

CONVERSATIONS



When President McKinley Was Shot

By L.E. Buchholz

As we headed into the first decade of this century, 1901 to 1910, the main event for many here was the death of President McKinley. It caused our people great fear and sorrow. They were mainly immigrants, strangers in a new land, and when they heard that the president had been shot, they were sorely afraid that the nation would sink in bloody turmoil, and they would lose what little possessions they had. As we know now, that did not happen. The immigrants struggling in the Dakotas eventually succeeded in building a prosperous civilization. During those early years, sod houses sprang up everywhere. The breaking up of the prairie sod began to turn the world upside down, so that both Dakotas at once became farm states.

The situation of my immigrant parents was promising in that the Soo Line Railroad and the town of Lehr, North Dakota, were both here on their arrival. They immediately started to use available machinery, acquire stock and other property. The future looked hopeful. They believed they could succeed with their

farm life.

During those days, almost everyone saw the beginning of a church, school, or country store (if no nearby town were available). Mail service also became a reality. A weekly German newspaper was a pleasant possibility, and so was a twice-a-year mail-order catalog, and maybe even a letter once in a while. Some towns around here even had a doctor. And most communities were called upon by traveling salesmen.

But during the decade of 1910 to 1920, events began to pile up. The homestead act expired, and the coming of immigrants around here all but ceased. As of 1914, farmers received full or 100% parity. We then saw farms become fewer and larger. Our nation became involved in World War 1. Frame buildings became the going trend. And women were even supposed to be allowed to vote.

Following on the heels of the warring world was the deadly flu epidemic. It was like the black plague. People almost everywhere were sick, suffering, or dy-



The neat sod house appearing here belonged to L.E. Buchholz's grandparents, Ferdinand and Augustina Buchholz. The sod home was located near Lehr, North Dakota. In front, a vintage car shows the unmistakable influence of horse-drawn buggies: two lamps mounted at the top of the car's front. Identities of the people are not known.

ing. Those were trying times. Grief swept across our world then. But life had to go on. Years were required to overcome all of the setbacks, yet overcome them we did. Conditions eventually returned to normal again.

It had been learned long before that that one horse could do the work of 20 able-bodied men, and do it better and cheaper. Horse numbers built up fast. By about 1920, horse numbers rose to 26 million nationwide (and that was not counting six million mules). Then, surprisingly, their numbers began to decline, continuing to do so until the late 1950s when interest in them turned around again and the horse population reclaimed half of its former numbers. Horses and mules stood for progress, profit, crop production, and labor saving. They could reproduce themselves. And we could survive on their "home-grown" fuel.

My grandfather died in February 1920. My grandmother followed him in death in November 1925. Readers may be interested to learn that both of those honorable people died in their farmhouse that was completed in 1907. They are buried in the country Evangelical Tabor church cemetery, about five miles east of their farm.

I will now give you the names of their five children in the order of their birth, and in the next five segments will give information on the marriages and the farms they moved on. All four of their sons stayed on farms, as their parents did. That is a sure sign of true faithfulness and an enduring life.

Edward, Jacob, Emanuel, Bertha, and Reinhold were their children, all born in the Old Country (i.e., Russia). They were two to 12 years old at the time of the family's arrival in the U.S. At that time, there was a good country school in the Lehr vicinity only about a half-mile west from their house. I believe all of them attended classes there, except my father. He had had some schooling in the Old Country. My grandparents never could read or write English. In fact, they never learned how to speak English, either.

I have read many accounts in jubilee and history books as to the welfare of the people in the two decades mentioned. But I shall only speak about my grandparents' family. They worked as hard as any of them did. They could never have had any money to speak of. The customs up to then were humble. But I do not know that they went hungry, had no clothes, or no dwellings. I am of the opinion they lived normal lives, and kept on with seasonal duties.

I would never want to make out that things were that bad in Russia, that they had to flee for their lives, only to arrive here and then be told that conditions were worse here than there. All of that could leave readers in confusion. All I can leave you with is this: things are different now than they were then. But you can still move out on a farm and live off the land, and find out for yourself. Living under a wagon box can still be tried. I myself have lived on a farm in North Dakota all my life, have liked it, and have never wanted to be anywhere else. And I think I have lived a full life. □