

Backgrounds

Danzig

Residents Of Ghost Town
Decide To Get Together For Reunion

By Florence Baumann

Danzig, North Dakota was located in McIntosh County half-way between Ashley and Wishek. It was started in 1908, and surveyed and platted as a town in 1911. The railroad was built several years before Danzig was even organized.

In many ways, it was a typical frontier town. Among some of the early business places were a hardware store, bank, lumber yard, general merchandise store, and post office. The little town grew rapidly. More stores were started: two elevators, a meat market, garage, implement shop, beer parlor, cream station, filling station, school and churches.

The hardware and implement stores were a great improvement to the community, aiding the farmers in all the equipment they needed. During the

summers, good polka music was played out front of the stores every Saturday evening—which the young folks greatly enjoyed. The musicians were all area boys, but, my-oh-my, how they could play! At one time, when he was just getting started in his musical career, Lawrence Welk drove over from nearby Strasburg to perform.

I remember many humorous events connected with some of those early stores. The lumber yard, for example, not only provided the region with all the necessary construction materials, but also sold paint, gas, and coal. During the cold winter, the lumber yard was a favorite place to get warmed up by the help of the big, roaring hot, coal stove. But many a jacket was scorched by some frigid soul too eager to get warm!

On Saturday night, everyone—and I



Shopping at the lumber yard.

mean everyone—would go to town. They bought the week's supply of groceries, and delivered eggs and cream. The streets were parked full of Model A Fords. After shopping, everyone sat around and visited.

The meat market had a good supply of sausage, beer and a few groceries on hand. There was also a cream station at the side for those who didn't ship their cream to the Mandan creamery. The meat market was also a very good visiting place.

Danzig had its own power plant, which was quite an accomplishment for a village its size. The lights would blink at 15 minutes to 11 every night as a warning signal—and at 11 o'clock they were out! Whether you were in bed or not!

Other memories: The blacksmith

was always busy. People used the garage for a variety of purposes—July celebrations, wedding dances. The two elevators were a great help; we hauled our grain in by wagon, but later by truck; one elevator burned down but was replaced. The beer parlors were happy places where you got your refreshment and played a game of pool.

There were two churches in town. On Sunday morning, everyone flocked to church. Afterwards, everyone discussed the week's happenings. Or, in the winter, warm up around the church furnace. (It seems like we were always cold! Ha!)

At first, the schoolhouse was a one-room building, but it was later enlarged to a two-room, commonly referred to as the "big room" and the "little room." The first eight grades



TOP PHOTO: Trapping was good. Anton Helmer (with whiskers, at right) and Gottlieb Ley show their catch in early years around Danzig.

BOTTOM PHOTO: At the old cream station, Albert Johnson and Fred Gieser Sr. sold cream and flour for many years. Later, the building was turned into a butcher shop. It is still standing, vacant, in Danzig.





TOP PHOTO: View of the town of Danzig, in early 1920s, facing east. From left to right: grocery store, post office, bank, general store, schoolhouse (white building), and lumber yard (at far right).

PHOTO BELOW. "We thought we were so sophisticated!" said Edna Ritter. She is shown with Olga Straub (Schick). Mrs. Ritter's maiden name was Wolf.





TOP PHOTO: Music was an important part of the early towns, especially summer bands. Members of the Golden Fellowship Band (front row, left to right): Charlie Smith of Wishek, N.D.; Sarah Tarnasky of Lehr, N.D.; Edwina Weber Reizer of Danzig, N.D.; Robert Johnson of Lehr; Gideon Krein of Wishek; Clarence Johnson of Lehr; Harold Hetzler of Danzig; and (standing with trumpet, Art Johnson of Lehr, who was the band's director).

Back row: Fred Giesler of Danzig; Art Krein of Wishek; William Schilling of Danzig; Alvin Krein of Wishek; Frank Helmer of Danzig; Willie Helmer of Danzig; Gerhardt Essig of Lehr; Oscar Pfeifle of Danzig; and David Helmer of Danzig.

