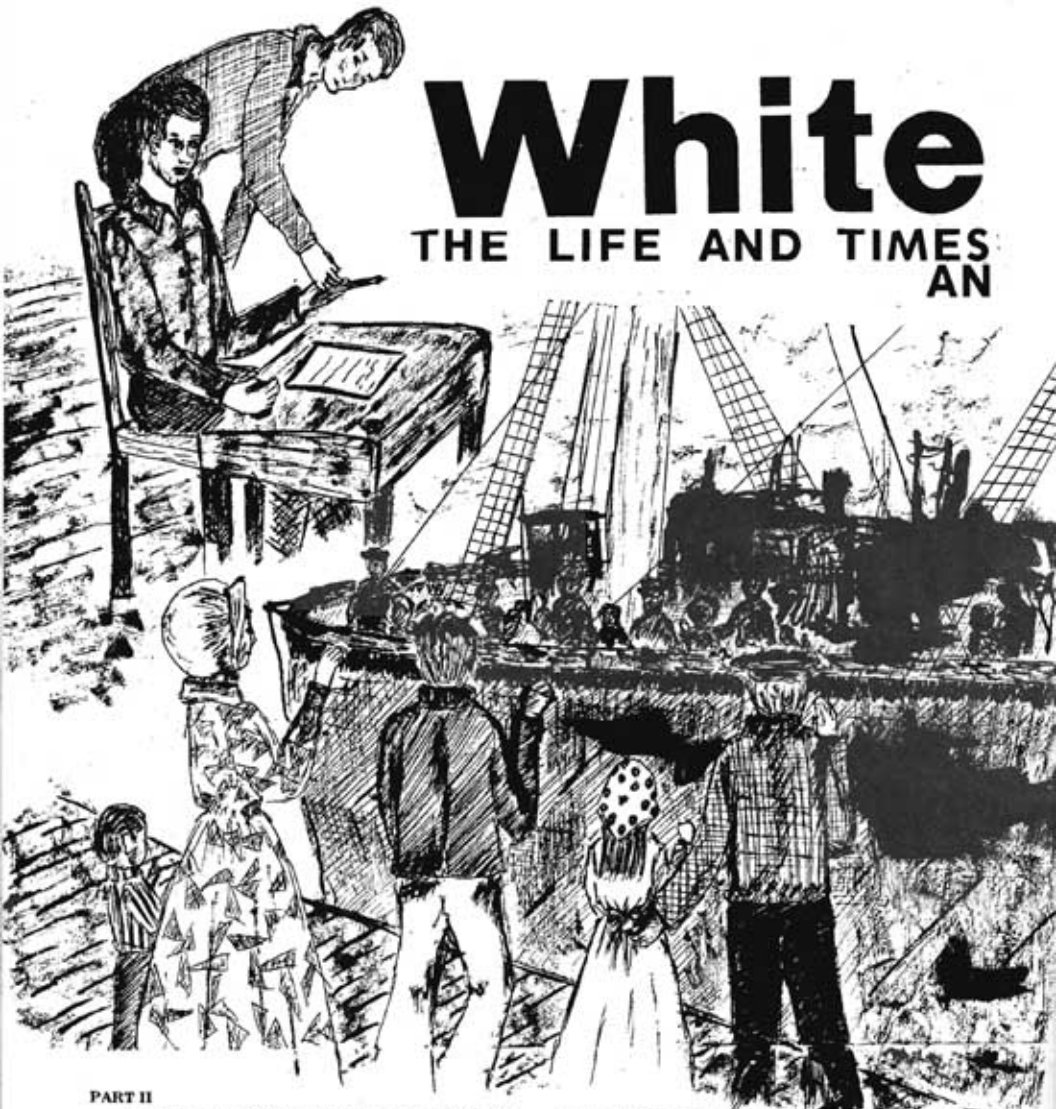


White

THE LIFE AND TIMES
AN



PART II

In the winter of 1874-75 it was hard to get work. The settlers were all newly settled and were very poor. There were few like the Jasmans, who had nice houses and lived comfortably, and too many jobless young men looking for work. Many could not earn their board. Some worked for farmers and got just their board and room, and others didn't even get that!

