

Erick and Agnes Ness

By Leo Ness

Erick Nesje was born on the family farm in Nesjestrand, Norway, in 1877, to parents Peder and Ingebord Nesje. Five children were born to this family. The eldest, Lars, inherited the family farm, as was customary in Norway.

Work being scarce at home, at the age of 17 Erick immigrated to the United States. He temporarily settled in Bayfield, Wisconsin, in 1894. Erick worked on farms, in a copper mine, and also fished on Lake Superior. In the early 1900s, Erick became a U.S. citizen and changed his last name to Ness.



Agnes and Erick Ness with, from left, Carl, Leo and Ragna

In the spring of 1906, Erick came to Alaska, settling in Petersburg, which became his permanent home. At first he worked and fished for the local cannery. He obtained land and built a cabin on the hill north of the present Icicle cannery. It became known as Ness Point.

In 1908, Erick started logging at Muddy River. Using a steam donkey for power, this developed into a prosperous business. Many places north and south of Petersburg were logged. By 1918, the difficulty Erick had in obtaining material caused the shutdown of the logging operation.

In the winter of 1909, Erick married Agnes Anderson. They built a large permanent home on the

land where the cabin used to be. Three children were born to this marriage: Ragna, Leo and Carl.

After logging ended, Erick started fish buying and processing. He also began a local insurance company. He owned three different boats, each connected to various businesses. They were the *Ragna*, the *Lovera*, and the *Harder*.

In the early years, Erick was very active in the civic affairs of Petersburg. He served on the city council as mayor, and served on committees for the water dam, the first hospital, city floats, the Public Cold Storage, and Blind Slough Power. He was also very active in Sons of Norway Lodge, especially with the building of the lodge hall and the store, which became the present The Trading Union.

After several years of suffering from cancer, Agnes Ness died in 1925.

In later years, after the children had grown and left home, Erick married Anne Fosse. He kept up the insurance business and had several rental units. They had beautiful lawns and gardens at the old home on Ness Point. The home site is now Eagle's Roost Park.

In 1954 at the age of 77, Erick Ness died. He was a true

Alaska pioneer.

All three of the Ness children were born in Petersburg, at the home at Ness Point, and graduated from Petersburg schools. Before the children started school, however, the family spent a lot of time in logging camps.

Summer vacations were busy times picking berries, fishing trout and camping at Sandy Beach. As the boys grew older, they spent a lot of time hunting. In high school, all three played basketball and took part in school plays.

Erick and Agnes' daughter, Ragna, was born in 1911. On her birthday, January 31, 1925, her mother, Agnes, passed away, after a long illness with cancer.

Erick and Agnes Ness cont'd

After high school, Ragna married and moved to Seattle, where she and her husband, Pedar Magnus Ness, made their permanent home. They have one daughter, four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Ragna passed away August 7, 2003.

Carl went to the California School of Fine Arts in California. After serving in the U.S. Merchant Marine during World War II, he moved to New Mexico. He was a design draftsman for Dynaelctron Corporation at White Sands, New Mexico. Carl was a well-known artist in the Southwest. He and his wife, Frances Marie, have three children and four grandchildren. Carl died June 15, 2003.

Leo Ness was born in 1912 and has always made Petersburg his home.

He started seining and fish packing during high school vacations and later started longlining.

Leo enlisted in the Navy in 1942 and was

honorably discharged in September of 1945.

While in the service, Leo met and married his wife, Ruth. They returned to Petersburg, built a home on Gauffin Street, and Leo resumed fishing. He owned the seine boat *Libby 8* for many years.

Leo started fishing at the age of 15 and retired at the age of 75. His hobbies are gardening, hunting, picking berries, reading and visiting old friends. He is a charter member of the Pioneers of Alaska, life member of BPOE, and belongs to the VFW and American Legion.

Leo and Ruth have two sons, Steve and Jonathan. Steve and his wife, Joyce, live in Seattle, where Steve is the head finance officer for the Veterans Affairs office. They have two children.

Jonathan and his wife, Jeanette, have three children and remain in Petersburg. Jonathan is Petersburg's postmaster.



Erick Ness