BOTTOM PICTURE AT LEFT: When this photo was snapped in September 1942, snow had already fallen—even though trees still had green leaves and farmers were in full swing threshing grain.

PHOTO ON OPPOSITE PAGE: This steamer belonged to John F. Wolf, who lived about two miles east of Danzig. John Wolf sits on the wheel, and Gottlieb Wolf is near the fire box.





were taught there. We had fantastic baseball games during recess. Winters were always rough on our fathers as they took us to school by horse and sled. Many a time they froze so that we could get an education!

I remember the days the Gypsies came to town, we would all run and hide. Most people were afraid they would steal something. The story was that they would come into houses and would then steal pillows! Some of the mothers would threaten their children when they were naughty that they would be given to the Gypsies!

Danzig was a regular Western town in its earlier years. Some of the stories were rough and tough. Many barn dances were held both in town and in the surrounding countryside. Barn dances were not allowed on Sunday evenings, but we had them anyway. Lots of times they ended up in fist-fights, or someone used a piece of iron for defense. When news came that the sheriff was coming, the orchestra would pick up and leave—and everyone else would hide.

One of the first doorbells in town was installed at the merchandise store. Us kids thought it quite a novelty. The store had living quarters in the back for the grocer. When he was out in back, the young boys in town would open the store's front door just wide enough to make the doorbell ring. Then the grocer would come out from his lodging



Farm Light Saves Couple

A newly-married couple, Mr. and Mrs. Willert Bertsch, and Mr. and Mrs. Peter Geffre and daughters Janice and Joann of Ipswich, S. Dak. accepted the generous hospitality of the John Exlinger family near Danzig, while a typical North Dakota blizzard raged outside on Monday and Tuesday of last week.

Mr. and Mrs. Bertsch, who were married at Wishek on New Year's Day, left Wishek Monday afternoon, enroute to their new home at Huron, S. Dak. Not realizing the severity of the storm when they set out, they were able to travel only to within about two and one-half miles of Danzig, when the motor caused trouble, due to the wet blowing snow. However they kept trying, but made little headway. Realizing their efforts were futile, they decided to leave the car in search of shelter. Not familiar with the countryside, they walked in an easterly direction, away from the

storm and soon sighted a schoolhouse. To their disappointment, though, they found no fuel, since the school is not being used. Mr. Bertsch also was without matches. Becoming rather alarmed, since they were very cold and tired and it was fast growing dark, they rested awhile and again continued their trek in search of warm shelter. They plodded onward, and soon saw a light in the distance, which they followed to the north side of the highway. Soon the light faded away but they kept faith and followed in that direction which led them to the John Exlinger farm, where the light in the window further guided them. They arrived there at 1:13 p.m.

In spite of the heavy clothing they were wearing, Mrs. Bertsch suffered frost bite to her hands and feet and said she could not have walked a half mile further. The farm yard light at the Exlinger farm, put on while the coxes were being done and then turned off again, was the guiding light which led the couple to safety.

Lesmon Boschee took Mr. and Mrs. Bertsch to his home at Wishek, Wednesday, after the roads were opened. Mrs. Bertsch is the former Erna Thurn, daughter of Mrs. Hone Thurn of Wishek.

The Geffre family had visited

A 1950 newsclipping

Mr. and Mrs. Paul Scherman at Wishek on Sunday, January 1, and had started out for their home on Monday. Due to the blizzard and large snow drifts their car stalled about a half mile west of the Exlinger farm. After considerable shoveling, which was of no avail, Mr. Geffre walked to the farm of John Exlinger, who hitched a team of horses to his sled and got the other members of the Geffre family, who had been waiting in the car. Mr. Geffre suffered frostbitten ears. They remained there until Thursday.

Both couples were extremely grateful for the hospitality and kindness shown them by the Exlinger family.