As I was a carpenter and could also make furniture out of plain wood, I had a better chance of obtaining a job. I

found a man who had immigrated from Russia five months before I had, but he wasn't a builder himself. I went to work for him for ten dollars a month and my keep. He had a cellar to make, a barn to build, and some other things. That winter I was supposed to make them a table, a cupboard and other furniture.

First the barn was built of sod. We broke up real weedy soil, and then cut it into pieces about two and one-half feet long. These we put together. The wall was two furrows thick.

Roots

OF KARL WACKER, IMMIGRANT



This is the second article of "White Roots," the story of Karl Wacker, an immigrant from South Russia, who settled near Leola, S.D. in the latter part of the 19th century. The narrative is Wacker's own account, translated from German by his granddaughter, Hilda Feickert Sperle, when she was only 15 years old. The preceding article told of the pain of saying goodbye forever to his family in Russia, of the excitement of landing in America, and how his carpentry skills enabled him to find work with the kind Jasman family. The story continues with Wacker meeting a beautiful young woman—and their new, happy life together on the prairie.

(that's about two feet). One layer was laid one way, the next layer across and so on until it was the desired height. For doors and windows we left holes, laying wood across to make them square. When it was six and a half to seven feet high, we made the gable ends higher some four or five feet. Then the barn was ready to put a roof on and put the doors and windows in. We drove to the woods with the wagon and horses and got some trees from six to eight inches in diameter and some big willows to put the roof on with. After

putting these on carefully we put on a layer of hay, and then covered that with a layer of sod. Finally, the barn was done.

After the cellar had been made, we went to town to get some nice lumber, nails and glue for me to make furniture. I had some tools and little by little I got myself what else I needed. In two months we had made all the furniture they needed and also a drag and a sled. A lot of farmers praised my work, and one said, "When you get through here, come to my place. I have some work for you, too. I'll pay you 20



Illustrations by Barbara Beechey O'Neil

It was love at first sight!

cents a day and give you your room and board."

What could I do? I had no home, had to have some place to stay, and so I took him up and went and made him a sled, drag and various other things he needed. In two weeks that was over too, but others had asked for me, and so I was busy most of the winter. On Sunday, I would go along to church and after church the farmers came to me and told me what they wanted done. So when I was done with one job, there was always another one or two waiting for me.

At the end of March I went back to Yankton, to Jasman again. I had \$25 in my pocket and a man owed me \$10. I felt pretty well off. (I never got those \$10 dollars though!)

In about ten days I went to Yankton again. My brother Johan and another young man named Jacob Bauer had gotten very little work, and so each had a board bill of about \$20 which they couldn't pay. I was sorry for them, but did not have enough money to help both of them. I gave my brother \$20 to pay his bill. Now I had only five dollars to my name. But I soon got work making wagons again—two weeks for five dollars a week, working ten hours a day. Later I got work as a carpenter and earned a dollar a day. I picked up lots of carpenter work here and there.

My brothers were lucky, too. Johan got a job in an implement shop. From time to time, they increased his wages and he kept that job for several years. The other one, Christian, stayed at Jasmans. He worked six months for \$35. In May he came back to Yankton and got a job in a shoe store. As the settlers were mostly German, they preferred a German clerk. My brother was German, and so they liked him. He received good wages and kept that job about ten years, and then he went into business for himself. In this he had lots of luck and many customers.

In 1875 the times got better and wages, too. But to make this story more complete I have to go back again, about six months.

As I believe I have said before, we arrived in Yankton in October of 1874. In November we heard that there were some people coming to Yankton from Russia—from the same village I had come from. On the appointed day, I went with a friend to the depot. Some of the people who were coming were his friends and he went to meet the train. We were about the same age, 19. The train pulled in and here they were, my comrad's neighbors from Russia! They had a 19-year-old daughter, very pretty to look at, and the first time I saw her I liked her and thought she would make a nice wife for me. (In other words, I think Grandpa means it was love at first sight). Well, my friend went forward and greeted them and introduced them to me but when it came to Barbara, the pretty girl, he shook hands and even kissed her! A pang of jealousy went through me. I didn't like to see him kiss her. I didn't ask anybody where she went or wanted to live, but my thoughts were always with her. When will I see her again? Then in March when I came to Yankton she was in town, working for two dollars a week. I didn't know this, though, and after about a month and a half, I saw her once in church. I watched her but, when church was over and people went out, she was lost in the crowd. Gone again! And I couldn't find her again for two weeks. Then I met her once and talked a few words. After that we met more often and began to like each other lots. She moved and worked for another family. These people paid more and were very good to her but they had an awful lot of work and it was too hard for her. They realized this, though, and hired another girl to help her. That helped but it was still hard for her and as our

German man was bricklayer and I was carpenter.

