into the Nation's steel mills. He has witnessed the gradual depletion of resources until the once prosperous county has become the second poorest in the State. He has seen young people depart for more lucrative areas of employment and the number of older people increase as the total population declined.

Now the proportion of older people is more than half again as high as that for the State and the Nation. To do something to make life richer and the days less desolate for the elderly has been a challenge to the county for a number of years.

On the night of the dance in 1963, Aitkin County had four active programs for older people. Four years before it had had none. How the Aitkin County Citizens Committee on Aging achieved so much with very limited resources and how it is continuing to make life more meaningful for older people is a tale worth telling. It is a story of the vision, persistence, and determination of a few State and local leaders, of cooperation of elected county officials, of the drawing of funds from meager resources, and stretching of limited finances to carry on the most needed activities. Most of all, it is a story of enthusiastic response by the county's older people.

Watching the 80 dancers in the county-owned Senior Center that August night were Ted Arens and Mrs. Oscar Malvick, two of the leaders who had pushed so hard for a program fitted to the particular needs of Aitkin County. Both are senior citizens themselves. Mrs. Malvick, in her early 70's, is the wife of a semi-retired builder and lives on a lake several miles from Aitkin. Mr. Arens, in his early 60's, is a former dealer in farm implements now serving as the Aitkin postmaster. Both have served as chairman of the Citizens Committee. That night they had reason to feel gratified at how far their program had moved.

Here they were in the attractive basement room of a church, reclaimed from a fire which had destroyed the super-structure. It had been bought and furnished with funds raised dollar by dollar from many and varied sources. Before them was a large group of older persons who would dance happily till midnight. Some of them had driven 30 to 40 miles from points in Crow Wing County, others had come from more remote areas of Aitkin County itself.

Every afternoon of the previous week the Center had been open for its regular schedule of activities. On the table and shelves in one corner was a display of articles made on the Tuesdays of each week—the day a volunteer comes to help with crafts. There were little veiled hats the ladies had made for themselves, lap robes and towels for the hospital, toys to be donated to children at Christmas time, aprons, footstools, embroideries, and other creations of old but busy hands.

On the piano was a stack of song books, printed in large type. The members enjoy singing from them every Wednesday afternoon under the leadership of a musically trained volunteer.

From this activity has grown a small choir which sometimes sings at community functions.

In a bookcase were the beginnings of a small library for the use of members. Playing cards, chess, checkers and cribbage boards piled on a side table told of long companionable games each afternoon of the week.

Movies, lessons on nutrition, forum discussions on medical care, housing, and other subjects take place in the Center. One day each month, it is the scene of a gay party honoring those celebrating their birthdays during that month. Members also arrange county-wide picnics, take part in holiday parades, and present special programs outside the Center.

The program built around the Center in Aitkin, however, can serve only a few of the needs of older people in other parts of the county. The distance from the northern to the southern border of the county is about 60 miles and some areas are separated from others by barren bogs. About one-third of the older people live on farms or in isolated country houses. For these reasons the committee is continuously working to stimulate activities in other key spots.

Golden age clubs organized in Tamarack, Hill City, and the Cutler-Pine Lake area have on-going programs. Members meet regularly once a month—winter and summer—for fellowship, a program, and such other activities as they wish to plan. They drive and are driven from radii of 15 to 20 miles to attend. For many of them, it is the only time they see and are able to visit with friends and acquaintances of former days. On one occasion an elderly man met a former neighbor he had not seen for 50 years.

Activities of these Golden Age Clubs are described in more detail later in this report. (See pages 7-10.)

### **Beginnings Are Not Easy**

THE PRESENT PROGRAM did not suddenly blossom forth. Its development has not been easy. It proceeded in the face of cynicism and hostility in the early days and, more recently, under vocal opposition of some influential leaders.

Attempts to start a county-wide effort, made in 1954 and again in 1956, never really took hold and accomplishments were minimal, even though the organizational framework survived. (See chronology of developments—Appendix I, page 18.)

In 1959, the Minnesota Governor's Citizens Council on Aging decided to spend one-half its Federal grant for preparation for the White House Conference on Aging to see what could actually be accomplished on behalf of older people at the local level with local effort. This was to be in addition to the State's other work preceding the White House Conference.

Aitkin was one of the five counties selected by the State to test the idea. Bernard E. Nash, special consultant to the Governor's Council, went into the county to explore the situation. In his words, he found "its people generally depressed, overwhelmed with problems, and cynical about plans for the elderly." An exception was the deep interest of three individuals, Mrs. Malvick, Mr. Arens, and Robert Jornlin, director of the Welfare Department at that time. As Mr. Nash puts it, "Those three had only conviction and determination—no power, no money, and no big name to win them the following of the questioning leaders of the younger set in the community." But they believed the older people themselves wanted a program, and they set about to arouse concern and enlist leadership of persons in the upper age bracket.