BOTTOM PHOTO AT LEFT: Henry and Pauline Wolf. They were the last caretakers of the Danzig depot.

BOTTOM PHOTO AT RIGHT: Henry Wolf was also a mail carrier. He is with two-year-old Darlene Olsen, whose father, Henry Olsen, was postmaster when this photograph was taken in 1942. Note Chesterfield, Model, and 7-Up advertisements nailed to wall.





John Exlinger with 128 muskrat furs he trapped in 1932. He sold them the next year for \$2.50 per hide. Shortly afterwards, the market dropped to 65 cents per hide! Exlinger used part of the money to buy his wedding suit when he was married in 1934.



TOP PHOTO AT RIGHT: Although inactive at the present, Danzig has two grain elevators which indicates the high amount of grain grown in the Danzig area during the horse-and-buggy days. With better highways the volume of grain dwindled and, coupled with the difficulty of securing grain buyers and managers, the elevators were closed, at least temporarily. Elevator photographed here burned down and was later replaced.

Farmers' Elevator Company, a corporation, was organized March 4, 1911 by Peter Billigmeier and George Gackle of Kulm and George E. Schlechter of Bowdon, North Dakota. Later John H. Wishek acquired ownership.

Danzig Grain Company, a corporation, was organized August 23, 1917 by John H. Wishek of Ashley, Peter Billigmeier of Kulm, and Fred Ziegenhagel of Lehr.

Wishek later acquired ownership by buying out Billigmeier and Ziegenhagel, and both elevators were taken over by the Union Elevator Company of Ashley, the present owner.

The best-known manager of the Danzig elevators was Jacob C. Goll, a well-liked individual who lived in Danzig for many years.

Another pioneer business in Danzig was a corporation named Danzig Hardware Company. This firm was organized August 25, 1917 by John H. Wishek, Peter Billigmeier of Kulm, and Fred Ziegenhagel of Lehr. This firm operated a fully-stocked hardware line and handled the John Deere farm equipment. For many years, and at the time the business was moved to Ashley in consolidation with the Ashley Implement Company, the manager was John A. George. George had built up a large area of satisfied customers and was well-known for fair treatment of those with whom he dealt.

BOTTOM PHOTO: John Forstad, Danzig area musician, with violin. Forstad was one of the first of many musicians of the area. He played at barn dances. Many of the dances were after pie socials, and some of the favorite tunes were "Skip to My Lou," and "Happy is the Miller."

