

A SCARY NIGHT UNDER THE STARS

By Terry Ulrich

The history of the Wilbert and Alvina Ulrich farm dates back to the years 1886 and 1890, when Johann and Elisabetha Weisz homesteaded the W $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ -27 and W $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ -34-129-69 in Myrtle Township. They added a tree claim in 1891.

The '90s were not good years for the Weiszes and they lost their farm to unpaid debts. Samuel Hoffman purchased the farm (320 acres) in 1900 from the local banker and his entire family moved to McIntosh County from their homestead in McPherson County in the spring of 1901. The Hoffmans came to the Dakotas during the years 1884 to 1889. Samuel homesteaded in Sec. 9, W $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ and SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ in Detmold

Township in McPherson County in 1889 (land presently owned by Ray and Robert Bertsch).

Samuel's brother, Jacob, arrived in 1884 and his original homestead, which remains in his family, is six miles straight south of the Ulrich farm. Samuel's older brother, Johann, remained in Russia but his six sons—John, Christian, Frederick, Christoph, Karl, and Phillip—and a sister, Magdalene Lammele, all

homesteaded in the Long Lake, South Dakota, area.

For some reason, Samuel, looking for better land or to live closer to his relatives, moved to Myrtle Township. Sam had two sons: John (an early Ashley implement dealer) and Jacob (a farmer in north-central McIntosh County) from an earlier marriage.

Samuel Hoffman, born to Johann and Katarina Hoffman, married Katherina Werre (born in 1856 and died in 1936). Four children were born to this union: Fred (1891-1962), Carl (1894-1955), Magdalena Ketterling (1896-1973), and Lydia Pfeifle (1898-1976). However, Samuel only farmed the new land a few years before he died in 1908. Fred, Carl, and their mother then farmed the land. That was quite a responsibility for Fred, the eldest, who was only 15. It helped that Katherina was tough and independent. She bought her first 160 acres of land in 1911.

Fred farmed his entire life with his brother, Carl. They later added more land in 1919. Fred married Beatha Heyd (1910-1968) in 1933. Her family had homesteaded in the Long Lake area in 1887. They only had one child, Alvina Hoffman Ulrich, born in 1934. Carl never had any children and spent his remaining 13 years as an invalid. Katarina died in 1936.

Alvina married Wilbert Ulrich, and three children were born to them: Gary, Terry, and Nancy. Gary and his family, Terry, and their parents presently operate the family farm. Nancy is a social worker for the State School in Grafton, North Dakota.

Land has been added through the years and there are many different buildings, but there are still a few first-generation buildings and some stone ruins from the Weisz family which remain.

Wilbert's grandfather, George Ulrich, came to McIntosh County in 1906 and homesteaded on top of the big hill south of Fredonia. His maternal grandparents, John and Elisabeth (Neuharth) Opp are



original pioneers in McPherson County.

John's parents, Daniel and Katherina Opp, homesteaded in 1884. Their land still remains in the Opp family.

Elisabeth, who was born in Dakota Territory at Menno in 1881, arrived with her parents, George and Elizabeth Neuharth, in the Eureka area in 1884. The Neuharths had originally homesteaded in the Menno area in 1874.

Here are some excerpts from a diary of Daniel Opp (1872-1956), brother of John Opp, describing their first night on the prairie:

"Having arrived here, everything was unloaded as quickly as possible. The wagon was set up and loaded with the goods. While all this was underway, we boys herded the oxen. When we looked about, we noticed that not far from us three wagons, to which oxen were hitched, had made halt. We also noticed by their language that they were some of our kinsmen. So we reported this to our parents.

"And what did we discover? They were acquaintances from our old home, who, during the summer, had settled 60 miles west of

Frederick. Naturally, we were greatly elated to find acquaintances in a strange land who could show us the way to the new settlement.

"In the meantime, evening had approached. But, regardless of that, we decided to go as far as the Elm River, six miles distant, where the other three teams agreed to overtake us that night, which they did.