On Mr. Nash's second visit, a proposal to establish a county committee on aging was put before the County Welfare Board. Each angle was explored, discussed and debated. Once assured it was to be a "program of the people," the Board voted unanimously to support the organization effort. With this support, the program really began to move.

### **Lessons Are Learned**

THE FINAL ORGANIZATION of the Aitkin County Citizens Committee on Aging in October 1959 demonstrated several of the ingredients essential to success in a cooperative community effort: first, the importance of professional guidance such as that given by the State consultant and the director of the local welfare department; second, the value of local leaders, determined and willing to work; third, the fact that when people become aroused

and motivated they can achieve a cooperative goal despite negativism and discouragement; and, lastly, the importance of support from a political or governmental structure.

Persons over 65 played a large part in the successful development of the Aitkin County program. Once aroused and given a channel for their energies, they put forth a great deal of effort. Always in the forefront were Mrs. Malvick and Mr. Arens.

Mrs. Malvick's interest was in seeing that older people had opportunities to live their individual lives, with dignity, with purpose, and with meaning. She worked long days and nights enlisting people, raising funds—almost dollar by dollar, supervising activities, and making plans. She has driven her car literally thousands of miles over the back country roads visiting leaders or just calling on older people. In every sense she has been the driving force behind the county activity.

Much of Mr. Arens' motivation stemmed from an early concern about the dreary old age of his own parents. As a very young boy he had been brought by his family to settle in the sparsely populated northern part of the county. There were few roads and the distance of ten to twelve miles between houses was a long trip by team. From sunup to sundown the settlers worked hard to establish a home and make a living. There was little energy left to visit a distant neighbor on Sunday. As the young people grew up, they would walk many miles to dances and parties. But as the parents became older, they became more and more isolated.

For years Mr. Arens was haunted by the memory of his aged parents alone in their farm home with no outside interests or activities. Long before 1959 he had decided that there ought to be places easily accessible to older people where they could enjoy mutual pursuits and the company of one another. When first he began to talk about this idea, very few people shared his concern; some thought him an impractical idealist. More than one influential member of the community said, "Let's forget this foolishness. The older people never had it so good."

However, when a County Committee was finally organized, Mr. Arens was elected its first chairman. Mrs. Malvick became the second chairman in 1961, and in 1963 she was succeeded by the present chairman, Mrs. Evelyn Carlson.

## A Senior Center Becomes the First Goal

THE FIRST GOAL of the Committee was to establish a center where older people could gather for fellowship, fun, and activities. Seven months after the Committee was created, the building for a senior center in Aitkin had been purchased and the title presented to the Aitkin County Board of Commissioners to be held in trust for all citizens of the county.

The \$4,000 necessary to buy and equip the Center was raised in small sums through the tireless efforts of the few leaders. An Easter drama under the direction of a local minister brought in \$700, and a white elephant sale earned \$300. The Lions Club raised \$300 through a pancake supper. Various kinds of benefits were held by the American Legion, the Council of Catholic Women, the Teachers Association, the Square Dance Club, and other social clubs and church groups. Small contributions came in from businesses, elected officials, farm organizations, the 4-H Clubs, and the Girl Scouts. Additional money was raised through memorial contributions, trading stamps, and benefits organized by the Committee itself.

The purchase price of the church basement, only two blocks from the center of the village of Aitkin, was \$2,500. Remodeling, flooring, plumbing, painting, and furnishings absorbed the remainder of the fund. To date, an estimated \$5,000 has been spent on the Center. It is now an attractive, functional building, 1,500 square feet in size, only partially below street level, with outside windows, and eight steps leading to the entryway. It is equipped with a small kitchen and men's and women's rest rooms. The Center opened for the first time in December of 1960 with 60 persons in attendance. The formal dedication, which took place the following May, attracted 200 visitors.

After plans for the Aitkin Center were well under way, the Blandin Foundation\* of Grand Rapids, Minnesota, contributed \$1,400 for operating costs. After almost three years of operation, the Committee has been able to retain a balance of \$900 from that

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\* A foundation created by the Blandin Paper Company to help serve the communities of Itasca County in which the industry is located. The grant to Aitkin is one of the few given to any other county.

contribution. This has been due to the financial and clerical assistance of the County Commissioners and the Welfare Board, careful management, money raising affairs, and small contributions of the senior citizens themselves.