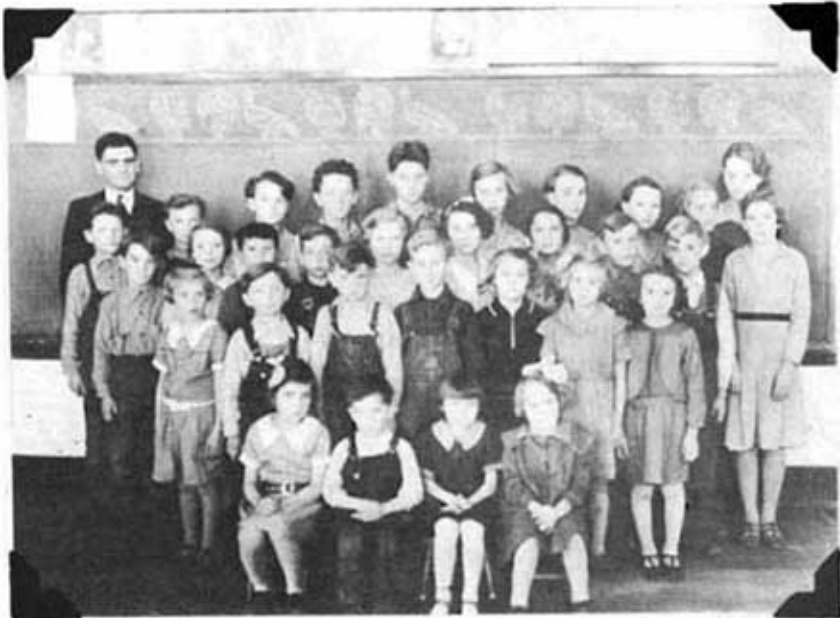




Making sausages was usually in November—and sometimes in December. Shown from l. to r. are John Wolf, Ed Weber, Elmer Bertsch and Adam Bertsch. Hogs were usually butchered in the morning. The meat cooled at dinner-time and afterwards everyone pitched in to cut the meat and grind it. Sometimes, the kids even stayed home from school in order to help. The most fun was the sampling of the sausages to see if the seasoning was right. The worst part was the cleaning of the intestines and stomachs! One woman recalls her mother sitting out on a snowbank—cleaning the stomachs. "Sometimes I wonder how those people ever lived so long," she said. The people around Danzig made their own liver sausage, fry sausage, head cheese and blood sausage. Bacon and hams were cured and smoked. The hams were cured by being put in barrels filled with salt brine. There they would remain for about two to three weeks, depending on the size of the hog. Sausages were mixed by hand, and then put in sausage casings.



John Ley and his team hauling grain to town in early 1920s. Brick building in background is the bank.



All eight grades pose for picture in the school room in 1936. Ed Koth and Martha Quatier were the teachers. Some of the country teachers received \$45 per month. From that salary, they paid \$13 for boarding and room costs. Many times, the school district did not have enough cash to pay salaries and so the teachers were instead given a registered warrant. When funds were available, teachers were notified—and then they could cash their checks.

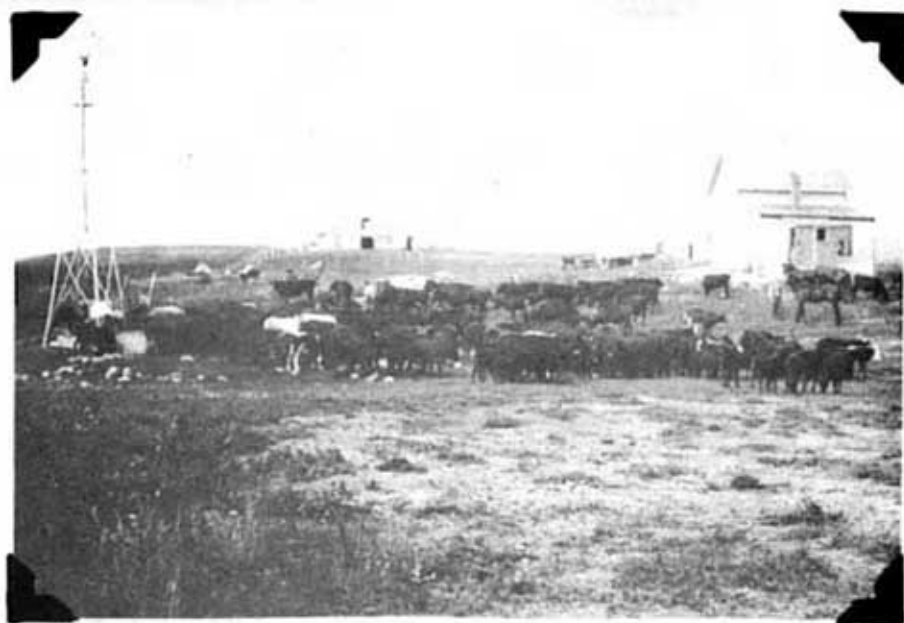
place—and of course would find no one there! The trickery provided many laughs until the boys' parents found out. That solved that problem!

Courtship provided additional opportunities to play jokes. Courtship in earlier years wasn't by car. Every young fellow had a good riding horse on which to visit his best gal. Frequently, he rode it for many miles to get to her house. Pranksters would then sneak the horse out of the barn when the boy was with his girl, set the horse loose, and then gleefully watch how the boy would get home!

