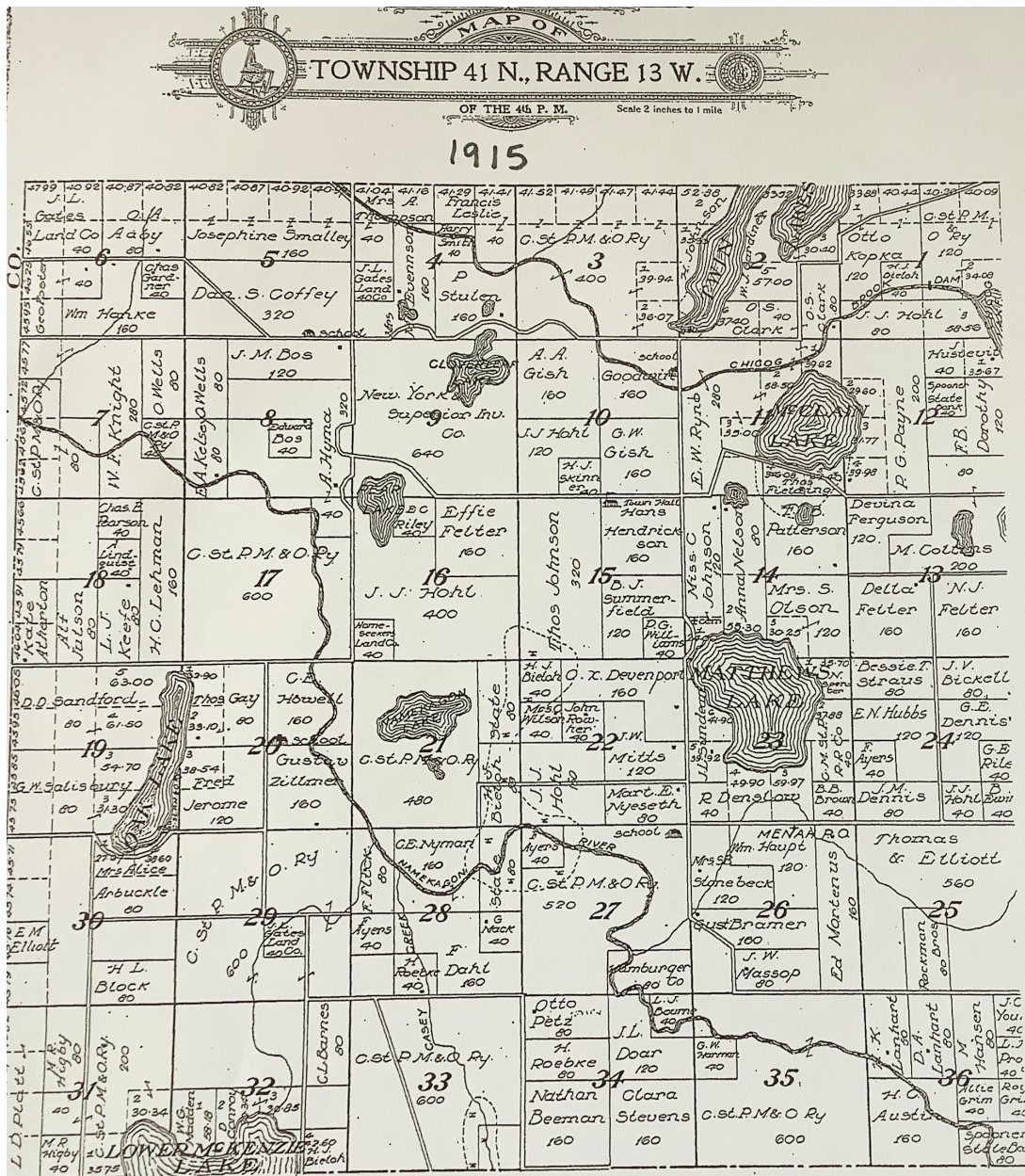


# Chicog-Then and Now for January, 2026

JoAnn Malek

Wisconsin was the first place in the WORLD to designate a numbered highway system! I wasn't sure this statement could be true until I found it repeated on the Wisconsin Highways website. Knowledgeable highway officials must have checked it out, right?