The only paid helpers at the Center are the members of a small orchestra which plays for the Saturday night dances, and a hostess who is on duty every afternoon. She is paid \$100 a month from the county welfare budget and is under the county merit system. She has no responsibility for program, but is a kind of general manager responsible for upkeep, general decorum, and the comfort of members who attend.

Actual operation of the Center has been delegated by the County Committee to its members who live in the Aitkin district. Thus the program is the responsibility of the district subcommittee. Since there are no funds for paid specialized staff, this subcommittee must find volunteers to take charge of music, education, crafts, hobbies, games, picnics, and other activities.

Active, dedicated, volunteer leadership has made the Aitkin Senior Center a busy place as reflected in its Saturday night dances and day in and day out schedule of events.

### **Today, Golden Age Clubs Are Active**

THE CENTER IN AITKIN is, as indicated earlier, only one part of the present county-wide program for the elderly. Varied activities stem from the Golden Age Clubs in Tamarack, Hill City, and Culver.

At Tamarack (population 112), the club meets in an abandoned school house. Attendance at the monthly meeting runs from 40 to 90 members. Many come from McGregor, a neighboring town 10 miles away (population 283) and some from adjoining Carlton County. There is now a move on to establish a club and perhaps a center in McGregor.

Members of the Tamarack club want to do things for themselves and they have an agreement that there will be no long speeches at their meetings. They stage amateur shows, hold hobby exhibitions, have travel talks with slides shown by traveling members, circulate books from the library provided by the school, and put on special programs.

A traditional festive occasion in Tamarack is "Heyday," a holdover from the old-time celebration of the farmers at the end of haying season. In 1963 the Golden Age Club captured the prize for the best float in the "Heyday" parade. Planned and built by the members, it represented a covered wagon. Twenty members sat inside dressed in olden day costumes with one member playing an old-fashioned pump organ.

At one meeting, members voiced their distress that a few older persons in wheel chairs could not attend meetings because of the steps leading up to the building. At the next meeting one month later, the district vice-chairman was surprised to find a ramp, a little more than the width of a wheel chair, already built and in place. It had been constructed during the time between meetings by male members of the club. Standing by now at the top of the new ramp were two of these members holding a rope with a hook at the end, ready to pull up the wheel chairs of the handicapped persons who had been especially invited.

Another Golden Age Club is located in Hill City, which is almost a "ghost town" of under 500 people. Before the late 1920's it was a thriving community supported by nearby mines and a wooden box factory. After opportunities for employment dwindled, many residents left to make a living elsewhere. Houses became very cheap and during the depression of the thirties there was an in-migration of people seeking low cost shelter and garden space. Today there is another in-migration, both in Hill City and throughout the county. This time it brings persons, retired or about to retire, who wish to settle on one of the county's many lakes to enjoy fishing, hunting, and quiet, peaceful living.

The Hill City club meetings in the town's Grange Hall are the stellar attraction for the older people for miles around. Club activities are similar to those in Tamarack, with monthly programs, travel talks, picnics, hobby shows, socials, and participation in other community events.

The third club, in the more sparsely settled Cutler area (population under 50), is smaller but active. Its meeting place is the basement of a one room church called Pine Lake Chapel. Its members do not hesitate to tell of the importance of the club to them. It gives them a regular occasion to see and visit with their elderly neighbors scattered for many miles over that section of the

county. News of ill and homebound persons is exchanged and definite arrangements are made for visits to them during the month.

"Some of these disabled people sit day after day, week after week, in their lonely farm homes with few visitors except some of us from the Golden Age Club," said one member. "They pass their time piecing quilts, crocheting rugs, and whittling knitting needles and other objects from wood. If there were some sales outlets for these products, it would provide a little extra income and a great deal of incentive to the homebound elderly."

### **Older People Like the Program**

THE COUNTY COMMITTEE estimates, on the basis of local studies, that each year half the older people of Aitkin County participate in these senior activities in one way or another.

Mrs. Malvick and Mrs. Carlson keep in close touch with all the clubs and with many older people scattered over the county. One day they will call on a 93-year-old man living alone in a dilapidated old house on the edge of a lake and offer to bring him a clean pair of overalls if he will come and play his violin for the Saturday night dance. Another day, they will drop in on a 74-year-old woman, whose ancestors were the first settlers in the county, and who now finds these visits and the monthly meetings of the club the high points in a life centered around an invalid husband.

There is no doubt that the program means a great deal to many people. This is evident as story after story unfolds.

