

COOK COUNTY

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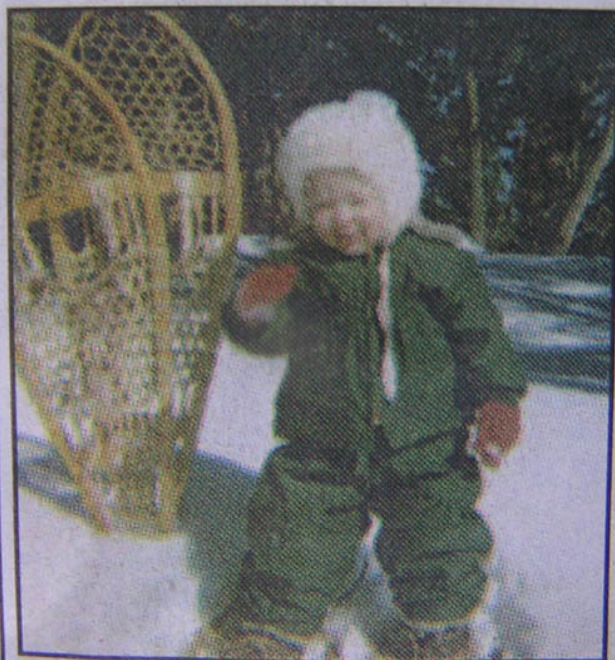
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Gunflint legends



Art Madsen and the
Snowshoe Baby
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Correction: Black and white photo titled "Grand Marais mayor Homer Massie" is in fact not Homer Massie, but **Ade Toftey**, the original editor of the Grand Marais News-Herald who authored the news release of the Snowshoe Baby story.

The story of Art Madsen's Snowshoe Baby

Editor's note: This is an abridged version of the story of the Snowshoe Baby originally written by Helen Sue (Madsen) Manzo and Alesha Leanne Manzo. To read the entire account, check the Web page at www.sagonto.com.

Marco Manzo III
Contributing writer

Art Madsen (1904 – 2000) one of Quetico Provincial Park's original 16 Rangers and a sworn officer of the law, helped lay the foundation of Quetico's vast 1-million acre, 600-lake park.

Madsen patrolled various beats in the Quetico during the winter — averaging 1,500 miles per winter on snowshoes. He captured two of Quetico's most notorious poachers: one which took him three years to track then had to wrestle the armed poacher to the ground before arresting him.

Art Lake in the northeastern section of Quetico is named in his honor. Madsen lived an adventuresome, vibrant, long and healthy life. (For more on Art Madsen see Boundary Waters Journal Fall 2000 issue, "The Original Quetico Ranger" or at www.sagonto.com "Adventure Articles.")

Imagine you are a pregnant woman — one due very soon, out in a snowy wilderness, and you needed to get to the nearest hospital, 180 miles away. In today's society, not many would be in this situation, by choice.

In 1956, Virginia "Dinna" Madsen was large with child No. 4 and her husband, Art, was not about to have the baby in their remote island cabin on Saganaga Lake, five miles from the end of the Gunflint Trail.

The choice was made and the day set to start the trek to get out, which started with Art preparing a half-track at the neighbor's for the first five miles through a two-foot fall of new snow which weighed and cracked the ice, causing deep slush conditions. The half-track was in need of repair, so Art arranged for a fisherman on Sag with a snow boat (like an Everglades air boat) to take Dinna and their six-year-old son, Chris, as far as the winter portage, a little over half the distance to the road, so Art could finish the repair and catch up with the luggage.

The ride in the airboat was so rough that after several sharp bumps the plank on which Dinna was sitting cracked. Mother and son were left at the portage to wait for Art. She made a small fire to warm them, as it was very cold and little Chris was getting hungry.

Dinna, waiting at the winter portage, recalled: "Suddenly, we could hear someone coming with a dog team. It was our neighbor Irv Benson (who lived on the island behind us) with his team and sled. Irv had a load of



Photo courtesy of the family

The Snowshoe Baby, Sue Helen (Madsen) Manzo, above, learned to snowshoe before she was one. She was called the Snowshoe Baby because of what her mother had to go through to get to a hospital in Duluth from Gunflint Lake in 1956 to give birth to her. The story was picked up by newspapers all over the country and editors never forgot about the Snowshoe Baby. In fact, when "The Snowshoe Baby" had her first child, Paul Harvey announced it on his radio show.



