



W. W. Mayo House

The Cosgrove Years

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Charlotte Wright Bradley* purchased five of the six lots of land that was originally Mayo family property, lots 6 through 10, from Felix and Laura Borer with the deed for the property dated October, 1876.

Charlotte was the mother of Elizabeth who married Carson Nesbit (C.N.) Cosgrove. According to family descendants, Charlotte gave the Mayo Home to C. N. and Elizabeth as a wedding gift shortly after their marriage in 1874.

When Charlotte Wright Bradley died in 1884, she willed several parcels of land to her children. The will reads: "To said Elizabeth E. Cosgrove, Lot No. Six (6) And South Thirty five feet of Lot No. Seven (7) and Lot No. Ten (10) east of Rail Road in Block No. Forty One (41)...."

Carson (C.N.) and Elizabeth had four children, all of whom were born and raised through most of their childhood years in the home.

Robert Hugh Cosgrove (who was a founder, on the first board of directors and the first secretary of the Minnesota Valley Canning Company) was born in July, 1876.

Cora B. Cosgrove was born in February, 1880, and Ethel C. Cosgrove was born in May, 1885.

Edward Bradley Cosgrove, the giant-in-the-flesh who made the Green Giant Company, was born in the Mayo Home in July, 1888.

In 1912, Edward (Ward) Cosgrove married Louise Amy Strong whom he met while attending the University of Minnesota. Ward graduated from

Carson Nesbit (C.N.) Cosgrove



Robert and Grace Cosgrove came to Westfield, New York, from Ireland in 1850 escaping from the Irish potato famine. One son, John, had been born in Ireland. Carson, their next child, was born on November 22, 1853. When his father died, Carson became responsible for the support of younger brothers and sisters.

In his late teens, he traveled west settling in Wabasha, Minnesota, in 1870, then moving to Le Sueur in 1872. Two younger brothers also came to Le Sueur, John and, younger brother, James.

C.N. was a successful businessman. He owned a hardware store with his brother John and sold farm machinery. He raised purebred Herefords and owned a large amount of property.

C.N. served his community well as a member of the Board of Education, as an Alderman and Mayor of the City, and as a State Senator for one term.

In the 1880s, he was invited to help organize the Minnesota State Fair. While serving as secretary, he spent five years as a resident of the state fair grounds and gave of his time and energy day and night to build up and boost the Minnesota State fair. He served as president, secretary and on the board of the Minnesota State Agricultural Society / Minnesota State Fair for some 24 years.

Described as the "little giant" (with a five-foot-three-inch stature), he presided at the organizational meeting of the Minnesota Valley Canning Company in March of 1903. He was elected to the Board in 1905 and, at age 72, served as President from 1925-1929, then Chairman of the Board until his death in 1936 of injuries resulting from an automobile accident.

Edward (Ward) Bradley Cosgrove



Edward (Ward) was the youngest child of C.N. and Elizabeth Cosgrove's four children. He was born in the Mayo Home in July, 1888, and spent his early childhood years here.

Upon the urging of his father to come and help with the canning company, Ward returned to Le Sueur from Kansas City. He went to work for the company and was made Secretary of the Board in 1914.

Ward and Louise moved into the Mayo Home and lived there from 1914 to 1920. While Ward was secretary, on several occasions meetings of the Board were held in the home. Ward had his office for the cannery in the home.

In his first few years as secretary, salesman, accountant, farm and field manager and general manager, he traveled around either on foot or on horseback...no buggy or car.

His salary the first two years was \$100 a month, the next two years, \$125 per month. He had to resign to get advanced to \$150 per month. One director said,

“My God, Ward, that’s six dollars a day. Ain’t no man worth that!”

Ward, referred to as the giant-in-the-flesh, served as the most impressive President from 1929-1954 and as chairman of the Board until his death in 1962, at the age of 74.



Robert (Bob) Carver Cosgrove

Like Bradley and Arthur, Robert was born in the Mayo Home on April 18, 1919. He began working for the Green Giant Company as a seasonal employee, hoeing corn in experimental lots at age 14. Bob attended Shattuck Military School and the Universities of Virginia and Minnesota.

During World War II, he served as an infantry captain. He married Eleanor Dodd of Philadelphia and they have four children. Tragedy struck the Cosgrove family, as two brothers, Arthur and David, were killed in action during the war.

Around the country, Bob became known as Mr. Green Giant. Rising through the ranks, he served as chairman of the board, president, and chief executive officer during his years with the company that spanned from 1946-1981. During his presidency, Green Giant sales nearly doubled reaching \$191 million in 1969.

There were some tough times for Bob, as some questioned his judgment when the decision was made to merge with Pillsbury Company in 1979.

Robert Cosgrove died on August 1, 1993, ending the era of the most influential three-generation family in Le Sueur’s history.

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