Mrs. G and her husband had been attending the Aitkin Senior Center prior to Mr. G's sudden death. Their daughter tells of the mother's severe depression and subsequent hospitalization after her bereavement. The friends from the Center kept in touch throughout. Finally, they persuaded her to return. Now she is a daily visitor and her daughter believes that the Center may have saved her mother from a mental institution.

A man in Aitkin, severely crippled with arthritis, now walks to the Center pushing his wheel chair ahead of him as support. He had been a regular Center attendant before his arthritis attack. After his release from the hospital, his landlady pushed him to the

Center in his chair. Later he learned to walk behind the chair with her beside him. Now he negotiates the distance alone. What he might have done without the friends and activities of the Center cannot be known, but there is reason to believe that what he found there has given him an incentive to get out again rather than to submit to loneliness and despair.

Another member at the Aitkin Center is a man with his right hand so severely palsied that it shakes constantly and almost violently. He was so self-conscious when he first came that he would hardly move from his chair in the corner. With encouragement from others, he now plays cribbage, dances, and participates in other activities.

Nelly T washes and irons for a living, but she spends a few hours every afternoon at the Center and dances there every Saturday night. She frankly says it is her only recreation and she doesn't know what she would do without it.

There are lonely bachelors who come to the Center each afternoon to get away from their meagerly furnished, unattractive boarding homes.

In Hill City, an elderly mother, whose children lived so far away they seldom came home, became so despondent she did not leave her house for four years. Her doctor feared she would have to be committed to a mental hospital. When the Golden Age Club was formed in Hill City, a special effort was made to get her to meetings. In a few months she became actively involved and is now an enthusiastic participant.

A number of doctors have recommended golden age activities to their patients. Whether by coincidence or otherwise there have been no commitments to mental institutions because of senility since the county program began.

Most of the county's older citizens have had little opportunity for much education or any pursuits except those necessary to make a living. They have been loggers, lumbermen, miners, or small farmers. The few with the most physical energy and educational background assume leadership roles in community affairs and provide most of the stimulation and guidance for the senior citizen program. To push the others into activities beyond their capabilities would, the leaders believe, mean discouragement and failure for the whole program.

## The Committee Has Legal Status

THE AITKIN COUNTY Citizens Committee on Aging is now firmly rooted in the county government structure, with a constitution and by-laws, and operating budget. Although its tap root strength comes from the Welfare Board, the Committee's program is broad and county-wide. Its purposes, as set forth in the constitution, are:

To study the needs of the aging and to take such actions as are necessary to help meet these needs;

To study the needs of other groups in the community to determine social needs and, if such needs exist, to work towards the meeting of these needs; and

To raise funds to finance the operation of the committee and its program.

The constitution provides for a committee of from 15 to 30 members appointed by the Aitkin County Welfare Board under the authority granted to it by Minnesota State law (see Appendix II, page 19). The constitution and by-laws (see Appendix III, page 20) are designed to encourage county-wide interest and participation and to prevent domination of the Committee by any one town or section of the county. There are five vice-chairmen, chosen one from each of the five commissioner districts, and each is responsible for the coordination of activities of the County Committee on Aging within his district. A chairman, a secretary, and a treasurer complete the list of officers.

One-third of the committee members are appointed each year by the Aitkin County Welfare Board from a slate of candidates nominated by a majority of the members of the Committee. Members serve for a period of three years and may be reappointed.

At present, the Committee has 20 members. All districts are represented, except one in the more remote southeastern part of the county. Local terrain tends to focus this district's transportation and activities toward a neighboring county.

Aitkin County leaders believe their organizational structure has worked well, and that it has resulted in a balanced representation from both political parties, from various religious and socio-economic groups, and from most parts of the county.

Today the Committee has stature and is considered an integral part of the county community. It is asked to send representatives to other community conclaves and takes part in all community drives and other civic affairs. It would be inaccurate to say that, even now, the Committee has the complete cooperation and support of every element of the community. The County Commissioners and the Welfare Board stand squarely behind the body which they, themselves, created. There are other persons, however, some quite influential in village governments, who still see little need for the Committee and have no great regard for its work.

### **Distances and Dollars Are Involved**

IN ORDER TO APPRECIATE and understand fully the accomplishments of the Aitkin County Committee, it may be helpful to know in more detail something of the special problems posed by the peculiar characteristics of Aitkin County itself. Statistical facts on its rural nature, lack of resources, low tax base, low individual income, and high public assistance load shed light on both its governmental and human problems.

Aitkin County is situated in the rural north central part of Minnesota approximately half way between Duluth and the Twin Cities. Its largest village is Aitkin with a population of about 1,800.