Art Madsen was one of the 16 original Rangers in the Quetico. He died at the age of 95.

furs to send out with the mail truck, and he informed us that the slush was very bad. Irv offered us a ride, but his sled had quite a load on it with his furs. At the same time, Art had just started out with the half track three miles away. I could faintly hear the half-track's engine, off and on, as the wind would pick up the rumble and carry it around the islands and trees. I was confident that Art would be coming soon on the half-track, so I declined Irv's offer. Irv then left with his dog team to catch the mail truck.



Grand Marais mayor Homer Massie presents a pair of tiny snowshoes to the "Snowshoe Baby," Helen Sue Madsen as her brother Chris looks on.

Chris and I continued to wait. Little did we know that the half track had thrown a track and was bogged down in heavy slush.

She and Chris waited until they saw Art on snowshoes pulling their luggage in a toboggan. Art was alarmed and quite distraught to see his very pregnant wife and son standing out in the cold, and asked why they didn't go with Irv. Dinna explained that she knew he would be along shortly as she could hear the half-track approaching.

Art had left Dinna and Chris' snowshoes and the half-track behind when the steel track got bogged down in the deep slush, froze and snapped, so gave his snowshoes to his pregnant wife and broke trail with the toboggan. Little Chris followed, sinking almost the length of his body into the snow.

"In that deep slush I could only walk 15 steps, then I had to rest and then start again," Dinna recalled. "Our legs were so tired, and Art had to struggle along himself without any snowshoes, assist Chris and tow the tobog-

Stork brings girl to 'Trek' woman

Editor's note: Following is the story of the birth of the Snowshoe Baby as it was reported in the Cook County News-Herald on Feb. 9, 1956.

"Mrs. Art Madsen, the Canadian outdoors woman who beat the stork to Duluth, via dog sled, snowshoes, snowmobile, car and bus from her home north of Saganaga Lake last week and has made the headlines on Page One in most dailies in the country, gave birth to a daughter at St. Mary's Hospital in Duluth Monday, Feb. 6, 1956. Evidently her arduous trek had no ill effect on her own health or that of the child, as they were both reported doing well.

The baby weighed seven pounds, one and one-half ounces, and she has been named Helen Sue.

Another boy, Chris, 6, is attending school in Proctor after having completed th 175-mile trip with his mother. Two other children stayed with the father, a guide, at the backwoods cabin.

The big story was a scoop for the News-Herald which first reported it to the Associated Press and from that office was then broadcast far and wide."



Dinna Madsen, the mother of the Snowshoe Baby, with Marco Manzo III, her grandson and author of this account, at Sagonto.

gan as well. The baby kept on moving, and Art was afraid that we were going to have it right there. I did my best to stay calm and focused by telling myself, "Take it easy, but push onward. Hurry up, but go slow."

They continued on, making slow progress, but somehow managed to complete two miles. Upon rounding the bend to the last stretch of ice, snow and slush, the landing was in sight. Irv, who was still waiting for the mail truck, saw them heading his way, struggling through the deep snow and slush. Seeing their predicament, he hitched up his dogs again and came to meet them to transport them the last one-half mile.

About the last mile they were spotted by Irv Benson who was waiting for Don Brazel and his mail truck. Irv hitched up his team and picked up Dinna and Chris. Art said goodbye to wife and son at the mailbox and snowshoed the five miles back up the lake to look after his other two children who were being watched by a close family friend.

Dinna had to stay the night with Eve Blankenburg, as the Trail was not plowed that day. It had snowed 17 inches.

The next morning, Eve called the snowplow custodian and

convinced him to plow the Trail. "My husband is one of the biggest taxpayers in the county, and we've got an expectant mother here," she told him. "We want to see that snowplow today."

When the snowplow finally arrived, Russell and Eve drove Dinna and Chris to town by following the plow on its way back down the Trail.

When they arrived Russell called Ade Toftey, the publisher/editor of the Cook County News-Herald, from Leng's Soda Fountain, and Eve related the adventure.

Ade took the story and wrote an article which eventually went out over the Associated Press wires.

Meanwhile, Dinna and Chris caught the bus to Duluth. The newspaper stories caused a public stir with headlines like "By Dog Team, Snowshoes: Expectant Mom Mushes Way to Village," "Everything From Snowshoes to Bus 'Outruns' Stork."

Dinna was called the "Mushing Mother of the North" and her new daughter, Helen Sue, was dubbed forever after as "The Snowshoe Baby."

For the complete story, see "Adventure Articles" at www.sagonto.com.