

Andrew and Margaret Solga

Their Sons: Chuck, Art, Bill and Dick

Andrew Albert Solga

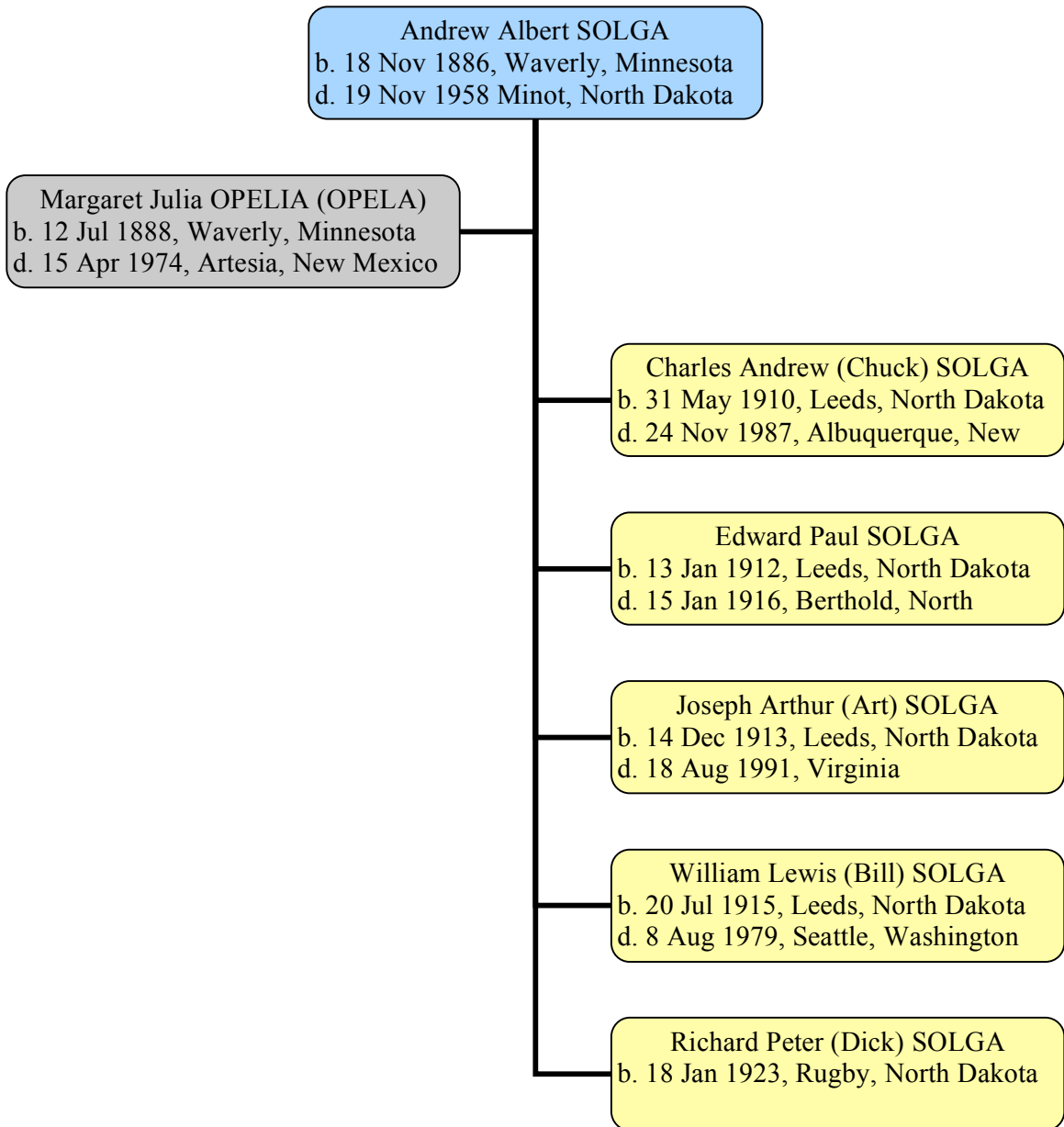
b. 18 Nov 1886, Waverly, Minnesota
d. 19 Nov 1958, Minot, North Dakota
m. 24 May 1909, Browerville, Minnesota

Margaret Julia Opelia (Opela)

b. 12 Jul 1888, Waverly, Minnesota
d. 15 Apr 1974 Artesia, New Mexico



Wedding 24 May 1909



Andrew (born 1886) lived in Waverly, Minnesota until age 4, after which he grew up on the family farm near Browerville. He was the eldest of nine children born to Rochus and Margaretha Solga. He completed 6th grade before focusing his time on the family farm. He left home at age 19 to work for the Great Northern Railway.



