Memories of the farm, a journey worthwhile

The Bargman Homestead

BY KATHY TANDERG
A large, corner picture window in the living room of the Albert, Enid, and Hilbert Bargmann home lets the sun in every morning, filling the home with warmth.

But that’s not all this window does. Sitting in one of the comfortable easy chairs in the southeast corner of the room, looking out you (name), it’s true purpose is to sit so often and gaze out.

The window frames a picture that is not just beautiful, but serene, filled with a landscape of golden rolling hills, red barns, grain bins, cattle and trees.

The window is the Bargman brothers view into the past as it looks out at the farm where Hilbert was born 80 years ago. The place Albert, now 75, moved to as a young man.

The farm was purchased by their parents, Henry and Emma (name), in 1926 when they moved from the family homestead of Emma’s parents a few miles south, where they could have their own place.

The Bargmann homestead where Albert was born and raised is what ingrained the love of the land into Albert, the older brother by 17 years. The love of the land was passed along to younger brother Hilbert, a love both brothers still share and reason why they continue to live on the farm.

The Bargmann family history near Hanover began in 1885, 122 years ago. Albert and Hilbert bear a proud heritage from among the first families to settle and file homestead claims near the rural community of the Hartt family near the Hauver farm site founded in 1884. It was still part of Dakota Territory in those years.

Their maternal grandparents, William and Elenora Rabe, arrived in 1885 to the area with a branch of friends from their home in Chicago.

The first settlers that Albert could recall include Johann Albers, the first to arrive in the area from Chicago in 1883 with his friend Christian Bornemann. After filing his claim, Johann returned to his rented land near Chicago to harvest the crops, and then returned the following year in 1884 with his family.

Johann must have spread the word among his family and friends in Chicago because they also began to make plans to move to the Dakota Territory.

In Chicago, they worked wherever they could get a job. Then they heard about the free homestead land. Albert said.

By 1885, all was ready and the group of friends began their journey to Hannover. Among the group coming to join Johann and Christian, as Albert recalled, were his grandparents, John D. Albers, Henry Albers, Dick Henke, William Henke, August Wolff and Henry Woehrer.

“The friends were a group of settlers who had originally come from near Hannover, Germany. Hannover was named for their home place,” Albert said, re-creating the information told by his grandfather.

Albert said most of this first group of settlers homesteaded land along Square Butte Creek so they would have water.

Albert and Hilbert’s grandfather filed his homestead in 1885, just 3 miles southwest of Hannover. Their mother, Emma Rabe, later married Henry Bargmann, a Minnesota man, and the couple lived on the Bargmann family homestead as well. Albert was born there in 1910.

Albert was born soon enough to spend time with his grandfather. He was able to get to know this grandfather and hear stories of those early days. These were the days when buffalo still freely roamed the prairies, a sight quite different for these former city people.

“I think those people had a lot of guts. When they came, grandfather had very little possessions: a team of horses, a few cows, a few chickens. All he could bring to start a new life,” Albert said.

Albert remembers a that-papered house with a wooden roof on his grandfather’s place. In those early days, keeping warm was difficult in the winter. The settlers didn’t yet know about the coal that lay below the soil’s surface that would have provided heat.

Albert said one thing Grandfather William told him about was how they had to go out picking up buffalo chips to burn.

“(Grandfather) said there were many a winter’s night he sat at the stove to keep putting buffalo chips in,” Albert said.

The Bargmanns and many of the neighboring settlers still needed to feed their families during this time. One way to earn a little money was to pick buffalo bones on the prairies and haul them to New Salem to sell.

“They had a few acres to farm but not a lot of power to do it, so it took time to get everything ready,” Albert said.

Albert said one of the first things the settlers of the area did was establish St. Peter’s Lutheran Church. They also established a store in Hannover and the town began to grow with the addition of a blacksmith shop grocer, grocery store, a...
John Deere implement dealer and a creamery. "(Dairy) was the livelihood of these homesteaders here. They hauled milk to the creamery," Albert said.

Childhood on the family homestead holds memories of hard work but also good times. "When I was 6 years old I followed Dad to town with a team of horses to haul grain to town. I think I just held the reins and the horse knew where to go," Albert said.

A special treat was when an uncle would return from New Salem with treats – Cracker Jacks – candy and a toy. "I always remembered that," Albert said.

Albert was an adult when his parents decided to move from his grandparents' homestead, now owned and farmed by a Rabin cousin. They bought a farm located north of Hannover. Hilbert was born there in a two-story house that was later moved into Center. A new ranch-style house was built a few feet away on the farm.

At the new farm, the Bargmann family continued a good life where they raised the rest of their family. Besides Albert and Hilbert, there were Bill, Eleanor, Louise, Lorna, Caroline and Alma, who passed away at a young age.

The place was good for them, with a good well for the house and running water for the farm piped in from a coal mine less than a mile away.

"Dad dug the well and they had to dig it all in by hand because we had no power. Power didn't come here until 1950," Albert said.

The 1930 days of dust and grasshoppers made a big impression on Albert as a young farmer. Sometimes he could hardly see the barn across the yard. Everything blew. Dust in the summer and snow in the winter.

And the grasshoppers ate everything in sight.

"They were so thick sometimes that when they moved (as a group) you couldn't see the sun," Albert said.

Albert loved horses and he farmed with them for a good part of his life.

"I learned never to mistrust a horse," he said, adding that a horse saved his life in a snowstorm because he knew the way.

Progress caught up with Albert in 1938. That's when he traded off six horses to buy his first tractor – a John Deere.

"The green line, that's the best. I bought it from William Bornemann who ran the Hannover dealership until 1956. That's when I bought my last tractor from him, too," Albert said.

Growing up on the farm has left good memories for Hilbert, too. While brother Albert has a love for horses, Hilbert has a love for cattle that still remains. As a boy, his job was to herd cows and without a watch, he had to find a way to gauge time out in the pasture.

He explained his unique time-telling technique.

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Hilbert Bargmann

"I always herded them mostly on section lines. When it was dinnertime, with the fence going north and south, the shadow would be on the wire. Then I knew it was noon and to take the cows home to get a drink and rest."

Hilbert's biggest treat when he was little was picking mustard by hand. He was paid a penny, but he's not sure for how many, and he saved his money. Then the family would go to Old Settlers Day in Center in mid-June where he could spend his earnings.

"I got maybe a bottle of pop and a ride or two at the carnival," Hilbert recalled.

The mustard fields near the farm were still picked by hand until two years ago, not by Hilbert, but by Albert. Though he could no longer walk the fields, Albert was 95 when he still got on his horse and rode out to the mustard fields, leaning over to pick what he could.

For many years, Hilbert continued working the cattle, raising the Bargmann Herefords that were well known in the cattle business. In 1986, Hilbert was named Hereford Man of the Year.

"That's all I've ever had is a Hereford cow herd. But I have crossed some of them with Angus, I could watch little calves be born all year, every day of my life," Hilbert said as his eyes sparkle with memories.

Albert and Hilbert worked the farm together until just three years ago. The brothers say they were able to continue doing so for so long because of family, their nephews, and that means more to the brothers than words can say.

Today, their nephew and wife, Robert and Pam Bargmann, and their children, Sandy, Cody and Haley (Bohm bach) continue to farm the land and that as well holds great meaning to Albert and Hilbert.

"It makes the heart kind of proud," Albert said.

"That means a lot to me to keep it in the family," Hilbert added.

Albert and Hilbert plan to live out their days on the place they live. As they look out the large window and reflect on the good years they've had on both family farms, they are assured that it was well worth the hard work.