

## Homestead Life in Stark County, North Dakota

By Louis Selinger ( 1904 - 1990 ) submitted by Gerald Selinger

In the year 1809, Jacob Selinger, my great great Grandfather immigrated to Russia from the Rheinpfalz Baiern, town of Rulzheim, in Germany. The Selinger parents were born in South Russia, the village of Rastadt. Dad's parents were Anton and Katherine, and there were nine children in the family, three from a former marriage. The two oldest ones, Michael and Hironymous, immigrated to Canada in 1892. My dad Gregor and his sister Theresa went to America, grandmother Katherine and the others stayed in Russia.

My mother Anna's parents were Anton and Magdalene Wandler. Mother was the oldest in the family of eleven children. So she did not get much schooling, had to stay at home and help with the work. The whole Wandler family came to America at the same time as our parents, two of the girls, Aunt Rose and Emma are still living, in Dickinson, North Dakota as I am writing this in 1981.

The Selinger parents were born in the year 1879 and grew up as farmers. As was the custom in those days, they all lived close together in the "Dorf" (village), and had their farm land farther out in the country. I remember them saying, that when driving back and forth with the wagon hauling hay or grain, they sometimes fell asleep but the horses knew the way home.

My parents were married shortly before they came to America, When they were not quite 19 years old. The reason was that Dad's mother thought that it would be better if he got married before leaving for the far away land, and also that unmarried men were required to take military training. A reason for leaving Russia was that land was hard to get, and in America they could homestead 160 acres.

They sold what they could not take along. April 8, 1899 was a heartbreaking day, leaving mother, brothers, sisters, and friends never to see again. They traveled fourteen hours by horses and wagon to the nearest railroad station at Odessa, Russia. Then by train for five days to Bremen, Germany. Then after ten days they boarded the ship "Laan" in Bremerhaven. Before that they had never been on a train or ship. They were put on the lower deck as that was cheaper, the air circulation and food were not good, and some got deadly sick. In all those trips they were treated poorly, not like humans but more like freight transported.

It took nine days till they landed in New York, and from there they were treated more like human beings. They were put in first class in sleepers, and for once they could rest up till they arrived in Dickinson, North Dakota on May 15 , 1898. They had some difficulty on the train for they did not understand English language.

On arriving at Dickinson, they were met by some German people and friends who had come over earlier. They took them in where they were to stay till arrangements were made and the necessary things bought, to go out and get started to build on the land they had chosen about 20 miles south of Dickinson.



Gregor & Anna Selinger

They first built a house for the Wandler grandparents, where Mother and Dad stayed the first year, till they got a house built for themselves. It was 16x24, divided into two rooms. The houses were built out of sod, which was plowed up, cut into the lengths to build the walls, about 20 inches wide, one door and a few small windows. A timber across the top and some rafters and boards for the roof, then a clay-like ground on the top, instead of shingles. This would wash off when it rained, so had to replace some again. The house was warm in winter and cool in the summer.

Four of us children were born in that sod house. The total cost of the house was \$35, where we lived till 1905. The walls inside and out were plastered with a light mud applied by hand and when dry, it was white-washed with a calcimine. At first they had a dirt floor which also plastered with mud. Water wells were dug by hand, 7 to 8 feet across and 20 to 30 feet deep. The sides were laid out with sandstones. Water was pulled up by rope and bucket, later on got some pumps.

The barns were built with stones for the walls, with a timber across the middle. Some wooden poles for rafters, next some brush or tree limbs across those, and then some hay which was then covered with dirt. Inside was a wonderful place for the sparrows to build nests, where us kids would like to rob their eggs.

The folks lived very poor and also got homesick, being so far away from home where they grew up. One consolation was that the grandparents lived just one-half mile away, and could share work and machinery. We had three horses to plow with a walking plow, and when a stone was struck, would stop to dig it out, which was then used for building the walls for the barn. When they build the next house, used stones for the walls instead of sod and a wooden roof with shingles.

After the land was plowed and worked up, grain was planted by hand. Mostly wheat for a cash crop and oats for the horses. Wheat was sold for 45 to 50 cents a bushel.

Did not have fences for the livestock so had to stake them out, or put hobbles on the front legs to keep them from going too far away. They milked a few cows and what milk was not used up, was set in a cool place until the cream would come on top, which was skimmed off to make butter. The butter was taken to town and traded in for groceries, mainly sugar, salt, oatmeal, yeast and such. If they had any eggs to sell, had to pack them in a pail of oats to keep them from breaking on the way to town.

Outside work was hard to get, sometimes Dad would watch sheep for somebody all night, for which he got paid 1 dollar. There was enough prairie land to cut hay, and sometimes if they needed something, they took a load to town where it could be sold to the livery stables for the horses. When hay was hauled to town the price was \$3 to \$5 a load, which was a lot of money in those days. Number 3 flour cost \$1.50 a hundred lbs, number one cost \$1.00 more. Eight lbs. sugar was 50 cents, coffee 20 cents a lb. , overalls for boys 25 cents and for Pa 50 cents. One time took a load of hay to town and found nobody to buy it that day, so could not buy things to eat.

There was always danger of prairie fires in the summer , and had to plow fire lines around the hay stacks and buildings. At times had to start a back fire to save the buildings and livestock. If they could see some smoke in the distance, everybody helped to fight it.

I remember them saying, sometimes they would kill a cow, skinned it and used the skin to drag over the fire with ropes attached to each side, pulled by horseback riders.

One other time, going to town with a load of hay, Dad stopped for a while on the road and got off the wagon. As he wanted to get back on, noticed a bobcat under the wagon. The horses got frightened and he had to get in front of them to keep them from running away. Luckily, a horseback rider was not far away to whom he called, and he came and shot the cat with a pistol.

The road to town was winding around mostly cross country with very few fences. So our job was to watch the stock from wandering away and keep them out of the grain field. In the summer there were no trees to sit in the shade, so brother and I dug a cave on the hillside where it was cool, but not stay in it long or the cattle would get too far away.

