

Working for \$1 per day . . .

Living Pioneers

What must one do to be physically active and alert for nearly a century? This question has often been pondered but has never gotten a fixed answer. Gottlieb C. Nitschke offers a partial solution.

A pioneer in rural Ashley, North Dakota, Nitschke always refers to his 90-plus years as "still being young." He celebrated his 92nd birthday July 28 and claims "early to bed and early to rise" and plenty of exercise helps one stay healthy. "Since God put him on earth for a purpose, he believes in doing something essential as long as he can. At age 92 he enjoys plowing, discing, cultivating and cleaning fields of rocks. The most enjoyable seems to be swathing the golden grain with a self-propelled swather. What a change from the scythe used when he was a lad!

Nitschke was born on July 28, 1886 to Christoph and Katherine, nee Gebhardt, in Beresina, South Russia. They came to America by boat, leaving Odessa on April 9, 1894. His passport, issued by Keizerlich General-Konsulat to Odessa, carried the words: "Gut zur Reise Nach Deutschland fuer den Infindlon." In English, that is translated to: "Good for traveling to Germany."

After arriving in the United States, they boarded a train which took them to Ellendale, North Dakota. A man by the name of M. Schlabsz met them there, and the Nitschke family rode as far as the John Maier farm—some 30 miles from Ellendale—by horse and buggy, their way of transportation. The Maier family hosted them until they had built a sod house and barn on a farm that had earlier been claimed by G. Skaley. Buildings were crude, not built by a construction company. With few tools, a sod house was put up in a relatively short time. The dwellings were built using many hours of the then inexpensive labor.

The following winter they took up another 160 acres to help accommodate their children—Gottlieb, 5;



The family poses for portrait: Front row: Rose, Rudolph, Bertha, and Elsie, with their parents (seated). Back row: Roland, Ferdinand, Richard, August, and Arthur.

Gottfried, 3; and John, 1. Their other children, Adolph and Mrs. Jacob Schock, were born in the United States.

Their one cow and horse didn't provide for the family too well. The horse was a means of travel and was also used with a one-bottom plow to break up the sod in planting crops. The cow provided for a large portion of the daily diet.

At age 16, Gottlieb started walking, seeking employment, preferably farm work. Having heard jobs were available in the Edgeley, North Dakota area, that was the direction he chose. Walking during the day and sleeping on grain sacks in elevators during the night, he continued his journey the next day.

Arriving in Edgeley, he found a job during the harvest season for \$1 a day. He received only 50 cents a day for daily routine farm chores.

In October, when fall farm work was completed, he walked back to his parents'



At a family picnic on the Nitschke farm.



Riding in the Ashley jubilee parade.



Gottlieb and Katherine Nitschke celebrating anniversary.

farm 13 miles northeast of Ashley. The following year he planned to find employment in the Edgeley area again. Since he was more experienced, he thought, "Why don't I sleep in a train car this time?!" To his surprise the car moved before he woke up and by the time it stopped he was in LaMoure—about 40 miles too far! Kenausky, a kind gentleman, offered him employment for the harvest season. Later on, Gottlieb's parents expanded their farm operation and so he didn't have to travel elsewhere looking for work—he worked at home.

Nitschke was confirmed at Peace Lutheran Church, east of Ashley. Gottlieb married Katherine Heyd on April 17, 1908 at the farm home of the bride's parents. Their first house and barn were made of sod, which they later covered with wood siding.

In their 60 years of marriage they were blessed with 11 children: Arthur C., Rose (Mrs. Phillip Eszlinger), Bertha (Mrs. Gottlieb Eszlinger), August, Rudolph, Richard, Roland, Ferdinand, all living in the Ashley vicinity, and Elsie (Mrs. Werner Hoffman) who lives near Leola, South Dakota. Two children died in infancy.

Their present home was built in 1950 and for the first time in their lives they enjoy the convenience of running water and plumbing. Several barns, granaries, and a machine shed were built throughout the years.

Their farm operation diversified into grain farming, milking dairy cows, once as many as 50—and all milked by hand. They also raised hogs, sheep, chickens and ducks.

The main source of fuel for many years was home-processed manure. This was a nine-month operation. The procedure included saving the

manure from cows and sheep, putting it into a lot, tramping it to make it solid, and then cutting it with a spade. It was then dried, shocked, dried some more, and finally set in a narrow long stack which was the fuel pile for the winter months. They even used the manure—called mischt—to heat ranges for cooking, baking, and canning in the summer.

One of the highlights of Katherine and Gottlieb's lives was being chosen king and queen of the diamond jubilee in Ashley in 1963. They were chosen from the townspeople as the most typical pioneers of the area.

Mrs. Nitschke passed away January 16, 1968. But her

King and queen in 1963 at diamond jubilee

husband, Gottlieb, and son, Ferdinand, have continued living on the farm where Gottlieb homesteaded. Ferdinand performs all of the household duties plus caring for cattle and chickens. They both share the field work and other farm chores.

Gottlieb was among the first to settle in the southern part of North Dakota. At that time, German was the common language of the area, and Gottlieb's knowledge today of English is mainly self-taught.

Rural living is most enjoyable for this venerable pioneer, and he would never exchange it for all the smog-filled cities in the world!

The writer of this article, Lillian Nitschke, is married to Gottlieb Nitschke's son, Richard. They live on a farm near Ashley, North Dakota.



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