



Esther (Mertz) Opp was the first to wear the bridal gown in 1947.



In 1986, Pamelyn (Opp) Galegher wore her mother's bridal gown down the aisle.



In 2017, Jenna (Galegher) Kulenkamp wore the same bridal gown her grandmother and mother had worn. *Courtesy Photos*

## Three generations wear same bridal gown

*(The following article was submitted by Casselton resident Julie Burgum, whose mother, Esther Mertz was the first to wear the bridal gown. Julie's sister was the second generation and her niece, the third. Esther authored the following bridal gown history.)*

In 1947 Esther Mertz went shopping for a wedding dress at the S & L store in Jamestown, ND. The basement of the store had a bridal shop where she found a satin with lace panels dress of her dreams. It had a price tag of \$100 - very expensive! Her parents, Reinhold and Frieda Mertz discussed it and

finally her father said yes they would buy it. Esther was the oldest in the family and the first one getting married. Esther shared that she helped her dad make hay and that he acknowledged that he was willing to pay that amount because of her hard work.

Esther married Reinhold Opp on November 27, 1947 in Street-er. A Thanksgiving type meal was served, and a wedding dance was enjoyed by those who could attend. The previous day blizzard made some roads impassable.

Thirty-nine years later when daughter, Pamelyn Opp was

planning a wedding with John Galegher, she asked Esther about the dress. It was found in a foot locker in the garage and had not been cleaned since Esther's wedding. They placed the dress in a bathtub and soaked it with Oxy Clean washing it three times till it came out clean. Pam modernized it by adding shoulder pads to make the sleeves puffer and stitched some pearl beading on the bodice. Pam and John's wedding was September 13, 1986. Following the wedding Pam had the dress dry cleaned and boxed.

Moving forward to 2017, Pam

and John's daughter Jenna was planning marriage to Peter Kulenkamp and was interested in the wedding dress her mother and grandmother had worn. Pam found that the dress had what looked like chemical stains along the hemline, so she went back to the "soak in the tub" method until the stain marks dissipated. Before washing the dress, she removed the 31 satin covered buttons, concerned that the metal might rust through the satin. The cleaned wedding dress turned out lighter than the old satin covered buttons, so she tried soaking them and then al-

lowed them to dry. After a few days she sewed the 31 buttons back on but after one week the rust showed through the satin. Pam ended up buying new satin buttons at a fabric store and sewed on buttons for the third time. Jenna wanted to update the dress by removing the satin sleeves, so Pam designed sleeves of sheer fabric with lace insert at the wrist along with pearl edging. The dress was a bit short for Jenna so Pam found lace to add to the hem, but it was too white, so she seeped it in tea, but it ended up darker than she wanted so she soaked it in Oxy Clean until it matched the

color of the dress perfectly. Pam sewed 7 1/2 yards of lace to the hem and spent about 10 hours of sewing to complete the project. Jenna and Peter's wedding was held on October 21, 2017 in the backyard of their family farm near Thompson. Jenna looked gorgeous in the 70-year-old wedding dress that had been worn by her mother and grandmother. It will probably not be worn again because of the fragile seams and the dress being a small size 4. How special that three women from three generations could wear the same beautiful gown on their wedding day!