In the years between 1930 and 1940, the county population was around 14,000 to 15,000. Today, it has decreased to approximately 12,000 of whom over 1,800 are 65 years of age or older. In 1930, those over 65 made up approximately 7 percent of the population; 8 percent in 1940; 10 percent in 1950; and 15 percent in 1960. In the State of Minnesota and the United States as a whole, the ratio is less than 10 percent. In 30 years, the total population of Aitkin County decreased 17 percent while the proportion of older people increased 65 percent. The only county in Minnesota with a larger percentage of older people is Chisago with 16 percent.

The median family cash income in the county is \$3,064 a year. That for the State as a whole is \$5,573. Data prepared on Aitkin County in 1959 for the White House Conference on

Aging revealed that only 1.6 percent of its elderly residents had a yearly family cash income of over \$4,000. Half of the elderly were estimated to have a family cash income between \$1,000 and \$2,000, 27 percent less than \$1,000, and 3 percent no cash income at all.

In July, 1963, there were 467 persons, or a fourth of the county population over 65, receiving old age assistance. Half of them are between 75 and 85. For 117 of the 467, the assistance grants were supplements to low social security payments earned under the Old Age and Survivors Insurance program. The maximum payment, under law to public assistance recipients in Minnesota is \$71. The average monthly payment in Aitkin County is \$52. The average vendor payment for medical care to Aitkin County recipients of old age assistance is \$33.

Over \$500,000 was paid out in old age assistance in Aitkin County in 1962. Approximately 47 percent of it came from the Federal Government, 45 percent from the State, and 8 percent from county revenues. The county tax levy for welfare alone is 62 mills. The average for the State is 21 mills.

Aitkin County's total tax levy of 335 mills for all purposes is high when compared with that of 100 mills in many southern Minnesota counties. The principal reason is Aitkin County's limited tax base. It has practically no industry and only one-third of its land is privately owned. The largest portion of the remainder is land taken over by the county for delinquent taxes. In addition, 137 square miles are covered by lakes, and other large portions are State and national wild life preserves, forests, and parks.

It is estimated that nearly two-thirds of the older people live in the villages. The remainder live in the surrounding countryside. Housing for the elderly with low incomes is scarce and much of what is available is substandard.

Aitkin County has 57 townships. Its governing body is the County Board of Commissioners, composed of one member elected from each of the five commissioner districts. This County Board, plus 2 citizens of the county appointed by the State Commissioner of Public Welfare, makes up the County Welfare Board. The county public welfare staff consists of a director, 9 trained professional social workers, and 6 clerical and financial assistants.

The county public health unit is made up of a part-time public health officer (a local physician) and a full-time public health nurse, both appointed by the County Commissioners. There is a good 32-bed community hospital but no public health clinic.

In 1963 a 44-bed nursing home was added to the Aitkin Community Hospital, at a cost of \$421,000. The impetus and leadership for this needed facility came from the hospital's auxiliary board but the County Committee on Aging lent its support and helped to raise the local funds necessary to match the grant from the Federal Hill-Burton program.

The County now has foster homes for older people licensed by the Welfare Department. In addition, it has placed 50 recipients of old-age assistance in room and board facilities. The County has no organized homemaker service but whenever the need for a homemaker or home-aide becomes known to the welfare staff a competent person is found, placed in the home, and supervised during her period of service.

### **Much Remains To Be Done**

THE PROGRESS MADE in Aitkin County in four years in the face of what seemed insurmountable difficulties is gratifying and almost phenomenal to those who were involved in the beginning. Some of those leaders are now being called on for consultation by other counties, seeking help in establishing their own programs.

The county-wide activities of the County Committee are increasing and reaching more and more people. The Senior Center in Aitkin is rapidly becoming a focal point for other community enterprises. The Girl Scouts, the hospital auxiliary, and the mental health association use the building for their regular meetings. The local association for retarded children is now using the Center facilities as a school for retarded children during the morning hours. Because of the Center's increasing importance, it now seems that citizens from every segment of the county would come to its support should its future existence be threatened.

The Committee recognizes, however, that its job has really only begun because there are still so many unmet needs.

An activity on which the Committee is now expending time and energy is a drive for some low cost public housing units

for older people. Finding a suitable residence for recipients of old-age assistance becomes more and more difficult. Not only are houses scarce, but many of the rental quarters available in both the villages and the country are decidedly substandard. Kerosene lamps, wood stoves, leaking roofs, water pumped by hand, and outdoor privies are common.

