



# Backgrounds

## Part II

# Humble Beginnings

Story of a German-Russian pioneer family

The following are excerpts from a family history about the Woeszners who settled near Ashley in the 1890s. It is written by Leona Neu of Ashley.

I remember two sod houses still in use as I grew up. One was the Alfred Fregien home on the farm near our school. Mrs. Fregien had beautiful geraniums growing on the deep window sills which were larger than those in the first houses. On the former Gottfried Maier farm was a sod house too. The Sackmann home was made of sod, as stated, but all under one roof was the granary (grain storage) and the cattle shelter (barn). The granary and cattle shelter were later removed. Only the house and lean-to were kept.

**WHEN MARIE WAS SIX**, the family moved to Ashley. Since she was the youngest in the family, her father was very close to her. Grandmother Sackmann liked to travel and she would expect Marie to do the household chores. One time, Marie was to prepare the yeast for baking bread the next day but she didn't know that it was her task. When Grandmother became very upset about it, Marie unfortunately replied: "If you would not always be gone —." That's as far as she got. Grandmother, who didn't think that that remark was called for, let out with a hand across Marie's behind!

Their home in Ashley was located at 122 2nd Ave. SE where the Andrew Sackmann and Maggie Bauer homes are now. The house was later moved to 401 3rd Ave. NW and is now the home of Paul Becker. It was Grandmother Sackmann's duty to take care of the chores. The family had chickens and cows to help supply the family needs. Often there would be more than the family could use and Marie would deliver a bucket of milk to the John Schaeffers. For a half-gallon of milk, they received 10 cents. However, in the empty bucket, Marie would find goodies such as candy and cookies. Schaeffer later moved to Eureka, S.D. where the family established a sheet metal shop which is still a business to this day. The water supply for the Sackmann family came from a well at the Christian Spitzer home, which was located where the Jacob Groszhans home is now. All the water had to be carried from there. Years later, cisterns were made to collect rain water from the roof of the house. Many had the cistern pump in the house, which was a great convenience.

**MARIE DIDN'T HAVE** to attend school since it was voluntary to attend at that time. Grandfather Sackmann, who was a very learned person, taught her reading from the Bible as this was about the only reading material on hand. School attendance was fine if no other work was to be done. Therefore, Marie only went to school until she reached the third grade. She was then to go and help her brothers and sisters with raising their families and doing the house work or field work. Much of her time was spent with the Jacob Kessel family (her sister Fredricka's family). They had two children, Martha and Ted. Many days of hard work and long hours were part of living there.

One time while helping at the Andrew Sackmann home (her brother), Marie had to carry water from a lake to the house. Andy, who liked to come along, ran ahead and splashed in the water with the board that was laid into the lake to walk on. That muddied the water so it could not be used. He got a spanking from Marie and to this day he says he will not forget it.

In 1918, the year of the flu epidemic, Marie was staying with the Andrew Sackmann family. All the family members became ill with the flu and were in their beds with no concern about anything. Marie tried the best she knew how to make them comfortable. In trying to keep the house warm, she used kerosene to spark the flames in the stove. It exploded and down came the stove pipes. She was helpless to do anything about it since she was only 14. Neighbors John C. Bertsch and Christian Maier came to check on the family and restored the pipes and helped clean up the mess of soot. While the family was sick, a storm came up and the flock of sheep wandered along with the storm and again the neighbors came and turned them back and took care of the farm animals.

That same year Marie got an ear infection. It was very painful and since only home remedies were used to cure the infection, it took a long time to heal and left her weak for a long while.

Some of her youth days were spent with other young people of the area. But Grandfather decided who were to be her friends. Some were told not to show up again.

**THEN CAME WORLD WAR I** and many of the young men relatives and friends were drafted into the service. One young man by the name of Fischer, who was a helper in Grandfather Sackmann's shop, was also called to serve in the army. Marie remembers the time he left. It was on a Good Friday when many of the town's people gathered at the train depot to see them off. The band played while goodbyes were said. It was heartbreaking. This Fischer boy later married a girl from Ashley, a Miss Schaeffer, and they resided in Eureka where he was custodian for the hospital.