Did not milk too many cows, and Mother did that most of the time. At that time it was a job for the women or girls when they got bigger. In the winter we could get ice to make ice cream, for which we used 1/2 milk and 1/2 cream, some sugar and egg beat up, and vanilla, then packed in ice and turned the freezer till it got thick enough.

To keep food from spoilage was always a problem in the summer, to keep fresh meat it was sometimes hung in the well for a few days. Mostly things were put in a root cellar, and underground cave with an entry built on and steps going down. This was cool in the summer and seldom froze in winter, where potatoes, sour kraut, barrels of pickles, lard and such were kept, also milk and butter.

Everybody raised their own chickens, set a hen on some eggs, which took three weeks to hatch. The chicks were run loose with the mother hen, at night they all crawled under her to keep warm. Chicken was about the only meat we had in the summer, just go catch one of the roosters. The hens were kept for laying eggs.

Mother did all the washing by hand on a washboard, laid a chair down and put the tub on the top that was the proper height for working a hand wringer attached to the tub. Our water was very hard, so carried some up from the creek which was close by. In the winter, some snow was melted for washing. Clothes were always hung up on the line, summer or winter. In winter they froze stiff and could hardly get them through the door, then hung over chairs to thaw out and dry. We did not change clothes very often, overalls hardly ever were washed.

The new house was a little more roomy, but the family also got bigger. We had two bedrooms, later made a bedroom in the attic for us boys. The household goods consisted of a stove for burning coal, a table, chairs and cabinet for dishes in the kitchen. The beds we slept in had corn husks for a mattress, which mother would shake up when making the beds, as they would bunch up in a pile. It was noisy when we moved around in the bed, like a rattling.

For heat in winter we had a heater for burning coal. Our job was to bring in a supply to last over night, ashes had to be taken out every day. During the summer in the kitchen stove, at times would burn cow chips for a quick fire, which we picked up in the pasture when they were dry. They were good to start coal fire, as we had no trees for wood except scraps sometime from an old apple box. One little incident happened where some people were boarding a school teacher for the country school. When she saw that they were using cow manure to cook with, she quit.

The country school was a one room building with about 20 desks, a teachers table and chair, a blackboard on the wall and a big heater in the corner, with a metal jacket around it. Outside were two little houses, one for the boys and one for the girls.

Water we had to get from the nearest neighbor for drinking. A pail on a bench with a dipper to drink out of, no worry about germs in those days.

In our school we always had men teachers, most came from Minnesota or Wisconsin. I am sure that some did not have more education than the eight grade. A few boarded at our place. We had a big dog, like a St. Bernard, and the teacher was always afraid of him. So every evening when he came home from school, he saved a little of his lunch to give to the dog to stay on good terms. One of the teachers was a sportsman. After school in the afternoon he went trapping and hunting. He followed the creek as there were some places with deep water holes, and some muskrats were in there. He got a few of them which he skinned and stretched out and hung them in the attic to dry. When school was over and he left, and forgot about them or didn't want to bother to take them.

In the winter the teacher had to go earlier to school and start a fire, for it always went out at night. So when we came at nine o'clock it was warm, except for the floor never got warm, so we kept our overshoes on. The dinner pails we set around the stove to keep our lunch from freezing. Everybody had a syrup bucket which contained jelly or syrup bread, an apple, maybe shortly after butchering get a piece of homemade sausage. Our school had around 20 pupils, age 7 to 17. Those were the days when they taught the three R's, Reading, Riting, and Rithmetic. We also had spelling and sang songs.

Seems like school was not that important in those days, if there was work at home to be done, that came first. So the older ones went to school very little, had to stay home to help with the work, or take care of the smaller ones.

As time went on the family increased, there were ten of us, two boys and eight girls. It is always said that the farm is a good place to raise a family, but it is also a big gamble. Work all year and depending on a good crop, but many things can happen, like hail, drought, grasshoppers, or rust. Which happened some years, so tighten your belt and try again.

In those days people lived a different life, anything was good enough, we wore our clothes and shoes till they were worn out. Seldom anyone had more than one pair of shoes, when we went to church just polished them a little. I heard that some kids had only one pair of pants or dress, and when they got dirty the mother put them to bed till the clothes were washed.

Dad bought another 160 acres land close by, for we were growing up and could help along with such as plowing, haying, harvesting. We had more horses so could use two teams. Got most of the land fenced in for horses and cattle, put up a few more buildings, addition to the barn and grainery using stone for the walls, which we picked up from the fields and pasture.

They always found something for us to do, spading the garden, picking mustard out of the grain fields, haying all done by hand, shocking grain after the binder, corn picking and potatoes. Always had a good supply of potatoes, enough to last the whole year.

Always was a big excitement when the threshing came, a steam engine blowing the whistle. In the early years, they stacked the grain so did not need such a big crew, like for threshing from the shock, where they needed 8 to 10 wagon teams to haul the bundles from the field. There were few machines for threshing around, and some years it got late in the year till they all got done. After threshing had to haul some wheat to town to pay the expenses. As it was 12 miles to town, could only make one trip a day with the wagon, which held 50 bushels.

Elevators were also selling flour and most people bought a year's supply in the fall, as they did not get to town very often in winter. Flour came in 100 lb. cloth bags at a time and was stored in the attic. For meat, three or four pigs were fattened up for the butcher.

The fatter the better, as they used a lot of lard for frying potatoes, baking, and to last all year. Usually, three or four farmers got together to help with the butchering. Scalding the pigs, cutting up the meat, clean the casings for sausage, grind the meat. Worked till late at night till it all was done. Next day would grind the fat for lard and render, when cool put in big crocks till needed.

