The caption under the yearbook photo reads: “An earnest, energetic fellow is Bill, Who in mechanics has acquired great skill.”

That appeared in the 1912 yearbook, “Shock,” and William Lindberg was one of the 23 Northwest School of Agriculture graduates that year.

Still hearty and in good health, Lindberg enjoys reminiscing about his days at the School, when only a few buildings stood, roads were unpaved, and chill winds swept the treeless campus.

He remembers, “We planted the trees now on campus. They were brought from Fosston, and we spent many hours over the years planting them. We planted them a little too thick, but we were afraid they might die out. We made 10 cents an hour doing it, good money for students in those days. The girls planted a few, too, so they could say they helped.”

Lindberg was born in Waseca County, but in 1904 the family moved to a homestead in Red Lake County near where Oklee is today, known then as the Red Lake Indian Reservation. “My dad was a teacher, but it was hard to support a growing family on $45 a month. He went to the land office in Crookston and filed his claim. You had to live on the land three years and then pay the government $1.25 an acre. The land is still in the family; my sister lives on the place.”

The Lindbergs first lived in a log cabin on their homestead. Later a frame house was built. The outbuildings, of which one remains, were of logs. “It was much different then. There were no roads, no schools or churches or stores. There was no Oklee. All the land had to be cleared of timber by hand.”

Bill and his two brothers and six sisters attended school in buildings that were usually one-room deserted places where “bachelors” had lived. Students sat on benches of rough planks. “We were required to go to school 40 days of the year then,” he reflects.

“My dad always said the Ag School gave people the training needed for life in the Red River Valley. We boarded at the school and only went to town if we really needed something. We got home at Christmas. There were three buildings on campus, and we went to class from 8 to 5:30 for six months. We had Sunday and Monday off.”

A young C. G. Selvig was school director then, and 13 faculty were on the teaching staff. The class of 1912 participated in men’s and women’s basketball, they had a class play, and there was a school band. Lindberg continued to play for dances throughout northern Minnesota in later years. A special song was written for the class of 1912, “Song of Farewell,” by faculty member N. E. Schwartz. Lindberg still has the sheet music.

In 1916 Lindberg married Helga Lindfors, another 1912 graduate. “She gave a baking powder biscuit demonstration at commencement,” Bill remembers. “They were good.”

Following graduation, Bill attended college at the University of Minnesota for one year, worked for the Northwest Experiment Station for one year, and then worked as creamery manager at Gonvick and Gary, Minnesota and Minto, North Dakota. He managed the Warren Co-op Creamery for seven years, and then became field manager for Land O’Lakes for 24 years until his retirement from business. He now spends much of his time as director of handcrafts for men at the Senior Citizens’ Center in Warren. He’s lived alone in Warren since his wife died.

“Oh, I have plenty to keep me busy,” Bill declares. “I work at the Center, and I went to Norway five years ago.” He’s interested in genealogy and compiled a history of the Lindberg family ancestry. “I’ve been in dairy work all my life, and many of my ancestors were involved in that, too.”
Lindberg’s son, Bill, Jr., follows the family custom. He’s a government dairy inspector in Chicago. A second son, Lowell, lives in Sioux City, Iowa, where he’s a postman and operates a specialty shop. Both sons attended the School of Agriculture for a time, as did Lindberg’s two brothers.

“I’ve seen a lot of changes. I remember well the muddy streets of Crookston. I saw horses up to their knees in gumbo. I’ve seen the Red River Valley become a sugar beet land. The Experiment Station had a lot of influence in that.”

Agriculture is the backbone of the country, Lindberg says, and the well-being of the nation depends on how agriculture fares. He speculates that more and more young people will return to farming. “A lot of people are getting tired of the big city. They’re thinking about farming more, especially in southern Minnesota. I hope we’ll see more livestock. It’s foolish for farmers to go to town to buy eggs and milk and meat.”

The trees on campus are large now, and many buildings have been added since Bill Lindberg first attended classes in 1910. “Those trees were tiny little saplings when we put them in the ground, and look at them now. That’s a sign of progress, isn’t it?”