At the time when the first airplane came to Ashley, and Marie met Jacob J. Woeszner, Jacob had a car by then. On Sundays, when he came to visit, he would come by car, but if he came during the week while Marie worked for her brothers or sister, Jacob J. would come on horseback. His favorite horse was a white "Schimmel" by the name of Rose. Dating usually happened once a week but then if the weather was nice, and there wasn't too much work, maybe once during the week too.

Marie also did housework for other people. One family who needed help was the William Hildenbrands. Mrs. Hildenbrand had had surgery, and so Marie took care of their three children Leona, Agnes, and Edgar. They were very young at the time, and so she had to take the mother's role. She spent many months with the family until the mother was able to do the work herself. Hildenbrand was fond of rabbit, and so he got one

for Marie to prepare. It was not her favorite food but to please her master she cooked it.

As the romance of Jacob J. and Marie went on, the time came for more serious talk. So Jacob J. came to the Sackmann home and asked Father Sackmann for Marie's hand in marriage. The next step was for the parents of Jacob J. to meet with the Sackmann parents. A day was set for the wedding and plans were made for the reception.

The engagement ring was a gold ring with a single ruby set in a high crown. The day of the wedding was set for Sunday, November 11, 1923.

**PREPARATION FOR THE** wedding took several days. The reception was to be at the Woeszner farm home. Sister Susan Fink and her baby daughter, Bernice, came to the Woeszners to help with the baking and other preparations.

Because of the pastor's schedule, the wedding ceremony was not at the home church, but at Zion II, a neighboring church known as the Biederstadt church, several miles northeast of the Woeszner farm.

On Sunday, November 11, the day of the wedding, the families of the couple assembled at the Woeszner home. Before departure for the church, devotions were held with Father Sackmann in charge. It was the practice to have prayer with the couple and their families before the ceremony. Since Gottlieb Kessel had a car with glass windows (a great improvement to curtains), he had the honor of taking the couple to the church. This was the Sunday when the Zion II congregation celebrated its annual mission festival. Also, after the service, there was a baptismal service. So the wedding party had to wait in the church's entry until the wedding ceremony began. There was much teasing about the wait. After all, which comes first? The wedding or the baptism?!

The bride was attired in a brown dress (above-the-knee style), low waisted with a skirt of fine pleated panels. She wore a fine net veil held with an orange blossom headpiece. The groom wore a dark suit, purchased at Straub's of Ashley, which was one of the best clothing stores in Ashley, and had the best suit available. The ceremony was performed by Pastor Bergstadt, with Daniel Patzer and Gottlieb Kessel as witnesses. After the ceremony the guests assembled at the Woeszner home for a dinner. Guests were the brothers and sisters of the couple, a few friends and neighbors.

Having receptions at the home meant moving out the furniture and setting up makeshift tables and benches to seat all the guests. The cooks were kept busy in the kitchen for several days since cleaning up after the wedding meant another day or two of work and more time for celebrating.

Gifts received at the wedding were: two long-stemmed goblets, two china cups and saucers inscribed with "Brother"—from sister Fredricka Kessel. (She couldn't get them inscribed "Sister.") From sister Susanna they received a Pyrex casserole in a chrome stand, a sugar and creamer set from the Dan Patzers, berry bowl and serving dishes from Aunt Fredricka Schulz, and a doilie from the Martin Sackmanns.

**THE BRIDE SPENT** many hours making linens for her hope-chest, among which were tablecloths with wide crochet edges, dresser scarfs with crochet insets, towels, bedding and sofa pillows, and others.

Furniture for their new home was purchased with the money Marie had earned doing housework for other people. Whatever else was needed for housekeeping, Father Sackmann bought. Also, added to the dowry were three cows which Father Sackmann purchased from Father Woeszner.

Viola Sackmann Maier says she remembers the wedding party driving through the Gottfried Schlabs farm on their way to the church. The young men of the area gathered there and shot their guns into the air to salute the bridal couple as they passed by. Some of the young men were Marie's relatives.

The newly married couple made their home on the farm with Grandfather and Grandmother Woeszner, and also Jacob J.'s youngest sister, Bertha, who was still living at home. Sharing living quarters involved lots of give and take.

