Virginia Schweigert remembers fun, entertainment at Zeeland Hall

By Zachary Vietz

Virginia (Brandtner) Schweigert grew up on a farm 12 miles north of Zeeland. She attended high school in town, as well as the Lutheran church. She has many fond memories of Zeeland and its hall. Virginia looks back on her high school days with a smile for all the pleasant memories. She remembers racing down to the cafe with her two cousins on their lunch break to wait on the travelers coming off the passenger and freight trains to make some extra money. She counted herself lucky she had the chance to wait on these visitors.

At the time, her aunt and uncle, Henry and Mary (Brandtner) Brandtner, owned the cafe. Virginia remembers going to the Zeeland Hall for gym class. Movies were also a big deal. Harold Dockter from Ashley would bring down the projector and do movies every weekend.

School plays and other social events, including basketball, were held in the hall since the school did not have a gym in those days. Skating was very much a popular activity. Every Wednesday evening from 6:30 to 9 they would have roller skating night. Virginia talked about how there was couple/trio skating and a lot of kids and adults.

Everyone would skate on the same night, even the adults. They would have an announcer and recorded music to highlight the night. Virginia mentioned that Mr. Mastel from Hazelton would bring the skates down and that they were “really good.” After graduating from high school in 1946, Virginia continued her education at the North Dakota State Normal and Central School at Ellendale to get her teaching certificate. From there, she went on to teach country school for 13 years at the Frieda No. 2 District School. She taught all the grades, first through eighth. Her largest class was 17 children.

She remarked that the class which gave her the most trouble were the sixth grade boys. Virginia laughed as she remembered them getting wet playing in a pond near the school house they were of the town’s history. Distinguished history professor, Dr. Tom Isern, of North Dakota State University, along with Heather Fischer of the Department of Architecture, were instrumental in helping to get the designation.

An event held in the historic building June 28 drew about 300 people, and Dr. Isern as well as noted Zeeland native, Bobbi Schweigert, head football coach at the University of North Dakota, spoke.

Virginia Schweigert holds a vintage yearbook from the Zeeland School.

Virginia and Clarence Schweigert posed for a portrait. Clarence worked with his father in the construction business. In later years, the Schweigert sons helped out, too. Clarence died in 2000. Clarence and Virginia spoke different dialects of German, most likely because of the Catholic v. Lutheran upbringing. When their kids would ask either one of them what a particular word or saying was in German, it was common for them to respond, “Well, your dad would say ‘this’ but I would say ‘that.’”

Virginia remembers that some people went home, rest ed and changed, then came back later in the evening. The popular Roy Holzer played at the Schweigert’s wedding. As far as John Schweigert goes, Virginia mentioned a few things. One clear memory in her mind is when John and his wife, Regina (Feist), would be walking to church on Sunday.

“She would be about half a block ahead of him,” Virginia laughed, “but they always would end up at the same place together.” Virginia does not remember John ever talking about the Works Progress Administration project. But, she distinctly remembers it was nearly impossible to convince him not to go along with Clarence to do carpentry work after he was too old to climb ladders and work on roofs.

Virginia and Clarence’s wedding was at 9:30 a.m. on a Tuesday. “That was an all day session,” she said. Virginia went on to explain how the ceremonies were a long affair in those days. It was not unusual to have a wedding on Tuesdays. She remembered that it was a “mixed” marriage, Clarence being Catholic and Virginia being Lutheran. They were married in the St. Andrew’s Catholic Church rectory.

After the wedding, there was food and then a dance at the Zeeland Hall. The dancing went on all the way until midnight.

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This is John Schweigert’s Declaration of Intention dated Jan. 3, 1935, the first step in becoming a U.S. citizen. John’s role as WPA foreman for the Zeeland Hall project was jeopardized because it was reported that he was not a U.S. citizen. In order to keep his job, he began the naturalization process. In a later document, Petition for Naturalization dated Dec. 28, 1937, his Affidavits of Witness were friends Ben Wolf (Buster’s father) who would later go on to become a N.D. Public Service Commissioner and Speaker of the N.D. House of Representatives, and Peter J. Hasenmueller, who owned the local hotel. The hotel has special significance for John and Regina. They met there in the late 1920s when John was a boarder working on a construction project near Zeeland. John arrived in Zeeland in 1922, and Regina worked at the hotel in housekeeping and as a cook. John was from Eureka, S.D., and in those days the 25-mile trip to Zeeland meant staying overnight. Regina worked at the hotel in housekeeping and as a cook. John was from Eureka, S.D., and in those days the 25-mile trip to Zeeland meant staying overnight.

If it ain’t BLUE, it won’t do!