

White



Friends and relatives surprise the Wackers on their 50th wedding anniversary.

Roots

This is the last of a five-part series chronicling the life and times of Karl Wacker, an immigrant from South Russia who homesteaded near Leola, S.D. The articles have finished a first-

hand glimpse into the frustrations and joys many of the early pioneers encountered. They were written by Karl Wacker's granddaughter, Hilda Sperle, of Leola.

Mother's asthma, as I said before, had returned and was as bad or worse than it had been before we went to Montana, and I had been ruptured for a few years but it hadn't bothered me until now. Now in my old days it all came and it was hard for me to do much of anything. But this was not near as bad as my dear wife's asthma. She had been rid of it for a few short years only to get it back in her old days.

My youngest son, Fred, came back from Montana, too. He couldn't get ahead in any way, and wanted to start something that would pay. He stayed one winter, and then went to Canada where he stayed about three years. In those three years he had two big operations and had to go to California for his health. The doctors told him that he must go to a warmer land so he chose California. There he bought 20 acres of land, built a house, planted alfalfa and fruit trees and got a few

chickens. Then he settled down. His children were growing up and could help him a little in the garden. His wife helped him too, and he also worked for other people, earning money. Three of his brothers-in-law were close by and helped him, too. So in money matters they didn't have to worry, although they were far from rich. Now his operation in Canada hadn't been complete and that bothered him again. He went to a doctor and was told that he must have an operation to save his life. There was nothing to do but go to the hospital again. There they made the third operation. Two ribs had been taken out to get at his lungs when he was in Canada. That had been a boil. Now two more were taken out and tubes put in to drain out the pus that had formed in the same place. This tube was left in and the rest healed again. For a long time the pus came out before it stopped draining. He felt pretty good but awfully weak.

In one of his letters he wrote, "I would like to visit you once again but don't have the money to pay the trip. I would like to see you all again and speak to Mother and Father about the Bible, for I believe I haven't long to stay in this world. I feel that I will die pretty soon."

I wrote to him right away and told him to come and that I would pay the train fare. A few weeks later he came and oh! how glad we all were to see him. There were so many things to ask and talk about on both sides. He told us how he wanted to die once when he was so sick, and how much happier he would be if he were in heaven now in everlasting peace. Oh, we had a wonderful time together, for probably



Several from the Wacker family with friends and relatives on a Sunday afternoon celebrating the arrival of the automobile.

the last time in our lives. No, we'll never forget those days together.

It was early in the winter when he started for home. Three days before he left his wound opened and started draining pus. My daughter, Luisa Wageman, then prepared pads of cotton for him to put on to keep the wound dry. These he took along and on the train a Negro took good care of him, all the way to Sacramento, California. There he went straight to the hospital and had another operation.

Before leaving the train, though, he gave the Negro ten dollars, saying, "You have earned it. You have the heart of a white man—no, better and softer than many white men's hearts.

him the last two operations now gave him the next one, too, the fifth. They did not know whether he would live through it. One of them, though, had hopes of making him well so he made the operation. Fred lay in the hospital till spring. Then the doctors saw that they would have to operate once more in order to make him well and the poor soul had to live through the sixth operation, for there was more pus in his lungs. They took off the shoulder blade and arm, partly, and all the ribs on one side except one, and when the pus had been taken out they put in a silver plate, in place of the ribs, and then patched him up again. He had to stay there till mid-summer. Then he was well enough to go home. But he had to go to the doctor several times for examinations, and he could not do any work at all.

Lately, the doctor gave him a tight belt or corset that he had to wear all the time—and now he feels and looks real well and does his own work again. Of course, he must be very careful not to lift too much or do too much work. When the doctor let him out of the hospital, he said, "I would not be afraid to put a bullet through you,

you'd live through it!"

But now to go back and go on with my own story. I just thought a few words about my children would make it more interesting. They are the most of one's lives, anyway.