(Seniority as a laborer 5 Apr 1905. Seniority as section foreman 1 Oct 1905)

When Andrew was working out by Surrey, east of Minot, he contracted typhoid fever and had to take a leave of absence from 15 Aug 1907 – 1 Nov 1907, ending up in the Minot hospital. The hospital faced 4th avenue – while recovering at the hospital Andrew said that he would set out and watch the city life.

Margaret (born 1888) grew up in the same towns as Andrew (Waverly and Browerville). Dick recalls her sharing that when she was a young girl she and her siblings used to go down to a lake to catch sunfish to fry.



In her late teens, prior to marriage, Margaret worked in St. Cloud, near Browerville, as a chambermaid in the St. Charles Hotel.

Marriage

Dick doesn't know anything about Andrew and Margaret's courtship. They were married at the St. Joseph Catholic Church in Browerville 24 May 1909.



*Francis Wodarz, Frank Opelia,
Pete Petron, Anna Mays
Andrew and Margaret*



Andrew and Margaret

Andrew's Career

Andrew (known as Andy by his co-workers), worked his entire career in North Dakota for the Great Northern Railroad¹. From 1908-1913 he was a section foreman in Leeds. At that time the Great Northern built section houses along every 8-10 miles of track. The foreman was to maintain the rails in that area. The family moved to Berthold when Andrew was given a promotion to road master of the branch line that headed north curling near the Canadian border. (Andrew registered for the draft 5 Jun 1917 while in Berthold.) They then moved to Rugby around 1918 for another branch line road master

¹ "The Great Northern Railway was created in September 1889 from several predecessor railroads in Minnesota and eventually stretched from Lake Superior at Duluth and Minneapolis/St. Paul west through North Dakota, Montana, and Northern Idaho to Washington State at Everett and Seattle. Headquarters for the line were located in St. Paul, Minnesota." www.gnrhs.org

position. Around 1928 Andrew was transferred to New Rockford, where he was the mainline road master overseeing about 250 miles of rails. In 1931 he became the district road master and moved to Minot at division headquarters, (Dick doesn't think he had the yards in Fargo). His last assignment was as a branch line road master, which ended July 1951 when poor health terminated his employment. Official retirement was Nov 1951.

Andrew's Social Security 701-14-1351



Leeds (1908-1913)

Once married, Andrew and Margaret lived in the Leeds' section house. Chuck (1910), Edward (1912), and Art (1913) were born in Leeds. Andrew's brother Tony lived in that same section house when he took over the job. Off to the side of the house Andrew planted lots of poplar trees as a windbreak. Dick recalls that when they would go back to visit Tony, Andrew would always be interested in the poplar trees. The railroad eventually sold off the section houses, requiring new owners to move the houses to other land.



Berthold and Rugby (1913-1928)

Bill was born (1915) when the family lived in Berthold.



Art, Bill & Chuck



Margaret with Chuck, Bill, and Art

Child Edward died in childhood (possibly 1916 as a four year old which would put his death just prior to the above photo of Art, Bill & Chuck). Dick does not know any details regarding cause of death. Dick was born (1923) when the family lived in Rugby².



Rugby House

² In 1931 a fieldstone obelisk was erected in Rugby marking the geographic center of the North American continent.



The Boys in 1924

New Rockford (1928-1931)

Dick, known during his younger years as Richie, began first grade as a five year old in New Rockford. The school (St. James Academy, a Catholic primary school for grades 1st-8th) had boarding facilities for the farm kids. Dick would walk to school (over a mile) even in the cold winter months. He's fairly sure that Bill went to the same school as an 8th grader.

Dick recalls that the Great Northern built a dam on the James River just outside of town to pipe water down for the steam engines. He remembers walking by himself down to the James River, below the dam, with his fishing pole and worms to catch Perch. At times he and his older teenage brothers would go to the reservoir where little Richie would watch Art and Bill swim. Dick describes Art as a graceful swimmer, gliding through the water; while Bill looked like a paddle wheel, splashing all over the place. (Dick never did learn to swim.)



