

PRAIRIE PHILOSOPHER SEZ...



Ticket to America

By L.E. Buchholz

Much planning and time must have gone into taking leave of the Old Country, Russia. It involved selling all of the belongings, as only a few things could be taken along. Fear was involved about the manner of speech: how can we understand them? how can they understand us? A long, strange, and fearful trip lay ahead of them. It was not unheard of that some persons died at sea, or that children were born enroute. When the day of departure finally came, sorrowing people wept openly. They figured they would never see or hear from each other again; people embraced each other for a very apparent eternal farewell.

Many such scenes took place at the area around the Black Sea. Sometimes over here (and a spell later), those events were reversed as long lost friends were reunited. At such times, hours were spent in questioning about the welfare of the left behind. Homesick, sorrowing, and bewildered people would try to comfort and encourage one another. I am almost certain that some people plain up and followed on over because the pain of being separated was too much to bear.

A paid ticket was needed to get from the villages to the waterfront by train, and maybe there a second ticket to board a ship to take them to the New York harbor and the promised U.S.A. Tensions ran high. Certain tests had to be met. They could be held over, pending the outcome of test results. Some could be sent back. Citizenship papers were to be taken out there and then.

After all the above and more, a third ticket was bought to board a train to take them to the end of the line, or to available homestead lands, or to someone they knew. In our case, it was to Kulm, North Dakota, where Dad's mother had a brother, named Christian Maier. It was he who welcomed them to our great nation and state; he told them of the whereabouts of Dan Roth and Michael Ternasky, who were well settled north of nearby Lehr, North Dakota.

When they stepped off the ship in New York, that was to be their last ship ride. And when they took the train from Kulm to Lehr, that may well have been their

last train ride. On arrival at Lehr, they leased a livery buggy. Their destination was to Michael Ternasky, who then pointed them to the available claim that they then at once filed on; an arrangement was made to spend the first winter there with the Ternasky family.

In April, in the next spring, a sod house was built, along with a barn and a poultry house. A team of oxen was bought, and also a wagon, plow, and even a buggy with a team of horses. They were happy when



Original Buchholz homestead frame house built in 1907. Men in foreground are unidentified.

they saw the progress they were making, and the help that people were freely giving them.

But unknown to them was the fact that a problem was sneaking up. They were to be unable to find a supply of water. Years of digging and drilling wells were to prove fruitless. It became a real trial to their faith.

It was 12 years later when Johnson & Holman of nearby Fredonia set up a well-drilling rig, and very close in, and drilled deep into the earth, that a good and enduring supply of water was found. For the next 75 to 80 years, it was the only well ever used on the farm. A modern stroke pump head was later installed. A low tower windmill was later erected. And a round, wooden water tank was located. Such a unit was complete and the last word in convenience.

The family's first money venture was to winter 70 head of big wild steers, four to five years old, belong-

ing to George Gackle of Kulm. The contract was to care for the cattle from October to April the following year. At the going price of \$3 per animal unit, they had plenty of range, a good supply of hay, some buildings, but no water. The intended well to be used was two and one-half miles away on the southwest corner of the mighty Mundt Lake. There a plank trough was provided along with a bucket and rope to be used as a pumping unit. Dad often told me those big cattle would eat three loads of hay per day, and run to the well once or often twice a day to be followed and watered.

Those early settlers often uttered the phrase that they had never seen that much money. In fact, they



Horse-powered well-drilling scene in early 1900s in North Dakota's McIntosh County. The mud cart which one of the men has in his hand is made with buggy wheels.

never even hoped to realize such incomes like earned wages of 50 cents to maybe \$1 per day, or money like \$210 in as little as six to seven months' time. A field of flax the size of 10 acres could net \$150, while 40 acres of threshed wheat could sell for \$500. Then there might have been money from the sale of cream, eggs, and even wool. It might have been such prosperity that inspired far-sighted businessmen here in our up-hill town to build two modern bank buildings.

In one of those banks, or even in both of them, money could be put on deposit, borrowed, or paid back with high interest. Taxes had to be paid. The banks' tellers had to write most of the checks themselves and then witness them as they were signed with an X. I have often wondered who may have been the happiest. Was it the laborers, the stock men, the grain farmers, or those bankers? At any rate, a few years later, the town had no bank at all. That sorry situation lasted for several years. It was the time our town was called a down-hill town. □