In the spring of the following year, the parents bought a home in Ashley. The house, which was once located at 609 1st Ave. SE, has now been moved to the farm of Ellis Puhlmann, which is about one and one-half miles northeast of the Woeszner farm. They moved to this new home in May 1924. In September 1924, Bertha was married to Edmond Kusler.

Grandparents lived in their purchased home until 1926, when they decided to build a new house. This is at 524 Center Ave. S., and is now the home of Bertha Fischer. This home was always spotlessly clean. In fact, there was no kitchen on the main floor and, for the most part, they lived in the basement. To further keep the house from getting any wear and tear, they covered the scatter rugs with newspaper. The front basement room was their dining room and living area and was furnished with a table, cupboard and cook stove. The second room was the furnace room, but that is where most of the cooking was done on a kerosene stove. Shelves behind the door with a curtain the pantry supplies. The cellar was supplied with all kinds of canned foods and the smell of cottage cheese was always present. I can still see that small cream separator setting on the wooden box. It was a one-gallon size and looked like a toy. It was hand-cranked and needed daily washing which was a tiresome chore. A milk cow supplied their needs for dairy products. The barn west of the house was the quarters for the chickens, hay, feed, storage and garage for the Model T Ford. The large garden was fenced in with woven wire. The big old tom cat was the master of the yard. If he came to the garden gate, he would make his

# A bowl of ice cream was a big treat!

presence known and had to be lifted across the fence or the garden gate had to be opened for him. His menu consisted of bread and cheese. He refused to drink milk. It had to be made into cheese.

## G

**RANDMOTHER WOESZNER KEPT** herself busy with all kinds of crafts and needlework. She made cross-stitch rugs. She would dye material from used clothes and cut it into narrow strips. The base for her rugs were gunny sacks in which local grocery stores got walnuts. They were a finer quality than regular sacks. She had her own special design of roses and borders. Some rugs were round, others rectangular. To keep them flat, she would put the rugs under the mattress to press. As far as we know, she made rugs for all the family members and grandchildren. Many more she sold or gave as gifts. The total came to a hundred, she told us.

Quilts were all handmade. Some designs were the "Flower Garden," "Wedding Ring," and "Double Ring." Not many women did a good enough job to satisfy Grandmother Woeszner, but a friend of hers, Mrs. G.D. Grosz, was an exception. Still, many hours were spent by herself.

Grandfather Woeszner took care of the housework, garden, cow and chickens. He used the dust cloth daily to keep the house spotless. The house had four rooms on the main floor, two bedrooms, dining and parlor. The parlor was never used. I was sometimes allowed to use the pump organ. Electricity was used only for lights. The only appliance they ever had was an electric coffee pot, and I doubt if it was ever used. The cistern supplied their water needs. The pump was in the basement. The cistern box, outdoors, was Grandfather's favorite spot to sit and rest. It was also the coolest place to keep food. Buckets attached to a rope were let down to the water and food was stored in them.

In summer time, Grandfather Woeszner would come to the farm and help with the work. I remember often he would come in time to hear the Bohemian Band over radio station WNAX, Yankton, S.D. He liked to hear march music as it reminded him of music in his homeland of South Russia.

We children would see the Model T come and would run to open the farm gate for him. We were sure he'd wave his hand as he passed by. If there ever was a kind person, it was Grandpa Woeszner. We were sure to get a treat of candy every time he came to the farm. Before he went home after a day's work, he stopped at the well and pumped water by hand to fill the water trough.

He was a modest man. He helped build the Pioneer Memorial on the south shore of Lake Hoskins. It is built of native rock and is erected in honor of McIntosh County's pioneers. Into these rocks are carved the names of the early settlers. But Grandpa Jakob did not want his name carved into a rock because, as he said, "In my life, I've had to work too hard with rocks." The structure was planned and erected by Herbert Larimer. The memorial was completed in 1935. The Sunshine Homemakers Club (of which I am a member) maintains the memorial grounds. Additional shrubs and flowers were planted in 1976. The Lake Hoskins Park was planned and trees were planted in the early 30s. Grandfather Jakob helped plant trees. During the dry years, they carried water by buckets from the lake to the young trees to help them survive the heat and drought.

