

Gatzlaff, Esther H. (Maas)
POSTED: May 28, 2010

SPRINGFIELD, Minn. - Esther H. (Maas) Gatzlaff, 94, of Springfield, died on Tuesday, May 25, 2010, at St. John Lutheran Home in Springfield.

Visitation will be from 5-7 p.m. on Friday, May 28 at the Chapel of the Good Shepherd at St. John Lutheran Home. Visitation will continue from 10-11 a.m. on Saturday at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Springfield.

Service will be held at 11 a.m. on Saturday, May 29 at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Springfield. The clergy will be Pastor Mark Johnson. Interment will be at the St. Paul Lutheran Cemetery in Springfield.

Arrangements are with the Sturm Funeral Home in Springfield. The family has designated the Springfield Public Library for memorial contributions. E-mail condolences may be sent to the family at www.sturmfh.com.

Esther Hedwig Minnie Maas was born January 17, 1916, on the family farm in Johnsonville Township, northeast of Walnut Grove, the second of five children born to Clara (Engelmeier) and August Maas. She attended rural school through eighth grade at District 113 in Johnsonville Township, then boarded in Walnut Grove for high school, and graduated second in her class from Walnut Grove High School in 1934, a fact her husband never allowed their children to forget.

She attended Teacher Training in Lamberton and then began her seven-year teaching career in a rural school near Milroy at the beginning salary of \$50 per month, for which she was expected not only to perform instructional duties for grades 1 through 8, but to pump drinking water, fire up and stoke the stove which was the sole source of heat, play softball at recess, and sweep up at the end of the day.

After a year, she transferred back to District 113 - but this time as the teacher. She proved herself so valuable that she was able to double her starting pay, though her duties remained the same.

She was married to Norman Gatzlaff on Sept. 23, 1941, at Trinity Lutheran Church in Johnsonville Township, and they established their home in Springfield. After a move to Washington, D.C., to accompany Norm during his Navy training during WWII, and a stay at home to await his return, Esther became active in the Springfield community and St. Paul Lutheran Church, in addition to raising a family. She was a member of the American Legion Auxiliary, Springfield Golf Club Ladies Association, Literary Club, Mary Martha Circle, Women's Bible Study, WELCA, two bridge clubs, two birthday clubs, and the women's bowling league, holding offices in many organizations. She served on the Springfield Library Board during the planning and construction of the current library building. She taught Sunday School and, for several years, was the director of Vacation Bible School at St. Paul.

She liked to bake and garden, and was an accomplished hostess. She loved sewing and needlework, especially counted cross stitch and crochet. Each of her grandchildren received a lovingly-crafted afghan for high school graduation. Esther enjoyed travel and learning about new places. She especially relished visits to Europe where she could try out the German she learned in childhood, as well as trips to Hawaii and a cruise to Alaska.

Esther had a lifelong love of learning and teaching. Even summer visits from her grandchildren were organized around lesson plans that included reading, crafts, swimming, trips to the petroglyphs or other local adventures, and cranking batches of homemade ice cream. Because the financial realities of the Great Depression prevented her from completing college herself, she made it her personal goal to see all three of her children earn their degrees. She would be delighted to know that, as of Mothers Day 2010, all seven of her grandchildren have now graduated from college, and most have pursued advanced degrees. And she would be especially proud of the two who became teachers.

She is survived by her husband, Norman, of Springfield; sons, John (Jeanne) of North Oaks and Bryan

(Angela) of Mahtomedi, daughter, Joanne (Daniel) Dunatchik of Portland, Ore., grandchildren Sarah (Chris) Popek of Las Vegas, Nev., Kristin (Joseph) Ceronsky of Minneapolis, Molly Gatzlaff of Portland, Ore., Michael (Carly) Gatzlaff of Boston, Mass., Andrew Dunatchik of Portland, Ore., Anne Gatzlaff of Portland, Ore., and Allison Dunatchik of Washington, D.C., one great-grandchild Trystan Popek, sister Myrtle Schleusner of Austin, brother Ernest (Eldora) Maas of Walnut Grove, and sisters-in-law, Selma Hageman of Springfield and Doris Grinde of Tracy.

She was preceded in death by her parents, sister Ella Axtelle, brother Paul Maas, and infant granddaughter Heidi Gatzlaff.

Throughout most of her life, Esther battled clinical depression. She fought valiantly, striving to make each day matter and to do her best at loving her family, serving her church and community, learning, and teaching.