

Loving the homestead by the highway

The Schilling Homestead

By WILLIAM D. O'DELL

There's a good chance if you've driven down N.D. Highway 49 from Beulah to U.S. Highway 94 that you've seen this farm. LaVern Schilling, 74, has lived his whole life on the farm that borders Mercer and Morton counties.

The farm was originally homesteaded in 1903 after his grandfather Johann emigrated from Russia. There were four boys and one girl from Johann and Karolina. Like many of the farmers in the area, he was of German from Russia heritage.

When the family initially homesteaded, Johann and Karolina built a sod house, which they all lived in until 1908 when the current house was built. After that house was built, the sod house was used for about three years as a schoolhouse for the Lebrity School District

of Mercer County.

During the early days of the farm, all the crops were hauled 16 miles to town. Those trips usually took all day by horse until the family purchased a 1924 Ford Model T to haul grain shortly before Johann and Karolina retired in 1925.

Of those four boys, Christ eventually took over farming from his father renting the land until he purchased the farm more than 10 years later. While the family had purchased a Fordson tractor in 1919, because Christ liked working on horses so much he continued working that way until he purchased a tractor with rubber wheels in 1939.

Following his father's example, LaVern first rented the farm from his father in 1956 and



The farm, which is easily seen from the highway near the Morton/Mercer County line, is shown in the latter days of the farm after the framed house was built in 1908.

See **Schilling** page 11



Johann and Karolina pose with their children Christ (back) and, front from left, John, Freida and George, while a picture of an older Fred (inset), their youngest son, was added to the family portrait later.



LaVern's father Christ Schilling married Selma (Beulow) Nov. 22, 1927.

Schilling

then purchased the land from his father in 1968. Betty (Beulow) married LaVern in 1955 and together they have two children, Glen Schilling and Debra (Schilling) Koenig.

When Johann initially homesteaded the land he only got one quarter and then he purchased another three quarters adjacent to the property, while Christ purchased another three quarters and LaVern bought another quarters. So LaVern currently owns eight quarters and farmed all eight quarters until this spring when he started renting out his land and sold some of the land, because he has retired.

Wheat, oats, barley and cattle were the staples of the land since his grandfather's time on the farm. LaVern said that like most farms of the old days, they had chicken, pigs, goats, ducks "and everything."

Everything was done by horses until the 1930s. LaVern said that they threshed until the late 1950s when they

purchased a combine.

The house and farm has gone through many renovations with the main house. Part of that house still stands today where LaVern and Betty live now while the chicken coop and the car shed are the only other two of the buildings still standing from the earlier years of the farm.

"There we had no running water or anything," LaVern said about how there was no running water on the farm until 1947. He also reminisced about how they used a little kerosene lamp until 1951 when they got electricity.

The farm's first washing machine was purchased in 1937. While the washing was gasoline powered after that, it was Selma powered before that.

Though the farm has changed with the times as required, the farm was not always prosperous especially during 1966 when they were hit by a blizzard first in March.

"I know we had a lot of snow," LaVern said about how the snow just



LaVern and Betty Schilling don't mind living next to the highway since after so many years they often aren't bothered by the noise.

piled up and snowdrifts obscured many of their farm buildings.

"We put up quite a few people here who got snowbound," Betty added.

She reminisced about how there were numerous people who had to use their house as refuge during the many storms. LaVern added

that the stayovers happened even as far back as 1949 when they had to butcher a pig many days. The highway was a large change for them from a dirt to scoria road in 1934 and then in 1960 it was paved.

"When you live right beside the highway you get all types of people," Betty said.

And then in June of the same year, the farm was hit by a flood, which took out many of their buildings.

"The water just kept coming ... They had 13 inches of rain over in Center and we got all the rain over here," Betty said about how the farm is located near the valley of a large stream.

Betty explained that they were going to an uncle's funeral in Zap

when they decided that they better stay to make sure that the farm was OK. She added that when they decided to turn around they just sat in the garage watching all sorts of debris being washed down the new river.

According to Betty, the water was high enough that a car could not get through. And some of her relatives had to turn around from Bismarck who could not make it across the water over N.D. Highway 49.

A few days later they found some of their belongings on a farm eight miles west of their farm.

However, both LaVern and Betty agreed that living right next to the highway has been one of the best things about the homestead.