**IN THE CUPBOARD** at their house was a pint ice cream container. It held nickels and dimes. Everytime we came to their house and told Grandfather of all that had happened on the farm during the week, he would hand out some of those nickels or dimes. We were to go and buy some ice cream "to cool off the heat." There was nothing to equal that flavor! Sometimes we would take a pint of ice cream to their house. Grandmother would not eat any. She was too fussy about she ate. No commercial foods! But Grandfather would take his dish of ice cream with a piece of bread and sit next to the cook stove, let the ice cream melt some, and then enjoy it.

When we were ready to go home, Grandfather would follow us to the car and wish us



Mrs. Andreas Sackmann, nee Karolina Schlabsz.

well on our way. Grandmother was usually too busy. She usually kept on with her work unless we came to eat a meal there. Grandfather would start the coffee and set the table. I remember that most meals were canned sausage, cheese, bread, and jelly. Most of the time there were some molasses cookies and often some chocolate pudding left over from breakfast—that is one thing Grandmother made every morning for herself.

They attended the Lutheran church faithfully, but most of the rest of their time was spent quietly at home. They had a few close neighbors who came to visit. During the 30s, the dusty years, it took good management to keep living on their savings and small income. Their only income was from land they still owned. Even though there were no crops during those lean years, taxes had to be paid. The farm was sold to son Jacob J. who had saved money to pay off the debt, but Grandfather told them to keep their money for a while yet. In the meantime, the banks closed up, the money was lost, and the debt was still to be paid. Grandfather had lost some of their savings too. Later, he was given ownership of a bank building in Ashley to replace the money he had lost in the bank. Grandfather sold it to Gust Pfahl.

On August 3, 1938, Grandfather woke up feeling sick. As he got out of bed, he collapsed and died a few hours later. We had no telephone at the farm, so Andy Sackmann came and told us of Grandfather's attack. But by the time Mom and Dad got to town he had already died. I remember the night before he died there was a thunderstorm with dust and no rain. Every spot in the house was covered with dust.

The funeral was on Sunday, August 7. The coffin was at the house until the day of the funeral. Family members would be in the room most of the time and relatives and friends would come to the house to call on the family. Four flower girls carried the floral sprays at the funeral, a practice which is not used anymore. It was not allowed to have anyone from any other church take part in the services in the Lutheran church.

**IN THE MEANTIME**, the Daniel Patzers had sold their home in Kulm and they moved in with Grandmother Woeszner in Ashley. A few weeks later they moved to Lodi, California. It was Grandmother's dream to see California, and so they took her along. She became very homesick and lonely. She wrote and asked us to come out also, but since that wasn't possible, we had our family photograph taken and sent it to her instead. We were told later, when Grandmother received the picture, she remarked: "Ich han denkt, Jacob, du kommst selber." ("I thought, son, you would come in person.") Grandmother made a pair of pillow cases for me with crochet insets and edges since I wrote to her in German while she was in California.

In early June 1939, Grandmother's health began to fail and she wanted to return to Ashley. Since the Patzers had not planned to come back to North Dakota at that time, arrangements were made for Grandmother to make the trip back with Pastor and Mrs. Rossen (a Nazarene pastor). We went to see her after she arrived home, but she was not well. She always talked about what we were to do once she died. A few days later when Aunt Martha Krause left her home, Grandmother wanted her to take the key along and lock the house from the outside in case she couldn't get up in the morning. And so it happened. The next morning, when they came to her door, it was still closed. They found her in her bed. She had quietly died in her sleep, June 11, 1939, at the age of 71.

The Sackmann grandparents lived in their house in Ashley. He had retired after he got out of the harness shop business. He died suddenly at his home of a heart attack on June 16, 1925. He was 62.

Grandmother Sackmann remained in her home in Ashley until July 18, 1927 when she married Daniel Roloff at Kulm. She moved to Kulm to make her home there for three and one-half years.

I remember visiting with them at their home in Kulm. It was located on the school block across the street from Patzer's house. Grandmother used to get very homesick for her Ashley friends. The step-grandfather was a very kind person and was very good to us. He did all he could to make Grandmother happy. She became ill and was taken to a Bismarck hospital for a time, after which she went to her daughter Susan's home in Ashley. She died on October 24, 1931 at the age of 68. The family was with her at the time of her death. □



Jakob Woeszner and wife, Anna Maria, nee Biederstadt.