Richie with His Mom and Dad

The family did not own a car, but Dick tells the story that while in New Rockford, Bill and a friend (Am, short for Ambrose) bought an old Model T. The two boys overhauled the engine, reassembled the car, and low and behold it ran. Bill was in the 8th grade, his friend in 9th grade. They then made an advertising deal with the owner of the local hardware store. They painted the Model T with a checkerboard of paint colors and posted the name of the hardware store across the back of the car. Money for gasoline was often hard to come by, so they taught little Richie how to siphon liquid into a can so that he could steal gas from a county road grater stored in a fenced off area near their home. Dick was small enough to fit through a hole in the fence.



Chuck played football in New Rockford (got his nose broken in a game), after graduating he went on to college at North Dakota State in Fargo (studying Civil Engineering). Dick recalls Chuck mailing home his dirty clothes to be washed. The postal service would do this at a very reasonable charge. Chuck worked summers, so wasn't around as Dick grew up.

During the depression very little hardship fell on the family. Andrew had a good job, an executive position as a road master making \$250/mth (a tremendous salary) and the family lived conservatively (i.e. kitchen garden for some of their food). Dick recalls that relatives in need of money would write to Andrew requesting help (including the parish priests from Browerville asking for tithe even when he didn't live there anymore), and he'd respond with some assistance. Margaret was more upset than Andrew over these financial requests.

Early in his career Andrew had bought 160 acres in Browerville for retirement. He rented out the land to be farmed and what he made went to taxes. (Taxes were levied against a piece of property by the county or state, if the land was farmed by a resident in Minnesota there was one tax rate, if a non-resident then the rate was almost double.) During the depression someone wrote Andrew a letter saying that 40 acres of native woods on his land were being cut down by someone to sell as firewood. Andrew went back to Minnesota to take care of the problem. He decided to sell the land getting a low price because of the depression.

Minot Rental (1931-1941)

Andrew and Margaret rented a small one-story house in an exclusive residential area of town (211 8th St, Eastwood Park subdivision) with three bedrooms, bathroom, living room, dining room, kitchen, and glassed in porch along the back side which became the boys' bedroom during the summer months. (Dick enjoyed watching and hearing the summer thunderstorms from this porch room). Dick remembers lots of Morning Glories crawling on twine around house. A coal furnace was located in the basement (coal delivered in the fall of the year, shoveled into coal shoot dumping the coal into an area segregated off in the basement); also in the basement was a cistern for rain water. A detached garage was in the back of the property by the alley, along with a bricked in garbage bin in which they could burn their trash.

Dick recalls that when they moved to Minot he had his first restaurant meal when the family ate at the Grand Hotel. He remembers it as something very special. The family had no car, so they "hoofed-it" around town. Eventually Andrew bought a car (around 1935-36). It was in that car that Doris first met Dick (Fall of 1942) when he drove up to the bowling alley and offered to give a group of them a ride since it was so cold.

Dick went to St Leo's School from third grade through high school. During 3rd-5th grades he was very introverted, very immature in comparison to his classmates. Since he was young for his grade level it was decided that he would repeat 5th grade. Dick does not remember this negatively, since friends that he did have from the neighborhood were in younger grades. Dick recalls the school tuition being \$2/month. For some families this was a hardship, but kids never seemed to be taken out of school, someone would always pay their way.

Bill went to the public high school in order to play football. Dick remembers going to Bill's games. He also remembers arguing with Bill over who had to spade up the kitchen garden for their mom, somehow Dick always had to do it. (Dick spaded and helped his mother plant potatoes, squash, lettuce, currant bushes, etc, yet recalls that if anyone came to visit, Andrew would show the garden off as his.) Dick remembers Bill, as a 16-17 year old, having to stay home to take care of the house while the rest of the family (including the older brothers) went on a vacation. It seemed to Dick that Bill was "left out". Their dad had Bill working on the railroad, even as a high school kid. Bill

would work on extra gangs (not section games) which meant that he was sometimes gone.