During the past winter one aged man, too weak to build a fire in his wood stove, was brought to the hospital with frozen feet. Many months and many welfare dollars were spent before he could walk again. An older couple were overcome by fumes from a faulty chimney in a small substandard apartment, and the wife died.

The Committee recognizes that many elderly persons would be reluctant to exchange their present homes, however poor, and their nearby friends for a more comfortable abode some distance away. For this reason, it would like to create a county housing authority able to receive Federal public housing funds to construct small housing projects in several villages not too far removed from the places where the older people now live. However, Minnesota law does not permit counties to apply for Federal housing grants or loans. Only a "city, village, or borough" may do so.

No village has yet taken a step toward any public housing and the council of Aitkin, the largest village, is strongly opposed. Consequently, the Committee on Aging tried in the 1963 session of the State legislature to have the law amended to give all Minnesota counties authority to sponsor public housing. There was opposition to this broad approach and the bill failed to pass.

At the next session of the legislature, the Committee will seek special legislation for Aitkin County alone. In the meantime, desire for low rent housing for the elderly is mounting in McGregor and Hill City. The Aitkin County Citizens Committee on Aging has an active subcommittee on housing which is working determinedly to get housing by one means or another.

Other goals, which the Committee would like to reach in the not too distant future, include:

- A full-time, professional coordinator to recruit and train volunteer workers and organize and strengthen the program throughout the county.

- A senior center in McGregor.
- Golden Age Clubs in McGrath and Palisade.
- Two hobby shops to sell articles made by senior citizens to the tourist trade.
- A part-time activities director for the Aitkin Senior Center.
- The building of a superstructure over the present Center building.

Aitkin County recognizes that its needs are different from those in an urban area. It realizes all too well the limitations of its financial resources. It has accomplished a great deal in the past four years with very little money, through its determination, energy, and a great amount of community support. Hopes are high that, with time, it can accomplish a great deal more.

### **Epilogue 1967**

After the legislation to provide low cost housing was defeated in the 1963 State legislature, the Aitkin County committee revised its strategy and continued to press for action. It succeeded in getting a bill passed in 1965 authorizing counties to establish housing authorities, but a rider was attached requiring approval of the proposition by a referendum of the voters in each county. The committee recognized that facts on the housing situation would have to be obtained and presented to the voters of Aitkin County if they were to be fully informed about the issues. Consequently, the committee applied for and received an Office of Economic Opportunity grant to conduct a housing survey in Aitkin County.

Mrs. Oscar Malvick once again took over the leadership. As chairman of the Aitkin County Committee on Aging, she and eight other team captains gave freely of their time and energy to direct the survey. Fifty-three people over 60 with incomes below \$3,000 a year were hired at \$1.50 an hour, plus 7½ cents per mile, to compile the data. The final results showed that in Aitkin County, 27 percent of the people 65 and over were still cutting wood for cooking and heating, 22 percent had no running water, and 33 percent had no hot water in the home.

In September, 1966, the question of establishing a public housing authority for the county was put to a vote of the people.

It carried by a five to two margin. On October 4, 1966, the county commissioners appointed a five-man housing authority, all members of the County Committee on Aging. These commissioners have now been sworn in and they are taking the first necessary steps to make low-rent public housing a reality in Aitkin County.

Other activities have been continued and expanded. The once-a-month dance at the Center is now scheduled for twice a month, and attendance has increased so much it had to be moved to a bigger building. Older people continue to come from as far as 50 miles away to the dance. A turkey dinner has become an annual tradition, and the last one was attended by over 400 people.

Over \$1,600 has been added to the building fund to expand the facilities. Hobby sales continue to grow. The Over-60 Choir sings weekly at both nursing homes. Cards and calls go to the sick from the Golden Age Clubs. The county committee is now assuming payment of utilities for the Center. The program for mentally retarded is a going concern.

Aitkin County continues to be a center for information and inspiration about activities for older people for neighboring counties and communities. Members of the committee make frequent appearances on TV, radio, in the press, and before groups inside and outside the State.

Aitkin County has still not solved all of the problems of its older people. But the gains it has already made bode well for the future. The county still stands as an example of how dedicated, determined leadership can achieve results—even in the face of financial limitations and public resistance.

## APPENDIX I

### Chronology

THE HISTORY of the movement in Aitkin County in brief is as follows:

November, 1954—Aitkin County was the scene of one of the fifty-three local hearings on the problems of older people conducted throughout Minnesota by an interim committee of the State legislature. Shortly afterwards, an "Over Sixty Club" was formed by the American Legion Auxiliary of Aitkin. The club had some activity about once a month until the establishment of the present Center in 1960.