Hams and bacon were put in wooden barrels, and a salt brine poured over the meat to the top. It took 4 to 5 weeks to cure, if it froze up it stayed in the barrel all winter. When cured, it was taken out and smoked. If properly salted and smoked it would last all summer, hanging in the smoke house. They did not know anything about canning at first, no refrigerators, very few had ice in the summer.

Everybody had some chickens, but they seldom laid eggs in the winter, for all they got was some grain and water, which was froze most of the time. We all liked chicken soup, and if somebody was sick, soup was the cure for everything.

For entertainment in the winter months, we had very few toys, a set of dominoes, and an old phonograph which we had to wind up by hand. We sat around the table with a kerosene lamp in the middle to read, study or color. We always raised our own popcorn and sunflower seeds which we roasted.

The mail only came once a week, for which we had to go three miles to get it. Us boys rode a horse on bareback, with a school bag on the shoulder to put it in. We got a few German newspapers, a letter now and then from the old country or Canada, where Dad had two half-brothers. Dad was a good writer, and wrote articles for the newspaper. One thing I remember, when the Titanic sank, it was weeks later when they read about it in the newspaper.

The folks were pretty strict with us, a strap was always hanging behind the door. The strap was normally used to sharpen the razor for shaving, so it served a double purpose. They say boys are boys, and Tony and I were no different. At one time the folks went to town, we were to rake some hay with the horses. On the way to the field, brother Tony was chasing a gopher, me on the rake got off to help him catch it.

But in the meantime the horses got scared and ran away. One wheel broke off and rolled away, which we did not see. Afterwards when we got the horses stopped, looked for the wheel but it was nowhere to be found. We stacked the hay by hand. A month later when the creek dried up, the wheel was found there laying in the mud.

Another time the folks went someplace and we were to keep the fire going where the meat was being smoked. We put on too much material on the fire, it got too hot and it burned off the strings where the meat was hanging. It fell in the fire and got badly burned, which was a loss. We got the strap for that and deserved it.

When the choke cherries were ripe in the summer, we drove ten miles with the horses and buggy to a place where they were. Went down a steep bank with buckets to fill up, hung the pails on a shoulder strap so we could use both hands to pick. Made a few trips back and forth, once in a while somebody stumbled and spilled them. Nicest ones were always on top of the trees, so climbed up on branches to pick them. Mother made quite a few buckets Full of jelly, and we liked it best when it was thin so it soaked into the bread Also was used on pancakes.

When halloween came along, the boys always pulled some prank, and we were no different. We never liked the idea to tip over someone's outhouse, which was done quite often. One time the two of us changed the wheels around on a neighbor's buggy, put the bigger wheels in front and the smaller ones in the back.

The next day as they drove to church with the horse and buggy, the two boys sitting in the front and the parents in the back. After driving a while the man said, the boys must be growing up, I could always see over them but not anymore.

Around 1912 people started to buy cars, seemed like everybody got a different make. Many of those are not built anymore, just to mention a few Maxwell, Overland, Reo, Whippet, Nash, Studebaker, Packard. If anybody was on the road and a car came along it was trouble, as the horses went wild. Best was to get off the road as far as possible.

Read some place that when cars first came out, one state had only two cars and they ran into each other on the road. One of our uncles had the first car in our neighborhood, a model T Ford Touring. How we would have liked to get a ride in one. Then it happened as we walked to school he came along and stopped to pick us up, some even stood on the running board.

The year 1916 we bought our first one, a Model T Ford, with a brass radiator which we kept shined up. The driver's side had no door on. The gas tank under to front seat held ten gallons. Had a ruler along to measure the gas, each inch was a gallon. A few other tools came along, a jack, tire pump, monkey wrench. No spare tire, if we got a flat we had to take it off and patch the tube, then pump it up to 60 pounds. All that took about 1/2 hour to fix.

A nice thing about having a car, we did not have to catch the horses every time to go someplace, especially Sundays to church. The first car cost \$480. In the year 1925 bought the second car, also a Model T Ford, but with a self-starter and demountable rims, also a spare tire. It cost \$516.

By 1910 more people came to homestead in the neighborhood, most also came from Russia, but from different areas. They were known as German Russians and all of the Catholic faith. As the closest church was 20 miles away, and driving with the horses was a long way to go, in the winter time almost impossible.



St. Pius School & Church - 1975

They then got together and bought 40 acres in about the center of the neighborhood and started to build a church. Much work was donated. After a year it was used for services, a priest came every two weeks to say mass. Three years later a parish house was built and they got a steady pastor.

Then a blacksmith shop was built in the village and a grocery store

where also the mail came once a week from Dickinson. The church basement was fixed up for a school room, four long tables and benches to sit on. Had a man teacher and everything was German, reading, writing, praying.

He was very strict and unreasonable, hit us on the hands with a stick, girls usually got their ears pulled. In 1917 the Notre Dame sisters from Mankato, Minnesota came to teach. The village hall was divided into two rooms for classes and they taught all grades, some of us were 17 years old. So now we had to learn in English, but most knew some English from public school. They were good teachers, no more of the rough stuff.

The house where the sisters lived was just plain, like everybody else. They had to carry in water, had an outhouse, carried coal up from the cellar for cooking and heating. They also kept some boarders that lived too far out. Once every few years, the Bishop came to confirm the children, sometimes some grown up ones too. They had to get him from Dickinson, 20 miles away, where he came by train from Bismarck. One neighbor who had a nice buggy with a top and some lively horses always felt proud to have the honor of going to town to get him. It was exciting as the team with the Bishop came to within two miles of us. Some horseback riders rode out to meet them and rode alongside like escorts.

We had almost 3 miles to school in the village of Scheffield, the country school that we had used before was closed up. It had been only 1/2 mile from our home. To the Sister school, as we called it then, we walked when the weather was nice, most of the time cross country. There were not yet many fields, mostly prairie.

