

The ranch was built and owned by a man from Minneapolis named Jim Delaney about 1890. All the lumber was brought across country from Napoleon. The only rail road was about 24 miles west of the ranch. The roads were prairie ruts so deep that if you met anyone you had a hard time getting out of them to pull off the road. Mr. Delaney bought some land and built; then he brought people from the city to sign up for claims which were supposed to be lived on a year and a half. A tar paper claim shack was put up and supplied with a cot and blankets, dried foods, matches, coffee, stove and fuel. They saved many lives when people were lost. These claims were then sold to the ranchers after he'd "proved up". My father owned 2880 acres, which was less than Delaney owned. We grew wheat on section 22 on the north side and cut hay on section 22 on the south side. In between was pasture or hills, springs, etc. The name was Pleasant Valley Ranch then and became known later as the Bell Ranch for my father. Half circle dot was the brand. Before the ranch was built it was an Indian camping ground. There are still graves and rock rings there also buffalo walloes. As a child I used to find buffalo horns. I still have one.

The first school was set up in 1911 in Conrad Miller's granary. (Conrad is the brother of Pete.) When a school house was provided my mother often taught. It was hard to find teachers. When more schools were built the ranch was often the boarding place. I think my mother charged \$12.00 a month room and board also a horse and outfit to ride to school about 5 miles away.

The rugs were often rolled up and dances were held on Saturday night to the music of our Victorala. Germans who couldn't speak English soon came and brought their little accordions which I learned to polka to. The Norwegians came with their fiddles and it was the Masurka and Komburger.

Lawrence Welk was born a few miles west of Napoleon at Strasburg.

The men, usually about 20, had rooms above the barn and also a bunk house below the spring house. My father's foreman was named Murphy. My mother had German cooks where as I learned German as a child. The small farmers had no way to sell their cattle but to my father. Many commission men used to come from Chicago and Minneapolis to buy hundreds of cattle, which we drove across country to Medina 35 miles north. It was the main railroad to the east. It fell my lot many times to deliver the cash to these farmers, imagine a 12 year old girl on a pony carrying over a \$1,000.00. One old Finlander woman went, Iia, Iia, Iia. They all fed me; sometimes I threw the food away. I loved the Indian bread covered with ashes, etc., much to my mother's disgust.

Three valleys in the foothills back of the ranch furnished fence poles, some fuel also huckleberries and choke cherries. Hawthorne apples and wild hops were everywhere. The Indians used to find many herbs too.

My sister Ruth and I were married in the ranch parlour. Three of her children were born there, Everitt, Pearl and Raymond. Johnny was also born there when George and I were running the ranch after my parents moved to Streeter.

The Indians used to camp there in summer and hire out to my father for haying and harvest. One beautiful little girl died there in a tent by the spring house. Her name was Ella. She is buried in the Catholic Cemetery in Edgely, N.D. One of the men drove our team and spring board buggy to take her. Mostly it is a place of happy memories.

*Virgie Bell (Higdon) Keller
daughter of Geo. M. Bell*