"Having arrived at the Elm River, we made camp. It was the first night we arranged our night quarters on the wild prairie under the clear heavens. All went well for it was not cold.

"The next morning we continued our journey, always toward the unknown west. Since we were heavily loaded, we could only cover 26 miles a day. This time we remained overnight at Koto, six miles north from Leola. Here we found a store, a post office, and several other small buildings.

"Up to this time, the weather was nice. The land was level, but all had been taken up.

"The next morning after breakfast, we started out again. But, alas, one of our neighbor's oxen had gone lame. Consequently, we could proceed only slowly and some of our acquaintances left us.

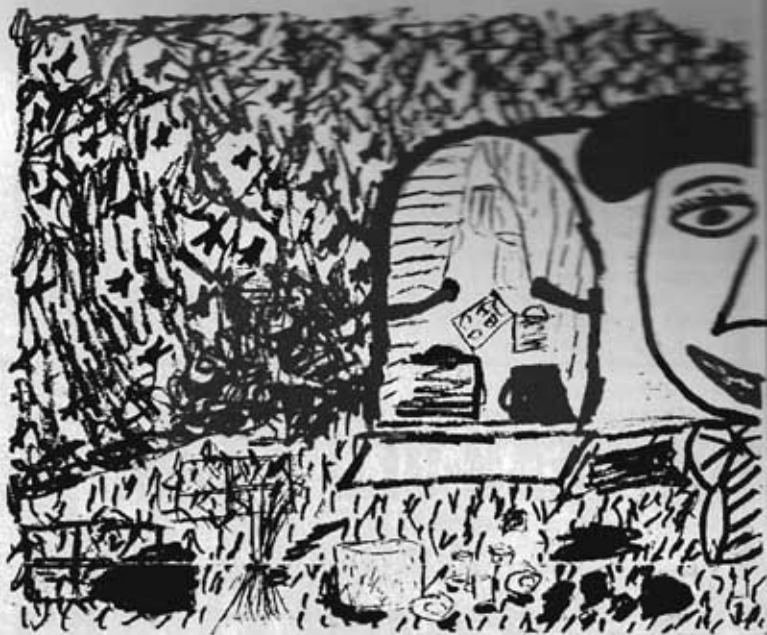
"Five miles west of Koto the

hills began. We drove all day without seeing any living being. Nothing but dismal hills which were covered with stones and bones. Who would have believed it at the time that any human beings would live here in a desert that had been forsaken not only by Indians but also by the wild animals?!

"That they had earlier been here was evidenced by the many and untimely bleached bones.

"In the meantime, night had descended again, and the time had arrived to prepare our night quarters on the wild prairie under the stars. We had a little hay left, but we needed that for food for our cattle. So nothing was left for us to sleep on but the bare ground, which was sufficiently large for us.

"After we had eaten our evening meal, we were supposed to go to sleep. We, the 12 children of two families, lay in the middle and our parents on both sides of us. After the customary evening blessings which the mothers invoked upon



THE NIGHT WAS DARK & LONELY.

Four-generation (continued)

"Finally we could see our promised land!"

their wards, we soon would have been overcome by sleep.

"But here on the open prairie that was quite another matter.

"It was a cold, frosty October night, and we noticed that our mothers, more in a sitting than in

a reclining position, watched over us, asking now this, now that child, if it was cold, which we older children constantly denied.

"We could clearly see by the bright moonlight how tears, like pearly dew drops, rolled down the cheeks of our mothers.

"Yes, those were pioneer days!

"We were on our feet early the next morning. The black prairie was covered with frost. In reality, it looked as though we had had a light snow during the night. The

lake, near which we camped, was frozen so hard that we could hardly water our cattle. We had neither wood nor any other kind of fuel with which to build a fire to warm ourselves.

"In all haste we devoured our bread with tears and then continued into the blackened hills. At noon we could look west from Long Lake into our promised land, which we reached at three o'clock in the afternoon. We had arrived at our destination!" □