About half ways we always stopped for a drink of water by a farmer. It seems to me that there were more birds than now. In the Spring as we walked to school, we found many bird nests in the grass, different kinds. If we found one, we always marked it with some cow chips and every day we stopped by to look at them. When the weather was cold or stormy, dad would haul us with the buggy or sled. On real cold days, we would heat up a stone in the oven, wrap an old sack around it and put our feet on it while driving. They stayed warm a long time.

In the late 20's, a new three story school was built. The upper was dormitory for Sisters and boarders, The second story for classrooms, a the lower for kitchen and dining. High School was taught for some years. The village of Scheffield increased some, as a number of homes were built, some for people with children in school or for people retired. The Selinger parents bought 6 lots, planted trees, had a big garden, a cow and chickens, where they lived until they died in 1937 and 1939.

The buildings are now all broken down and deserted as I write this, in 1981. The whole place is now as a ghost town, with most houses torn down or moved away. The long time priest is still there, where 130 families went to church at one time, now about 40 left.

About the year 1907 in the town of Dickinson, where most people did their shopping and is the county seat, a number of people decided to build a general store, which was call the Farmer's Store. To finance it they had to sell some shares. Many thought that was a good investment, so bought some shares. Our folks bought \$800 dollars worth, even borrowed the money. Grandparents invested some more as did others.

Something was overlooked by the shareholders, they did not take out fire insurance. Except one bought insurance by himself, and five years later the place burned down. Talk was that he did it himself, but nobody could prove anything. Anyway, he got the insurance money and the rest nothing. Dad wrote in his diary, I hope our children learn something from our mistakes.

The number 800 was unlucky for them, because during the depression when grain prices were low, they hauled 800 bushels of wheat to the elevator and stored it, hoping the price would go up. Storage was 1 cent a month a bushel. After several years the price did not go up, so they sold anyway but was very little left after paying the storage cost.

As we lived far from town and could not often get to a doctor, had to use some home remedies. The folks had a big doctor book which explained what to do for certain ailments.

One time a grandson had diphtheria, almost ready to choke. The book said to stand the patient in a tub, pour two pails of cold water over the person, the wrap in a warm blanket.

The child was three years old, he let out a scream during the process, but a few hours later the fever was less and he was up the next day.

Another time I had blood poisoning in my hand, which I got from a cut while skinning a jack rabbit. The book said to boil flaxseed and put it on the infected part while hot and wrap up to keep warm. Pain was less after a while and the next day it started to drain. Found a hair in the wound that had caused it.

Mother used to get gallstone attacks, the remedy was to drink a certain amount of salad oil and then lay a certain way. After a few treatments some days later she would pass a stone. For stomach ache, some peppermint drops or some sugar with a spoon. But for poor Dad, nothing seemed to help for his bad toothaches. Us children never had tooth problems while at home, and you know that we never owned a toothbrush. When the baby teeth got loose, just tie a heavy thread around it and jerk it out, or tie it on the door knob and shut the door.

After the folks bought the second car, which was more dependable, because of a spare tire, starter, and better lights (older Model T lights always dimmed when driving slow). They made a few trips to Mankato, Minnesota to visit the sisters. This was a long ways for them, over 600 miles. The roads were narrow and not all paved. It took two good days to make the trip. The two girls (Pauline) Sr. Leopold and (Julia) Sr. Winfried were at the convent at Good Council Hill. When the girls made their vows, the folks went for the occasion.

In 1926, they made a trip to Canada, over 200 miles away. Dad had two half brothers there which he had not seen since they left Russia some thirty years before, but they always wrote to each other. But for once they wanted to surprise them, and me going along to help with the driving.

Roads were mostly gravel, and had to cross the Missouri river by ferry. We had to fix tires a few times, either picked up a nail or some sharp stone. It was a big surprise, handshaking, hugging and a few tears. They lived in a colony of some eight families, just like in the old country. The farm land was farther out. In the States we had prohibition in those days, but there they could buy the beer and liquor. So the boys drove to town to get some drinks and I went along.

On the way back, we got thirsty but the law was that you could not stop by the roadside to drink. But they said that they knew of a place where people would not bother us, it turned out to be a cemetery, and we could see some empty bottles laying around. We stayed one week and then headed for home, and we made it in one day.

By 1926, brother Tony lived on the farm and I helped him with the work and got a share of the crop, and then got married that fall. The folks lived a simple life as they never had much money to spend. Some years the crops were not too good. They helped the children get started when we got married. No such thing as welfare, food stamps or such. People ate what they raised, bread was baked, just the necessary things were bought, sugar, salt, pepper, coffee, yeast.

Dad took out a life insurance policy one time for \$5000, but when the premium was due did not have the money to pay, so was going to drop it. Brother Tony had the grocery store in Schefield then, and had some income, so helped to pay for the premium, but reduced it to \$3,000.



Scheffield Selinger House - 2001

By the middle 30's Dad's health was failing, so he tried different diets, all liquids like tomato juice and others, but nothing helped. He died at the age of 58, in 1937 and Mother lived for another 1 1/2 years after that. We sold what little they had, and rented out the house for \$20 a month for some months, and later was sold for \$700. It is a sad sight at this time, and all broken down and sitting in the weeds.