Butchering-time was a big day when the neighbors gathered early in

the morning to butcher the hogs, clean the intestines and stomachs. The intestines were used for sausage and the stomachs for head-cheese. All the meat was ground by hand. Sometimes a jug of wine was needed till all the meat was ground and the sausage sampled.

At threshing time, the neighbors all helped one another. Everyone worked hard, and the good food served in the kitchen kept the workers well-fueled. Some nights were spent at the thresher's home and, usually, there



TOP PHOTO: The Johnnie Johnson ranch, about six miles east of Danzig, was one of the biggest cattle ranches of the area. Johnson had pure-bred Angus cattle as early as the 1910s.

BOTTOM PHOTO: Albert Johnson children—Agnes and Henry, back row; Arthur, middle; Clarence and Robert, front.



HOME SWEET HOME

By Florence Merkel Baumann

In memory of my parents—Mr. and Mrs. John Merkel

Looking over the rolling plains
Standing tall with golden grain
There remains an old site
Which is still my delight.
It was home for you and me.

From the sweat of our dear fathers
This site became possible.
Our churches and schools do not remain
But from them so much we have gained.
They were home for you and me.

Some buildings and trees stand tall and strong
As the wind blows through and sings its song,
As the sun sets over the graves of our loved ones
Where they have gone to the site in our heavenly home
Which I pray will be home for you and for me.

As God is our guide
We still honor this site.
May God protect this plot
Which we have cherished a lot.
Danzig, North Dakota, our home sweet home.

John and Lydia Merkel



Martin Fischer at the Danzig general store. The store sold dry goods, groceries—"and a little bit of everything," said former Danzig residents.

School days,
school days . . .



Country school photo taken in 1930. Rebecca Kessel (Thurn) was the teacher. There were three country schools in the Danzig school district, and one school in Danzig itself. At one point, one of the country schools had only four pupils.





Pie social at country school.



On June 19, 1926, confirmation class standing on steps of Danzig Lutheran Church (which was later moved to Ashley and is now the Assembly of God Church).



Committee which planned Danzig reunion: Front row, l. to r.: Erma Walz, Edna Ritter, Florence Baumann, Esther Exzinger. Back row: Edwin Walz, Lenhardt Ritter, Wilber Baumann, and John Exzinger. Not pictured: Lydia Roth.

The schedule of events for the reunion they planned: July 1—supper at 6 p.m.; Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Bertsch singing from 6:15 to 7 p.m.; men's male quartet singing from 7 p.m.; square dancing from 8:30 to 9 p.m.; Little German Band playing; general visiting. July 2—welcome from Edna Ritter at 9:30 a.m.; worship services on main street at 9:30 a.m., with Rev. Ben Zimmerman of Madison, S.D. as speaker; comments by Max A. Wishek and former Danzig businesspeople; potluck picnic at noon. (People are requested to bring own food and drinks, dishes, silverware, chairs or blankets).

weren't enough beds for everyone. Consequently, many of the men slept in the barn on the hay. That was just fine if the hayloft didn't have chicken lice. If it did, you didn't sleep at all! You scratched!

I remember other humorous events. A farm girl wanted to go to Danzig with her father on his day off. He agreed, and made a small seat at the back of the wagon for her to sit on. But he took off so fast that she toppled off the back of the wagon, and, he, unaware, kept on driving to town.

A Danzig rural young man had a problem. He was short of cash, but wanted to get married. His solution: he trapped muskrats and other wildlife. With his two-year catch of skins, he finally was able to buy a wedding suit. The couple still lives happily east of Danzig.

In the later years, Danzig became a nice, clean town to be proud of. But as cars became more and more popular, people drove to different towns for business purposes—and Danzig lost out. The roots of the Danzig people are deep. It's still home to a lot of us. ■