1956—Another county-wide meeting led to the organization of Chapter No. 1 of Senior Citizens International. This Chapter continued to exist until the formal organization of the present committee.

1959—Aitkin County was selected by the Minnesota Governor's Citizens Committee on Aging as one of the five counties in which demonstration work preliminary to the White House Conference on Aging would be carried on.

October, 1959—The Aitkin County Citizens Committee on Aging was organized.

November, 1959—A drive for funds to finance a senior center for older people began.

May, 1960—A building for the Center was purchased.

December, 1960—The Center was opened.

May, 1961—The Center was formally dedicated.

1960-61—Golden Age Clubs were organized in Tamarack, Hill City, Cutler and Palisade. (The Palisade Club has since been disbanded.)

1963—An unsuccessful attempt was made to get legislative action to permit the creation of a county housing authority which could apply for Federal assistance to build low rent public housing for older people.

1964—Efforts are continuing to obtain housing authority.

## **APPENDIX II**

### **Legal Authority for the County Committee**

#### **MINNESOTA STATUTES 256.01**

##### **Subdivision 8**

Any county or group of counties acting through its or their welfare board or boards may designate a county services coordinator who shall coordinate services and activities, both public and private, that may further the well being of the aging and meet their social, psychological, physical, and economic needs. The coordinator shall perform such other duties as the board may direct to stimulate, demonstrate, initiate, and coordinate local public, private, and voluntary services within the county dedicated to providing the maximum opportunities for self-help, independence, and productivity of individuals concerned. The board may appoint a citizens advisory committee which shall advise the coordinator and the board on the development of services and perform such other functions at the county level as are prescribed for the Governor's Citizens Council at the State level. The members shall serve without compensation. As amended Laws 1961, c. 466, 4.

## **APPENDIX III**

### **Constitution and By Laws**

#### **Aitkin County Citizens Committee on Aging**

##### **I. Organization**

Sub. 1. There is by ratification of this document, organized an Aitkin County Citizens Committee on Aging, herein, referred to as the Committee.

##### **II. Purpose**

Sub. 1. The purpose of this organization is to study the needs of the Aging and to take such actions as are necessary to help meet these needs.

Sub. 2. To study the needs of other groups in the community to determine social needs and if such needs exist, to work towards the meeting of these needs.

Sub. 3. To raise funds to finance the operation of the Committee and its programs.

##### **III. Membership**

Sub. 1. The Committee shall consist of residents of Aitkin County and shall be limited to a maximum of 30 persons and a minimum of 15.

Sub. 2. To become a member of the Committee, a person shall be nominated by a majority of the members of the Committee to the Aitkin County Welfare Board who may formally appoint such persons as a member and he shall become a member upon such appointment.

Sub. 3. Membership shall be divided, as nearly as possible among the five commissioner districts.

Sub. 4. Membership on the Committee shall be for a term of three years, after which a member may be reappointed.

Sub. 5. A member may resign from the Committee by submitting a resignation in writing to the chairman, or to the vice chairman representing his commissioner district.

Sub. 6. If a member is absent for three consecutive meetings without good cause, as approved by the executive committee, he shall be considered to have resigned.

#### **IV. Officers**

Sub. 1. There shall be a chairman, five vice chairmen, a secretary, and a treasurer.

- a. The five vice chairmen shall be elected one from each commissioner district.
- b. Officers shall be elected for a period of one year from the membership of the Committee.

Sub. 2. Officers shall be elected by a majority vote of members present and voting at the annual meeting, installed at the first meeting following election.

Sub. 3. No officer shall be re-elected to the same office more than one time.

#### **V. Meetings**

Sub. 1. The Committee shall meet at least once every three months, subject to call more frequently.

Sub. 2. There shall be annual meetings held in March of each year to receive reports of the officers and chairmen of the committees, to elect officers, and to conduct such other business as may come before it.

Sub. 3. A quorum shall consist of 50% of the membership, excepting those excused for good cause.

Sub. 4. If the total membership of the Committee shall be less than 15 persons, the only business that may be considered at a regular or annual meeting shall be the nomination of new members.

#### **VI. Ownership of Property**

Sub. 1. The Committee may own or lease such property, both personal and real, as would be consistent with its purpose.

Sub. 2. Property so owned shall be in the name of the Aitkin County Citizens Committee on Aging.

Sub. 3. Disposition of property valued at less than \$100.00 may be determined by a majority vote of quorum present and voting at a regularly called meeting.

Sub. 4. Property valued in excess of \$100.00 may be disposed of by a  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority vote of a quorum present and voting at a regularly called meeting, subject to the approval of the County Board of Aitkin County.