### Gregor Selinger Family

#### Husband: Gregor Selinger

Birth: 12 Mar 1879 Rastadt, Ukraine-Russia

Death: 27 Jul 1937 Scheffield, Stark County, North Dakota

Marriage: 11 Feb 1898 Rastadt, Ukraine-Russia

Father: Anton Seelinger (1835-1889) Mother: Katharina Klug (1844-1932)

#### Wife: Anna Wandler

Birth: 11 May 1879 Rastadt, Ukraine-Russia

Death: 2 Feb 1939 Scheffield, Stark County, North Dakota

Father: Anton Wandler (1855-1929) Mother: Magdalena Fischer (1858-1938)

#### Children

1 F Pauline Selinger

Birth: 26 Jun 1899 Death: 3 May 1973

2 F Eugenia Selinger

Birth: 17 Sep 1900 Death: 16 Nov 1965

3 M Anton Selinger

Birth: 27 May 1902 Death: 9 Oct 1983

4 M Louis Selinger

Birth: 26 May 1904 Death: 31 Mar 1990

Spouse: Rosemary Frank (1906-1988)

5 F Julianna Selinger

Birth: 9 Jun 1906 Death: 8 Dec 1992

6 F Rosa Selinger

Birth: 23 Apr 1908 Death: 3 Jul 1976

7 F Magdalene Selinger

Birth: 1 Mar 1912 Death: 5 Aug 1993

8 F Katherine Selinger

Birth: 8 Sep 1913 Death: 24 Jul 1963

9 F Otilia Selinger

Birth: 5 Mar 1915 Death: 14 Aug 1993

10 F Eva Selinger

Birth: 15 Dec 1920 Scheffield, Stark County, North Dakota

# Homestead Life in Stark County, North Dakota

By Louis Selinger ( 1904 - 1990 )

Part 2

In the year 1917, I went to school away from home, in Richardton, North Dakota. I had not passed the eighth grade at home, so was harder to get the hang of things. This was the same school that brother Tony attended, teachers were Monks and Priests. I did not have to take Latin the first year, but took ancient history which was not very interesting to me at that time.

In my spare time, went to play pool or walk around the place. There was a print shop which we liked to watch, how it was done. They printed a weekly German paper called The Volksfreund. They also mined their own coal, underground, we went into that a few times. They also had livestock and seeded some land, and a big garden. So there was always something to watch, sometimes helped a little.

Brother Tony and cousin Christ Brinster had the job of washing dishes, one washing and the other drying. They were ball players, pitcher and catcher, so they practiced throwing the dishes. They were those heavy ones.

The next year we went to that same school again, then called St. Mary's College. But not long after we were there, the 1918 Influenza epidemic broke out and we were sent home, and I never went back. Some of the priest teachers died of the flu and also a few of our parishioners died. Only those in the upper grades went back to continue their studies.

In 1919, Dad rented the farm out to the Martin Schoch's, with horses and machinery for one year. It was a dry Spring and looked like a poor crop, then would not be much income from crop shares. We heard that eastern South Dakota had a good crop. Dad took a train and went looking for work on a farm. Found work near a town called Hillsvie, South Dakota. They were haying at the time, he hired out for \$125 a month.

Then he wrote home that more help was needed in the neighborhood, so brother Tony and I also took the train to Hillsvie and got jobs close by for \$100 a month. We worked through harvesting, which was done by a machine called a header. The horses were in the back, the cutting part in the front which cut the heads of the grain. An elevator then took the grain and fed it to a wagon which was following alongside the machine. When the box was full, had to unload with a fork and made stacks, which were later threshed.

While we were gone, heard that back home it had started to rain and they also had a fair crop. We then took the train for back home, but there were poor connections and we had to stay overnight at Linton, North Dakota. Got a hotel room with two beds, us boys in one, Dad in the other. After the lights were out for a while, Dad put them on again and says that he is itching all over. Looking around we saw the bedbugs crawling up the wall, did not sleep much after that. Don't know if we brought any bugs home, but Ma washed all the clothes and cooked them in a boiler.

We then got more work doing stack threshing, which was hard work, pitching the loose grain into the thresher. I was only 16 years old, and they threshed till dark, but the pay was \$6 a day which was good pay at the time.

That fall and winter, I got a job as janitor for the church and school. Take care of the furnace , burning coal, and also other small jobs. Ate meals at the folks place, but slept in the parish house where they had four bedrooms, at home only two.

After renting the land out for one year, we farmed it again ourselves. Dad and I put in the crop in the spring. During the summer, Tony helped when not in school. In 1923 Tony got married and then stayed on the farm. I helped with the work and stayed with them that winter. There was not that much work, milked just a few cows, so had plenty time to hunt jackrabbits, as they were plentiful. Tony had a Winchester rifle, I had a Remington. Then wanted to know who was the best shot, stuck a knife on a fence post then see who could cut a bullet in half by shooting at the blade. Or light a match by shooting at the tip, the targets were from one fence post to another, about 30 feet.

There were a number of pheasants and prairie chickens around, but we thought they were too pretty to kill. In the evening, or if the weather was cold outside, we played chess till midnight. Guess we overdid it, it got on our nerves and we had to cut down.

The fall of 1925, I went to the Agriculture school in St. Paul for two semesters. The cost was \$160, that included room, board and laundry. Three of us boys in one room, with one single bed and a double bed, where Herb Arens and I slept. The other young man slept alone, but he had an artificial leg that he left in his pants when going to bed. His name was Thorvald Anderson. Herb Arens was from Loretto, Minnesota, about 30 miles from school.

I enjoyed the school very much as it was not all out of books, did things with our hands, like carpentry, blacksmithing, soldering, and rope work, etc. Sundays always went to church, too far to walk so us boys took the street car, which cost 5 cents each way. What seemed strange to me, had to pay ten cents to get a seat in church, and then also was expected to put something in the collection box. If we passed the box without paying, then we heard about it from the pulpit.



When going to church, did not eat breakfast, ate a meal at noon and for supper they gave us a paper bag with lunch for the evening. Our school had a good basketball team, which was something new to me. What I enjoyed the most was the swimming pool. Some fellows threw a penny in and we had to dive for it.

I also knew a girl from back home who was working in Rochester at the clinic, at that time. We wrote to each other and arranged to go home on the train at the same time after finishing the school year. Back home, helped with the farm work that summer, and bought a touring Model T Ford for \$65. Then I could drive to see my girl friend, Rosemary Frank, which was ten miles away.

One time, some girls arranged to have a basket social, with baskets nicely decorated and with goods things to eat inside. Then they were auctioned of the the highest bidder. We were not supposed to know to which girl the basket belonged, but a little fairy told me which one to bid on. I had to pay more than anybody, \$2.75, some others bid me up for she was one of the more popular girls.

