

## Gunder Martinson, 86, Retires From Job As School Custodian

For two generations, Gunder Martinson has been on duty as custodian of the Grinnell high school. He has kept the halls swept, the clocks regulated and, what was most important to him, the flag raised. This year, Mr. Martinson, 86 years old and a great grandfather, is laying down his broom. He is retiring from what has been to him a life work.

Mr. Martinson through the years, has become almost an integral part of the school over which he has exercised a proprietary interest. "He has been more than faithful to his job and to the school," says Superintendent B. C. Holmes.

Gunder has cheerfully scolded the kids for tracking mud into the school, then in almost the same breath asked them about their fathers, whom he remembers from the same muddy-footed stage. The kids love it. They all call him by his first name, and six years ago, when he reached his 80th birthday, they threw a surprise party for him in the school gym. They gave him a pipe, some copper wire, and a war bond. He is still a little surprised by it, but these gifts remain among his proudest personal possessions.

Erect and looking much less than his 86 years, Gunder has relinquished few of his duties to the younger men on the custodians' staff. He would still willingly tackle the job of climbing a 20-foot ladder to change the light bulbs in the assembly hall, or climb out to wash third-floor windows. "But we'd a little rather he didn't," says Supt. Holmes.

Since he went to work at Grinnell high June 8, 1917, Gunder has never missed more than a few days of work off and on, and then only for something like a cold, and once for a week, because of a wrenched knee.

He has had few interests outside of his family and his school. He has regularly arrived at the school building between 5 and 6 a. m., bringing his lunch with him and working until after 5 in the afternoon. One Sunday afternoon Supt. Holmes, who came to the Grinnell position two years ago, unexpectedly met Gunder in a school corridor. To Holmes' surprise look Gunder replied: "Oh, I usually come in on Sundays, just to check up on things."

But Gunder's special concern is the school flag, which he has always raised before classes and lowered at the end of the day. Once, when the chain on the flag jammed and it could not be lowered for several days, he worried constantly.

"What kind of a citizen will people think I am?" he asked. Born in Oslo, Norway, April 4, 1883, Gunder has legally been a citizen of this country for only 13 years, but he has thought of himself as such for much longer. His first papers, which he took out some 60 years ago, burned in a burning camp fire, and for a long time he did not get around to straightening out his application and completing the routine of becoming a citizen.

Even when very young, at home in Norway, Gunder felt the lure of America and the world. His father helped farm one of Norway's large estates, and for a time Gunder served as a coachman on the landlord's carriage. But the wanderlust that held him for the next 40 years began to stir.

While still a boy in his teens, Gunder was allowed to ship as a cabin boy on an uncle's sailing boat. Before he was 20, he had seen all the great ports of the Baltic, England, France, Ireland, and Germany. He had stopped at many of the exotic Mediterranean cities: Marseilles, Constantinople, Cadix. These days still hold very vivid memories for him.

When he was 20, he came to the United States to join a sister who had been here for several years and got work as a laborer. When news came from Norway that their father had died, they decided that the sister should be the one to return and inherit what was left. Gunder has seen none of his Norway relatives since, but through the Red Cross he got word that they had survived the Nazi occupation and the aftermath of the late war.

After his sister left, Gunder settled for awhile in Michigan, where he was first a lumberjack and then a worker in the iron mines.

"I always thought you should try a lot of things to see how you liked them," he says, so after his stay in Michigan he went to Wisconsin and home, staked 80 acres of land. Home, instead involved clearing of timber, and his lumberjack training came in handy, but Gunder decided to move back to the Michigan mines.

In 1891 he came to Grinnell to renew his acquaintance with Mary Emerson, whom he had known in Norway and who lived here with her parents on their farm. They were married in Michigan June 11 the same year. Gunder and Mrs. Martinson, who will be 85 Sept. 20, thus have passed their 38th wedding anniversary and are looking forward to their next one.

In 1893 the Martinsons returned to Iowa, and Gunder farmed for awhile near Grinnell. Those were the horse-and-buggy days, and Gunder decided to try his hand as a buggy upholsterer for the Spaulding buggy factory here, one of the largest in the world. He stayed with Spaulding's for 11 years, and next for two years he worked on the assembly line of the Grinnell washing machine factory.

It was then that Gunder stopped looking around, for he found the work that has held him for 32 years, as Grinnell high custodian. He has worked under several superintendents, including the late Eugene M.

Henely, for whom the gym was named in the new building erected in 1921.

The Martinsons have six living children, one daughter died in 1918, 13 grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. Three of the grandchildren fought in World War II and were to Gunder a great source of pride. "My sons fought in the first war, too," he adds.

Gunder's great and good friend is 76-year-old Tom Carter, retired junior high custodian, with whom he has long been accustomed to sit in the city park on warm summer evenings and talk about the old days. From the park, they can look across to the school, "to see that it's still there."

The two men always used to cack together, and one teacher named them the "Gout Dass" boys because of their constant companionship. Another always called them "the boys."

With the annual turn-over of students and teachers, Gunder has sometimes had a little difficulty getting them all straight in the beginning of each year. One fall day, long after classes were over, a girl came to ask him to open a classroom for her. Patiently, he explained that students didn't belong there at that hour and she'd have to ask the teacher for what she wanted. The girl left without explanation.

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but Gunder still chuckles over his learning the next day that she was a new teacher who had misplaced her keys.

For many years one of Gunder's chief delights has been going to Des Moines for the Iowa State Fair, and often his annual vacation has coincided with State Fair time. This year, though, he started his two weeks' off Aug. 1, ready for the final short period of work now before he becomes retired "proprietor" of his beloved school.

Monday, December 3, 1962

## Gunder Martinson, Dies Saturday; Services Tuesday

Gunder Martinson, 86, died Saturday morning in Grinnell at the home of his daughter, Martha Martinson, where he had been residing.

Mr. Martinson will be remembered by many as the custodian for many years at the old Center high school building.

Funeral services will be held at 1:30 p.m. Tuesday from the Smith Funeral Home with the Rev. Robert Dewey, pastor of the Congregational church, officiating. Organ music will be provided by Mrs. Rhee Auman.

In charge of flowers will be Mrs. Gene Martinson and Mrs. Henry Schultz. Serving as pallbearers will be Robert Dixon, William Dixon, Gene Martinson, Robert Martinson, Louis Martinson, and Henry Schultz. Interment will be in Hazelwood cemetery.

The son of Charles and Martha Larson Martinson, he was born Apr. 4th, 1863, in Oslo, Norway. He was baptized and confirmed in the Lutheran faith in Norway.

In 1880, he moved to the United States where he was united in marriage with Marge Emerson at Champion, Mich. To this union were born five daughters and two sons: Martha Martinson of Grinnell, Albert Martinson of Newton, Mrs. J. F. (Edna) Felsick of Tama, George Martinson of Iowa City, Mrs. W. E. (Irene) Dixon of Marshalltown, Mrs. H. E. L. E. Schultz of Sheridan township, and Mabel Martinson, deceased.

Other survivors include 16 grandchildren, 30 great grandchildren, and a sister, Mrs. Martha Thors of Norway.

He was succeeded in death by his wife, Marge, on June 11, 1953, three brothers and three sisters, and his daughter, Mabel, in 1918.