The same year the Milwaukee Railroad was built through. Many men worked there, the wages were high, from \$2.00 to \$3.00 a day! All the time not spent on my farm was spent in carpenter work. I was very busy but had nothing to complain about. I was well and strong and was earning money. By fall, I had all my debts paid and had bought a wagon, a team of horses, and 15 or 20 head of cattle.

We had four children by this time. That same year our home was blessed with a pair of twin girls. They weighed five and three-fourths and six pounds. They were so much alike and so pretty! No one, not even we, could see any difference. Soon it was known far and wide and many people came just to see our twins. Barbara always had them dressed alike. I weighed them off and on to see how much they gained. The first born was always one-fourth pound heavier. We named one Christina, the other Katherina.

Barbara's mother was with us when the twins were born and stayed with us two and one-half years. Her name was Katherina and so she always called baby Katherina her child and had her in her care most of the time. "One is enough for you," she would tell Barbara.

When the twins were six months old, we noticed that Christina had something on her back between the shoulder blades. It looked like a wart. Slowly it grew bigger and when it was about one-fourth inch in diameter we showed it to our doctor. He said to let it go until we can determine what it was going to be. The child cried very much, a lot more than the other one. When they were a year and a half old, the doctor told us it was a growth that had to be removed, and made the operation. The wound was about three-quarters of an inch across and one-eighth inch deep. It healed real nice and in a short time the child was as well as the other one. By this time they had started to talk some, and were identical again. No one could tell them apart. Often we had to look for



Shown above in a recent photograph is Hilda Feickert Sperle of Leola, S.D. She translated her grandfather's account from German when she was only 15 years old.

the scar on Christina's back to know which was which. When I came into the house, they came running to me. I can still see them running to me, their faces so much alike, turned up, screaming, "Papa, Papa, sit lap!" I would take them on my knees and look at one, then the other. I'd ask, "Are you Katherina?" They both said, "Yes." If I'd ask, "Are you Christina?" it was the same way. Then I would say, "But darling, I don't know which is Katherina or which is



The Wackers had a happy family life.

hearts found each other she told me more, and at last we decided to get married. On November 14, 1875 she became my bride.

We didn't have a marriage license. They didn't have them in those days. So we were married by the justice of the peace and on the next Sunday the preacher married us before God and the congregation.

I built a little house for us—a nice little home in which we were very happy. Neither of us had had a real home before. We had always been working for a living, and so it was really very nice to have a comfortable home to go to. It was wonderful! I had prayed for such a good wife and had wandered so far from home and God sent her after me. To me, she was like an angel from heaven. I still thank God in Heaven for sending her to me. She was loving, patient and true to the end, patient especially in her last few years of illness.

But I must not go too fast. Many things happened before she was at last taken from this cruel world.

Luck was with us and I got a lot of work and good wages. I must say I was very fortunate, for many young men, and older ones too, had come that long way and could not find as much work as I had. But then, a carpenter had more chance of getting work than a lot of others because so many immigrants coming in just stayed in and near Yankton. Carpenters were scarce and these folks needed homes and furniture, so it was my luck.

The crops were good and so day by day things grew brighter and everything went well for two years. The third year I caught a cold and after being sick for some time we sent for the doctor and he couldn't help me. Later we sent for another doctor and he said he couldn't help. The third one was sent for, who, after examination, said, "It is very bad. I have only one thing that might help. It is very hard on a person but I think he is strong enough to live through it." He gave me a prescription but from that they thought I

would die. They gave up hope, and then finally I came back again. But it took a long time till I could work once more. It cost lots of money, eating up most of my savings.

When I was a little better a neighbor came to visit me. He said, "Well, neighbor, you are sick. I think you should drink beer." He was a brewer. "But the doctor said I shouldn't take any strong drinks," I told him. "Oh," he said, "your doctor doesn't know everything. Beer is good for everybody. I will give you beer and you drink it instead of water. You and your wife both. Drink all you can and you'll be well in no time." He was true to his word. He gave us all the beer we wanted and in a few weeks I was well enough to go out and sit in nice weather! Later in the spring, when I was up and around, I went over and wanted to pay the good man for the beer but he would not accept anything.