Another time, I did not have a car yet, so took the folks Model T car, and picked up another boy and girl to drive to my girl friends place. We then drove to a dance which was at some farm house. When we entered the yard, some boys came towards the car. Pretty soon heard the tires blowing out, somebody had punctured the rear tires. Some boys just had it in for me. Spent most of the evening patching the tires. , We knew who the ringleader was and he surely avoided us afterwards.

The time came where we were thinking of getting married and settling down, I was 22 years old. After telling the folks, we then drove to the Frank's place to get the O.K. and make arrangements for a wedding. In those days it was the custom to have the wedding at the girl's home. Usually ate at the house and dance at some other building.

But the only place available for dancing was the granary and that was full of grain. So Tony Frank, one of the boys, and I started to haul the grain to town with wagons and horses, 17 miles away. Made one trip every day for a week till it was empty. The father, Lawrence Frank, set two barrels of mash in the basement for home brew for the drinks. A few days before the wedding, mothers did baking, butchering chickens for chicken soup. Couldn't have a wedding without chicken soup.

The big day came on the 19th of October, 1926 at St. Pius Church in Schefield. Father Leopold Ruemenopp was the pastor. The service lasted for two hours, even had the rosary and Benediction. Attendants and witnesses at the wedding were Frank Fischer and Tillie Roeder on the grooms side, with Valentine Fichter and Elisabeth Vogel on the brides side.

Louis & Rosemary Selinger



Around 80 people attended the wedding, grandparents, uncles, aunts, children and friends. When it came time to dance in the granary, musicians started to play accordion and fiddles. Before long, the dust in the seams of the wood floor started to come out and filled the room, it looked like a dust storm. It was quite a sight, people had dark rings around the eyes. We did not spend much time in there.

The older folks were in the house singing and drinking. I can still hear it ringing in my ears.

*Ach es gefehlt mir so schwehr aus einander zugehn  
und ven die hoffnung nicht verauf das wieder wieder sehn.*

*“ Oh it hurts me so much to be going away,  
when there is no hope of ever seeing you again “*

The weather was cold that night, one party slept it off in a wagon box, otherwise all went nicely, only some people had to wash up when they got home. The next day was clean up everything and move things back in place. Sorry to say, no honeymoon, guess they had not been invented yet. Now we were married, but no place to go. Rosemary's folks were kind enough to keep up over the winter.

In the meantime, looked around for a place to live, not wanting to go very far away. Found a vacant farm three miles away from my folks place. Out in the hills, 320 acres but only 60 acres cropland, the rest hilly pasture, but seeded some of the folks land. The farm had a small two room house with attic, a small barn with a chicken coop attached. A well which needed cleaning and repair, and an outhouse made of scrap wood and tin. Some renters had lived on the place, and either they were hard up, or lazy, because they had used up the mangers and doors from the barn for firewood.

The price for the place was \$3200, or \$10 and acre. Down payment was \$300, and \$300 a year , plus interest at 3 percent. During that winter, if the weather was nice, drove over to fix up the house inside, with a stairway to the attic and a pantry.

On March 15, 1927 we moved to our new place, the weather was good then. The parents from both sides donated the most necessary things, when we worked before being of age, we did not keep all the money we earned. Although I got some share of the parents crop before marriage. The Selinger folks gave us four horses with harness, a wagon, plow, and some machinery that my brother and I shared. The Frank parents gave household goods, stove, table, chairs, bed, six cows, ten chickens and a rooster to wake us up.

We were happy to have a place of our own, were not afraid of work, with the days long and the nights short. The barn was not big enough for horses and cows, so milked outside many times, fingers got cold. The horses worked hard and got better care, but did not have enough feed for them. Had to turn them loose to rustle for themselves, whatever they could find.

We were halfway through seeding on May 7th, 1927, when it started raining, then turned to sleet, and finally a big blizzard that lasted three days. The cows were home but not the horses, three finally came home, but not the fourth one. After the storm he was found dead one mile away. It was a sad day for us, as he was the best one of them.

We were not too cozy in the house either, had very little fuel for the stove. The house was cheaply built, thin walls with plaster inside, no storm windows, so there were little drifts of snow inside. I went outside in the storm looking for something to burn, found a few fence posts which I cut up for the kitchen stove. We both sat on the oven door to keep warm and broke it down.

The old Model T car sitting outside by the house was full of snow. It then turned warm and the snow melted fast. The Frank folks gave us another horse so we could finish seeding. Had plenty of moisture in the ground after that, and had a fair crop of wheat.

After seeding was done we knew the we needed a barn and granary for grain. Money was not very plentiful, so decided to build the wall of the barn with stones.

There was a big hill nearby with some sandstones on the top and sides, which I dug out and rolled them down the hill, where I could pick them up with the wagon. Then hauled them to the yard where I wanted to build. It took many loads for a 24 x 48 building, for the walls.

The two fathers were the stone masons, my job was to mix and carry the mud (not cement), just clay mixed with water for between the layer of stones. Took about three weeks to build the walls, and a week to put on the roof, except for the shingling which was left up to me. This I did in my spare time, early in the morning or late at night. Rose had to milk the cows alone quite often, for there was haying and harvesting to be done during the day. Finally got the shingling done in time for the threshing, as part of the building was used for the grain storage.

Hay was cut with a mower and horses, loaded and unloaded by hand, and put in a stack close to the barn. Grain was cut with a binder pulled by four horses, and the grain shocking was also done when we found time late at night, as long we could see some daylight.

Next came the threshing, where 6 to 8 neighbors came and helped each other, each taking their turn with the threshing machine. They hauled the grain bundles with wagons and horses and a team to haul the grain to the granary. Usually took three to four weeks till all were done.

Most places the threshing machine was set not far from the buildings, so that the straw pile would be close to the yard. Then the livestock could feed on it, and use it in the winter time to cover themselves and keep warm.