Art was 20 when Dick was 10. He had gone away after high school to a radio school in Milwaukee then returned to live at home in Minot where he got a job as an engineer building a new transmitter station for KLPM; a local radio station reaching out about a hundred miles from Minot. In the early 30s Dick contracted chicken pox and the house and its occupants were quarantined for six weeks. Art, who was transcribing the international code of the World Broadcasting System's news for the station needed to find a way to work from home. Art set up the back bedroom as a studio and the station installed a phone line to the house. Art not only transcribe the text, but read the news copy through the phone, over the air. To add flair, Art created a stylist (like a player piano paper) that when played providing the traditional "beep beep beep beep" sound of the news broadcast. Even after the quarantine was lifted, Art continued to keep the studio at home. Dick recalls that when the Lindbergh child was kidnapped (1932), the news updates during the 1934 arrest and 1935 trial were coming in so quickly that another announcer came to the house to broadcast while Art typed up the transcript. Dick remembers enjoying watching his brother work and brainstorm inventions. One side story: Art was a smoker. Target sold loose tobacco in packs with rolling papers included. This was a long grain tobacco for a machine that would roll your cigarettes. Art had Dick rolling his cigarettes, even re-cycling the tobacco out of the burnt stubs. Art eventually moved on to Minnesota, working in Grand Forks at a radio station where he rented a room in a lady's house (one of his housemates was a baseball player) and in Duluth where he lived in a remodeled garage. Dick recalls taking a train and following specific bus directions to visit Art one winter (as a 7th-8th grader).

Between the house and the garage Dick raised pigeons in a coop that had little nesting cubicles for the baby squabs. He'd go to the train yards and sweep out box cars for cracked corn and wheat to feed the pigeons. Margaret would give the birds dried up bread. The family never ate the pigeons, just had them as pets. For a while Dick had a chicken that he had rescued from slaughter at the armor factory. He built a second coop for the chicken and it began laying daily eggs. One summer when the family was on a trip

all the pigeons were stolen. Margaret was worried that the chicken would get stolen, so she butchered the chicken for dinner. That was it for raising birds.

Childhood hobbies for Dick included reading, (the Minot library had the children's books in the basement and every Saturday morning there was a story time that Dick would attend - he enjoyed adventure/action books, recalling a series about a cave boy and another book about a guy with a balloon airship); building WWI model airplanes out of balsa wood; and listening to radio shows (e.g. The Hit Parade sponsored by Lucky Strikes, Fred Allen Show, Jack Benny Show).

Dick remembers taking a trip to the west coast with Bill something during junior high school. They visited their Uncle John and cousins in Leavenworth, Washington. Dick recalls touring a battleship, the California, during this trip. They filled a suitcase full of pears from Uncle John to take back to North Dakota. Dick purchased a lug of cherries and ate them all by himself.



*Andrew, Art, Margret
Bill, Dick, Chuck*



The Men



*Bill, Dick, Andrew, and Chuck
1938*

During high school Dick remembers taking a train to Great Falls with his mother to see Bill. While on the train a conductor gave them a telegram addressed to Bill. Dick assumed that this might mean that Bill was actually on the same train. Dick decided to wait in the train restroom to see if Bill showed up, and sure enough he did! The exchange went something like: Dick, “Hey brother.” Bill, “What the hell are you doing here?!” Another chance meeting and similar exchange of greeting with Bill happened years later at the World’s Fair in Seattle.

All three of the older brothers married during Dick’s high school years: Bill in Dec 1939, Art Oct 1940, and Chuck Dec 1940.

Dick was very involved with sports during his high school years. He played football for St Leo’s six-man team during his junior and senior years, (Dick has a newspaper article about the team that mentions his name and exploits), enjoyed basketball and track. During all of Dick’s high school athletic years his father never came to watch him play, though Margaret would be at the basketball games. Dick graduated from high school in 1941.

After graduation Dick was hired on as a section laborer. He remembers walking 8 miles of rails, from Surrey to Minot, assessing the ties with his boss, his Dad. Dick

would pound an ‘S’ (swinging the mall) into wood ties that his father identified as needing to be replaced. His Dad moved quickly, and Dick remembers trying to keep up with his father; a hard day of work!