After the doctors were paid, there was very little left to live on, and so I sold my house for \$300. I got only \$100, and it took nearly two years till I finally got it all. We moved to my homestead, buying a team of oxen from my brother on time payments. One neighbor gave me a cow, another gave a plow, all to be paid when I had a start and could afford it. We built a sod house, a small barn, and dug a well. The water wasn't deep so that didn't take much. I broke up 15 acres of my homestead and sowed it. The neighbors broke up 10 acres for me. I was the poorest farmer in the neighborhood and so they helped me in every way they could.

The crops were quite good that fall and a lot of farmers had some building to do. There were jobs for me again! I got a lot of work. Five of my wife's brothers were in the neighborhood. They did lots for us for which we were thankful, but we couldn't pay them. They didn't expect us to, either.

Most of the neighbors were from Kassel, Russia. In 1877 we moved to the farm and in 1878 we decided to build a church. There were lots of people of our faith and so the church was made large. The walls were made of brick. A





Playing a trick on Grandmother!

Christina." Then one or the other would say, "Why, Papa, just look on my back. Then you will know." To find out, I had to open the top button of one dress and look for the scar. Then I'd know.

One day Grandmother put Katherina to sleep in her room, and then she went out and closed the door carefully after her. Christina was crying in Barbara's room, apparently not ready for her noon nap. Grandmother said, "Yours is crying again. You don't know how to raise children. Mine is sleeping." Then, laughing, she went out to work in the garden. She was out about half an hour when Katherina awoke and Christina went to sleep. Barbara went and got Katherina to her room and put the sleeping child in Grandmother's room.

When Grandmother came in, she said, "See, yours is still crying and mine's sleeping!" That of course was all in fun.

Then Barbara said, "But, Mother, this is your child that is crying."

Grandmother looked at the weeping child and said, "No, no, I know my baby. This is yours crying. Mine doesn't cry so much!"

"No Mother, just come and look. It is yours." But Grandmother just wouldn't believe it. At last she came, snatched the child from Barbara, put the dress aside and looked. The mark wasn't there.

"Oh, you dear child! What's wrong?" Grandmother said. "Are you sick?" And hugging the child and cooing comforting words, she took her back to her room. We had lots of fun with those two darlings!

People from far and near came to see them. Everybody was delighted and amazed at their beauty.

One day I had business in town and when I went in I took Barbara and the twins along. I stopped at the drug store as she wanted to buy something there. She got off the buggy and went in, and I went on to the grocery store with the twins. When I arrived at the grocery store, the agent glanced up and seeing the children, he put down his pen and came to sit down in front of my twin daughters. They looked

up into his face with smiles upon their bright and honest faces. They weren't afraid. They were used to having people stare and make a fuss over them, and they seemed to enjoy it. After looking at them a while, he looked at me and asked, "Are these your children?" I told him they were. He looked me over and then asked where the mother is. "She'll be here presently," I told him. "Oh, here she comes." He looked at her for a long minute and then at the children again, and then at her and at me again. Finally he asked our name and I told him.

"Oh, sir!" said he. If these were my children, I would take them to a big city and earn lots of money just showing them to people! Why, man, you can get rich through these twins!" I told him I couldn't do that. "But why?" he asked. "This could be your luck day if you would listen to me. If I were you, I would do just that. Is not that a great and wonderful thing? Such a lovely pair! Beautiful! Identical!" But I thought if something would happen to one or both of them due to traveling, I would never forgive myself. I wanted them to have a normal life on the farm with the rest of the family. I thought I couldn't bear it if we would lose one or the other of them.

The next winter there was an epidemic of diphtheria and all the children were sick except Christina. The twins were four years old by now. She ran around the house as lively as she could be. Once I remember she said to her mother, "The others are all sick but I won't be sick. I'll help you, won't I Mother?" Mother replied, "Yes, you darling, you help Mother," and Mother had a lot of things to do taking care of five sick youngsters. But that night my precious little Christina started to droop, didn't look so happy anymore, and in three days she was dead.

TO BE CONTINUED
NEXT MONTH