The job that I always dreaded was hauling coal, at first had to drive over ten miles with the wagon, which took all day and often during cold weather. Needed 7 to 8 wagon loads to last the year, at a cost of \$2.50 to \$3.00 a wagon load. Also had to haul wheat to a grain elevator twelve miles away, for there were bills to pay and various things to buy.

We sold cream that we produced from our milk cows, and that usually bought our groceries and some clothing. If not enough, then also took a few sacks of wheat along in the car to sell. When I think back, I often wonder how we did it all. The only help was at threshing time. And we always got to church on Sundays, in the winter time with the sled and horses.

We thought nothing of it to go visiting in the evening with the sled, and take the kids along all bundled up. At first there was no radio or such, so passed the evenings roasting sunflower seed or making popcorn that we had raised ourselves. We did some reading, but our only lighting was kerosene lamps which were not too bright.

In our two room house, we had a heater in the bedroom, and a kitchen stove in the other room burning coal for cooking and heating. When cold in the winter, we let the kitchen range go out, just kept some heat where we slept, just for trying to save coal. Sometimes the water pail in the kitchen would freeze up. The floors were very cold as there was no basement under the house. People talk about the "the good old days", maybe the days weren't that good, but we didn't know about anything different, everybody was in the same boat. We got through the winter with a few frozen fingers or toes, but we survived and looked forward to spring.

On March 15th, 1928, our first boy, Wilfrid was born, one year from the day we first moved on our farm. He was born at home, with the help of a midwife. She usually stayed a day or two, to help clean up, wash the baby, and cook some meals. Fee for her work was 2 or 3 dollars. Mothers would stay in bed for a week or so, so papa had extra chores to do. We had neighbors close by that helped us quite often. Their girls baby sat for many of our children through the years.

That spring when the seeding was done, started repairing the house outside, put on some siding and a paint job , and hoping that it would be warmer the next winter. Bought a used gas engine for the water pump, as the hand pumping for the livestock was always a big chore. Only had a trough for the water, later on bought a water tank, and also a windmill.

Some newer radios were starting to come out, and bought a used one, battery operated, Price was \$34.00, \$5 down, and \$5 a month. Needed an A, B, and C batteries , the batteries were expensive and did not last long if the radio was used much, so we had to be careful about how often we used it. Needed an outside antenna, so stretched a copper wire from the house top to the barn. Had stations from Texas, Nashville, Chicago and Yankton that came in clear. We always enjoyed hearing the country and western songs that we don't hear now anymore.

With the new barn which had a haymow on top, that held two loads of hay, then in case of a storm did not have to haul the hay or straw in. So we were getting a little more settled. On June 19, 1929, second son Bernard was born, also at home. Now the mother had more work in the house and less time to help outside, but always helped with the milking, would run in the house now and then to see if everything was alright.

During that summer, the neighbors got together and built a telephone line with sixteen members on the party line. We heard all the rings, ours was 3 long. There was plenty of blabbering going on. Did not need a newspaper to find out the latest happenings.

Our old car was giving us some trouble, then looked around for a better one. One dealer had Ford Coupe for \$250 which we decided to buy. Now we could drive in comfort, all enclosed glass windows, spare tire, and self starter. Later on took the back end out and put on a box, so now could haul sacks of grain, or pick up a calf that was born out in the pasture. Even hauled two pigs to town one time. When the family got bigger, the boys would ride in the back. But one time we drove to the Franks parents place to visit, and one of the Frank boys took it for a drive with some other young folks. They tipped it over, and bent it up pretty bad and one girl broke her arm.

Then the mid 30's came along, with drought and depression. Everything came to a standstill. What little we had to sell, did not bring much. Eggs 6 cents a dozen, can of cream \$4.00, Wheat 35 cents a bushel. But things we bought were also cheap, if we had some money. Gas was 18 cents, coffee 19 cents a lb., overalls 79 cents, shoes \$1.50.

But as our car was beat up pretty bad, had to look for something better. Happened to see an auction sale , 25 miles away where a car was for sale. Somebody took me along to the place of the auction. The car was a 4 door Chevrolet, 4 years old and in good condition.

I bid for \$200 on it, and got the sale, not thinking that I didn't have that much money. But I knew the clerk at the bank and he said to come in the next day. So had to mortgage the cattle till it was paid for. We drove that car till we bought our first new car, a 1941 Studebaker.

Also in the middle 30's, could not make payments on the farm or pay interest and taxes. Our landlord was living in Austin, Minnesota. The Real Estate man wrote to him of the conditions we had. He wrote back that we would cancel the payments and interest. Also the county canceled the taxes. Well, that was a relief.

Then the year 1936 was the worst year of all, no crop or hay, no pasture because of the drought. Had to sell a lot of the cattle. The government set a price of \$5 for calves and \$18 for cows. We had no choice but to sell, kept some milk cows and the horses which we needed to work the land. One older horse had poor teeth and actually starved to death.

That year was also the coldest winter in our days, 40 below at night and 20 below at daytime for over a month. Had to go out to feed the stock, and hauled straw from a mile away. Froze my fingers, ears and nose. Also the water pump froze up, had to thaw it out by pouring hot water on it. Had to carry water in for the milk cows and was afraid their milk would freeze up.

Some hay was shipped in from other parts, but it was of poor quality. Bought molasses and sprinkled it over the hay so they would eat it. We had to make loans to buy the feed, and also got a few grant checks of \$7.00 a month. For a while worked for the Federal W.P.A. and got paid 50 cents an hour. Then every week got some government commodities, things to eat and it was good quality food.

Then in 1937, the grasshoppers came, they were so numerous that they would black out the sun when they flew in. They came from the south when the wind was in that direction, always moving north. When the wind was calm, they did not move, stopped where they landed and stripped everything bare, chewed in the stems of the grain which then broke off. Our potato vines disappeared in one day. One farmer claimed that they ate the green shingles on the roof. If a jacket was left in the field, they chewed holes in it, fork handles were chewed on. The government furnished some poison bait which we spread on the fields, but it would never get all of them.