We never thought of celebrating wedding anniversaries. One day one of my daughters asked, "Father, how long have you been married?" I gave her our marriage certificate, thought no more about it and went to work in the garden. They figured and found out that in three weeks it would be 50 years since we had been married. They prepared everything without our knowledge and six days before our anniversary Karl came from Wishek to get Mother and me for a week's visit. Of course we had a very busy week. Our old friends and neighbors whom we had known while we lived in Wishek were still interested in us and wanted to see us again. On the day set for our return we left Wishek late in the afternoon, about 3:30 for our home. When we saw all the cars in our yard, we were scared and asked who was sick or what was wrong! They told us everything was all right and we should not worry. Mother trembled

There in Sacramento the doctor kept him three or four weeks so his wife and children could come and see him before he took him to San Francisco to given him another and very dangerous operation. The doctors who had given

Early Pioneers Helped Each Other During Problem Times

though, when we entered the house and saw so many dear faces.

Then the minister came forward and shook our hands and said, "Congratulations, Mr. and Mrs. Wacker! We are celebrating your golden wedding anniversary!"

How unexpected! We had to sit at one end of a long table. All the children and grandchildren who were near enough to come were present. Those absent were Rosina and Katherina and families from Canada and Fred and family from California.

The minister gave a short sermon and we sang songs. Mother and I were not ashamed of the tears of joy that ran down our cheeks.

On the table stood the wedding cake with a golden ring about it and on it were 50 candles with gold colored candle holders. After the sermon, supper was served. And, oh! what a supper it was! Everybody had brought something good to eat. After supper, the presents were opened and shown. It was a wonderful time we had that evening and by twelve o'clock everything was over, but not forgotten!

Well, after two years on my farm, one-half year alone and one and one-half with Emanuel and family, we built a house on the farm of one of my sons-in-law, J.J. Wageman. The house cost me a little over \$500. Just a little house, big enough for the two of us. Here we kept a good milk cow. They milked her with their cows, and Mother and I got all the milk, cream, butter and cheese we needed. Whenever Luisa (Mrs. Wageman) or Sarah, her daughter, made something good to eat we would always get part of it. Never a birthday passed that they didn't bring us a cake and often other goodies. Also the other children brought us something nearly every time they came to visit.

When we had spent five years here we decided some of the other children could take care of us too. Luisa was not

well and had only one daughter, while Christina, another of our daughters, had three grown daughters. One was married and so she still had two left and we thought we'd go there for the rest of our days.

Our sons and daughters, on hearing our will, got together and moved our house to Christina's, that is, John A. Feickert's farm. It didn't cost me anything to have it moved.

Two and one half years after this last move my dear wife passed away. On October, 25, 1933, the Lord relieved her of her suffering and took her to his heavenly home, where I would like to be. But the Lord wills me to stay so I must stay and console myself with the thought that it can't be long before I, too, will be allowed to go home.

The last eight years of Mother's life we spent lots of money for medicine, but all in vain. While living by the home of Christina we were also well taken care of. There was Hilda, one of Christina's daughters whom Mother had picked out for her own darling when she was but a baby. She was 14 years old when we moved to their farm and it made Mother very happy to see her come and look after us and ask whether there was any work she could do for us, which she did many times a day. Often she would come and wash the dishes for us. That made me very happy because I usually had to help Mother or, if she was too sick, do them alone. To show my appreciation I made her a willow sewing basket, which she adores to this day. She put a lining in it. I also made many other willow baskets, some big ones for wash baskets. The women liked them because there was never a rust spot as with apple baskets. I made a lot of different sizes—some I sold and some I gave away for presents.

I am still making willow baskets in my spare time, when I'm not reading or helping the children pick up chips to burn. But I can't stand to make more than one a day. My eyes are poor and muscles stiff. Soon they'll say, "Grandpa Wacker is dead—and then I will be gone, too. ■"

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