Purchased House

Probably in the fall of 1942 Andrew and Margaret bought the “big house” just around the corner from Roosevelt Park (209 9th St.). By this time the three older sons were all out of the house and Dick was attending local college. Dick recalls a Lilac bush right outside the breakfast nook window. Margaret didn’t like the breakfast nook (probably too small of an area for her large frame), and thus turned it into a storage space. The house was originally constructed to have a maid. Built back in 1910-13 by Foresgren (US marshal for that area). You entered the house through a screened in porch into the living room with stairs to the second floor on the left. Passing through the living room brought you to a dining room with office off to the side (this later became a bedroom for Andrew when he was ill and Margaret when she was older and the stairs were too hard to climb). The kitchen, with back bedroom, back stairs, and kitchen nook were on the backside of the house. A downstairs toilet was added in the back stairwell when Andrew became ill. Upstairs there were three small bedrooms and one bathroom. The back upstairs hall opened up to a large balcony.



209 9th Street SE, Minot

Reflections of His Parents



Dick's personal feelings of his father are that he was a hard working provider, but not much of a family man. He was always working. Monday mornings he would leave to go out on the line to supervise 250 miles of track and would come back Fridays or Saturdays, working in the Minot offices Saturday mornings. When he was at home he took over as head of the family. Dick can remember Andrew lecturing Margaret about spending too much money when he'd look at the check book on Saturdays. Margaret would always refer to him as Mr. Solga when in public.



Andrew Knights of Columbus³ 4th Degree – Also member of Holy Name Society

(Photographed in back yard of 8th Street house)

³ “The Knights of Columbus is a Catholic men’s fraternal benefit society that was formed (1881) to render financial aid to members and their families. Mutual aid and assistance are offered to sick, disabled and needy members and their families. Social and intellectual fellowship is promoted among members and their families through educational, charitable, religious, social welfare, war relief and public relief works.”
www.kofc.org



Margaret was a very dutiful wife and an excellent mother taking care of her sons. Always a good meal on the table (Margaret loved potatoes, so does Dick to this day), clothes clean, and reminders to the boys to do homework. Margaret liked to knit and crochet (would make pillow cases). She'd buy flour in sacks then use the sack to make dish towels. She was involved with her church and various women's groups. With her husband gone she had time to herself, which Dick assumed she enjoyed since Andrew wasn't easy to live with.



Andrew and Margaret could speak Polish (but not read nor write in Polish). English was spoken in their home. The only Polish that Dick knew was the prayers of the Our Father and Hail Mary, which were recited every Sunday evening in the Catholic service they attended. Both his parents were poorly educated and couldn't help with the boys' homework. Dick remembers in 8th grade helping his dad mathematically with plans for a culvert that needed to be built.

Andrew's Illness

Andrew came in off the line around 1948-49, on the verge of poisoning from swollen prostate. He went to the doctor and they immediately operated, finding cancer and thus removing the prostate. Dick's blood was compatible with Andrew's, so he gave a transfusion. Andrew had a significant time of bed rest.

Dick presumes that Andrew didn't understand, or accept, the side affect of prostate surgery on his "manhood". Andrew stated drinking heavily after that and putting on weight. (Margaret use to make beer in the basement during prohibition, but it was not until after the operation that Andrew began drinking heavily.) Andrew wasn't drinking on the job, but drank the entire weekend. He would hide the bottles. The railroad transferred him from the main line to a branch line (a demotion). Since he wasn't immediately suspended from the railroad, which would have been the consequence for drinking on the job, Dick assumes the possibility that his personality changed at work causing the demotion. It seemed that Andrew became depressed and somewhat neurotic; he wouldn't do anything, quite reading, wouldn't listen to the radio nor watch TV.

As the cancer took over, he just remained in bed. Margaret would try to stay beyond his reach when giving him medicine or care because he would try to hurt her. She was black and blue from pinches. Margaret eventually hired a male nurse to bath him a few days a week. Andrew finally became so ill that they took him to the hospital and while there he passed away of a heart attack.

Margaret's Last Years

Margaret lived in the Minot house for 15ish years after Andrew's death. Toward the end the brothers paid someone to live with her. In 1971/72 Margaret moved to New Mexico to live in a care home near Chuck and Mary. She told Dick that she didn't like New Mexico because too many spoke Spanish.

The last time Dick saw her was when Art, Chuck, and Dick were packing mother up for the move to New Mexico. Art then finalized an auction and sold the house. Lots of family history papers and photos were lost at this point.



Minot, North Dakota

St. Leo's (Rosemont) Cemetery

Grave is on first road paralleling 3rd Street



Catholic Church, Minot