#### **VII. Finance**

Sub. 1. Funds may be secured by receiving contributions, revenues from property owned, and any other sources commonly used by non-profit service organizations.

Sub. 2. Funds received shall be the responsibility of the treasurer.

Sub. 3. Funds may be dispersed only upon authority of the Committee.

### **VIII. Changes**

Sub. 1. This constitution may be changed by a  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority vote of the members of the Committee, either in person at a meeting or by signature, after the change has been read at three previous meetings held at least 30 days from each other, subject to ratification by the Aitkin County Board.

### **IX. By Laws**

Sub. 1. By laws shall be enacted to carry out the provisions of the constitution.

Sub. 2. By laws may be changed by a  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority vote of a legally constituted quorum, at any regular meeting, subject to ratification by the Aitkin County Board.

### **X. Dissolution**

Sub. 1. This Committee shall be dissolved upon a  $\frac{3}{4}$  majority vote of the members.

Sub. 2. This Committee shall be considered dissolved, if after due notification to the members of the Committee by the chairman, a quorum shall not be present at four consecutively called monthly meetings or six consecutive months, whichever shall be the longer period of time. This dissolution shall be effective the first day of the month following conditions outlined in this section.

Sub. 3. Upon dissolution, all assets shall become the property of the Aitkin County Board or a duly constituted successor organization as approved by the Aitkin County Board.

### **XI. Ratification**

Sub. 1. This constitution and by laws shall be considered ratified when signed by  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the approved members of the Aitkin County Committee on Aging.

### **XII.**

Sub. 1. The Committee shall not afford pecuniary gain, incidentally or otherwise, to the members and no part of the net income or net earnings of this corporation shall inure to the benefits of any members or individuals.

### **By-Laws**

1. To be considered a resident of Aitkin County a person must have an established residence here.

2. At no time shall membership on the Committee exceed 40% from any one commissioner district.

3. The chairman shall preside over the meetings of the Committee; however, he may delegate this duty. Roberts Rules of Order shall prevail.

4. The chairman is responsible for the overall coordination of the Committee functions.

5. The chairman may call special meetings as he deems necessary, with the advice of the executive committee.

6. The chairman shall call a regular meeting at least once every month.

7. The chairman shall appoint an auditing committee of three persons, not members of the Committee on Aging.

8. The chairman, with the approval of the Committee, may appoint such committees and committee chairmen as from time to time shall be necessary.

9. The chairman shall appoint a ways and means committee and a ways and means committee chairman, such committee to be a permanent committee.

10. The chairman shall have such other duties as designated by the Committee from time to time.

11. The vice chairmen shall be responsible to coordinate the activities of the Committee on Aging within their commissioner districts.

12. In the absence of the chairman, the vice chairman shall assume the responsibility of the chairman. The order of succession shall be by numbered commissioner district.

13. The vice chairman may appoint any committees and committee chairmen as he deems necessary in carrying out his duties in his district. These committees and committee chairmen need not be members of the Aitkin County Citizens Committee on Aging.

14. The vice chairmen shall have such other duties as determined by the Committee from time to time.

15. The secretary shall keep minutes of each meeting.

16. The secretary shall have such duties as determined by the Committee from time to time.

17. There shall be an historian and scrapbook chairman, appointed by the chairman.

18. The treasurer shall be the fiscal officer for the Committee. He shall receive and deposit funds, maintain financial records, and, only under the direction of the Committee, disperse funds.

19. The treasurer shall have such other duties as determined by the Committee from time to time.

20. The executive committee should consist of chairman, five vice chairmen, secretary, treasurer, publicity chairman, chairman of ways and means committee, representative of the welfare staff. A majority of the executive committee shall constitute a quorum.

21. The executive committee shall meet at the call of the chairman, but at least once a month, and at least ten days before the regular meeting of the Aitkin County Citizens Committee on Aging.

22. Membership of the Aitkin County Committee on Aging, as appointed by the Aitkin County Welfare Board, except those who have resigned, shall constitute the charter membership of the Aitkin County Citizens Committee on Aging, and shall serve for one, two or three years, as determined by lot.

23. Within thirty days after the ratification of the constitution, the chairman of the Aitkin County Committee on Aging shall call a meeting, and officers as outlined herein shall be elected upon nomination from the floor.

24. At least one month prior to the annual meeting, the chairman shall appoint a nominating committee.

#### **Ratified By:**

(On the original Constitution and By Laws this document is ratified by twenty-four signatures of Aitkin County Citizens Committee members.)

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