It was in 1917 that the Wisconsin Highway Commission laid out a system of numbered state highways. There were 5,000 miles in the initial State Trunk Highway System. Currently there are 12,000 miles. Trunk lines were numbered in order of their length, every highway number containing two digits. Michigan, Iowa and then Minnesota were the next states to adopt numbered roadways.

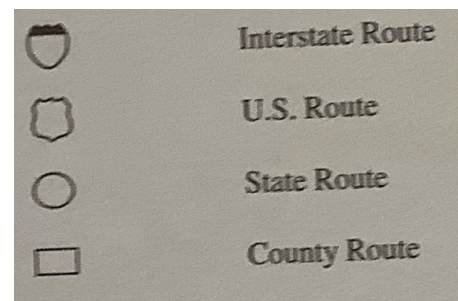


Our early Chicog neighbors would drive horse and wagon through field and forest without the need of roads, according to what grandma Etta May Stoneback told her granddaughter. “There wasn’t much brush. If the wagon got stuck, riders were called on to climb out and push.”

Already a network of trails connected the many Native American villages throughout the territory. Some of our roads may follow those trails. Others developed according to the topography, I suppose. Roads wound around area lakes and rivers. I’m sure there were many jots and turns, like the ‘devil’s elbow’ on F west of K. Have to wonder where that name came from.

Beginning in the 1890’s, with the advent of the ‘good roads movement’ trails were given colorful and descriptive names. Highway K was called the Old Green and White Trail. Another nearby road was dubbed Old Eleven. Though numbered routes are more efficient, some folks have been sad to lose the early, more colorful road names.

Through decades of repair and upgrading highways have been straightened. Each county route is now assigned a letter, shown in a rectangle on road signs. Wisconsin state route signs use a number in an oval. U.S. routes have been designated with numbers since 1926, with east-west roads even and north-south roads odd. State route 77 is part of this system.



In 1944 President Roosevelt presented to congress the concept of an interstate highway system. Between 1959-1969 more than three-fourths of the Wisconsin Interstate roads were built. Routes in this network are designated by a number preceded by an I.

Another highway innovation, the use of recycled concrete in road construction, was pioneered in Wisconsin on I-94 west of Eau Claire. This was an extension of the process used to recycle bituminous surfaces starting in 1979 - in which Wisconsin has also led the nation.

I’m not sure about the rest of the world, but numbered highway routes have taken over the U.S. thanks to the concept developed by early Wisconsin highway officials.

**Congratulations to Katy Larson**, Chicog bibliodragon librarian and the library research consultant for this column. Katy has been nationally recognized in 2025 for her work in connecting seniors to library services and community resources.

**Walkabout pot luck** gatherings will meet weekly throughout the winter. Join your Chicog neighbors, walk, chat, play games, add pieces to a puzzle, enjoy lunch. Enjoy this close-to-home place to get away.

**Do you have stories** to tell about Chicog-Then?  
I'd like to listen. Call or text me at (612) 250-0301.

***Thank you for reading Chicog-Then and Now***

Town Website: [www.townofchicog.com](http://www.townofchicog.com)

### **IMPORTANT JANUARY DATES**

Thursday 1/8, 10:30-12, Bibliodragon bookmobile, town hall

(Bookmobile routes are cancelled when there's a  
"feels like" temperature of 20 degrees or lower)

Wednesday 1/14, 6pm, monthly Chicog meeting

Wednesdays 1/14&28, Namekagen Transit Service

Wednesday 1/28, 10:30-12, Books&Bread, Beaverbrook

Thursdays 10:30-2:30, Weekly Walkabout pot lucks, town hall