If not one thing, it was another. Next came along a flood of jackrabbits, by the thousands. In the fall when fully grown, they went in bunches like a flock of sheep. Their favorite places were in the hills, and that is where we lived. People killed them off in every which way they could, sometimes chased them into some fences and clubbed them to death.

Had hunting party contests, east against west. Then brought them all to town and put on a pile 100 feet long. Some company would buy them up and use them for fox or mink farms. Some of the pelts were used to make felt for hats. Rather than chase them, I would let them come to me. Towards evening they always came for the hay stack, so made a blind for myself and the got close enough they got a surprise, till it got too dark to shoot. Could not be there all the time, so finally got some chicken wire to put around the stack to save the hay. The next year they got some kind of disease which wiped most of them out.

Also recall some events in the early married life. One Spring day as I was out in the field plowing, I happened to see a coyote walking along the furrow where I had plowed, perhaps looking for some mice that were dug up. Also saw another one up on the hillside. That gave me the idea that there might be some young ones in a den nearby. Then after the noon lunch, I took my rifle and looked around for a den and found a place that looked like it was being used. I looked in and heard some little noises, then plugged up the hole with some stones and went home to get a spade. Rose came along with me and we started digging.

Pretty soon we found the mother coyote and some pups in there, the mother gave out an angry howl at us. I shot the adult and then found a nest of the little ones. The purpose of all this was because the State paid us a bounty of \$5.00 for the adults, and \$2.00 each for the young. That extra money was always handy to get. I found another den a couple years later but only got the little ones.

One Winter, one of our calves died, and I put it out by the hillside and set a big trap nearby. The weather was cold and we got some snowfall, but some days later I checked the trap and there was a coyote caught in it and frozen solid.

It had a very fine fur, so I dragged it home and wanted to skin it, but had to thaw it out first. The only place was in the kitchen under the cook stove, it took two days to thaw out. Then put a hook in the ceiling to hang it up for the skinning, and then set up a stretcher to dry out the pelt by the stove, which took all of a week. Guess we wouldn't do that nowadays in our kitchen. Anyway, we got paid \$18.00 for that skin, almost as much money as for a cow at that time.

The depression and drought did not keep the children from coming. Gerald, our number three son, was born on January 16, 1933, and did not pick a very good day for it. Was blowing snow that night, and had to go after the midwife four miles away. Hitched up the horses to the sled, but got stuck in a snow bank and broke the sled, so now what. We also had a buggy that could be used, so I hitched that up and tried again, all went well this time and got home in time before the baby came. The lady stayed for two days and was a great help.

Marian, our first girl, was born on April 13th, 1934, and she picked nicer weather. I was out in the field plowing when Wilfrid, then 6 years old, came out to tell me to come home. This time I could go by car to get the same midwife as before.

Larry, born on April 3, 1937, and was another snowbird, with blowing snow and roads were getting hard for driving by car. Rose said that we should go to her parent's house, for they had better roads. This time we decided to call a doctor from Dickinson, twelve miles away. After some time the doctor called and said that the roads were blocked and he could not get through. So three of the Franks boys got some shovels, and the four of us got in the car to make our way into town. Finally got there and the doctor said he would take his own car along back, and got back to the Frank house around midnight, and Larry was born shortly after. We asked the doctor to stay till morning, but he wanted to go back and started out. Heard later that he had a lot of trouble, got stuck and finally finished walking home. Those were the days when a doctor would do anything to help.

Angela was born on April 20, 1941. and we were past the days of using a midwife for a birth. This time Rose went to New England, at a widow's home for there was no hospital in that town. There a doctor was available, she stayed there for a week after and the lady took care of things.



Next came James, on January 16, 1943. Snow and cold again, this time took his mother to the hospital in Dickinson, first child to be born in a hospital. Mother had to stay for two weeks because some complications had set in. Meanwhile we were snowbound on the farm, impossible to drive by car when the time came to bring her home. The Frank parents could get her to their farm, but I then had to drive for the 7 miles with a covered sled to bring her home. With 6 children, I was the chief cook and had enough meat and potatoes, but our bread ran out and the store too far away. So I whipped up a batter with flour, milk, sugar, eggs, baking powder and cinnamon. It was good.

In the year 1943, we decided to find a different place to live, as our North Dakota house was too small for our family, and there not a good future for the children around there. We had been to Minnesota a few times in the past and liked what we saw there. In the fall of 1943, we took a train to Brainerd, Minnesota to look around there. Son Jimmy was less than a year old at the time so we took him along with us. We had a list of farms for sale in that area, but found out that in that lake country, it was not the best land for farming.

We heard that the town of Pierz, thirty miles south, was a German community and had some good farmland. We took a bus to Little Falls and called a realtor from Pierz to see what was available. Found a place three miles out of town, with fair buildings, the house was rather small, it was 120 acres at a price of \$3600.

We made a down payment on it and went back home, but rented it out to a young couple for one year. In 1944 we put in another crop on our North Dakota farm, but got things ready for a sale in the fall. We sold all the grain after threshing, fixed some things and painted some of the machinery. We had our auction sale on October 5th, 1944. Some things sold good, other things not so good.

Took a few days to get everything straightened out, paid off some bills, Our land of 320 acres we rented out to neighbor, Tom Braun, at \$1.00 an acre for two years. Hired two truckers, one for our household goods, and the other for the 3 cows and 3 horses which we took along. It cost us \$100 for each truck, one supplied by our neighbor, Pete Braun, and another by brother-in-law Anton Frank. On October 9th, we started packing and loading household goods. We would spend the night at the Frank parents, and then leave from there in the morning. It was not easy to leave a place where we had put in so much work, then leave all the neighbors and friends and go to a strange place.

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## Family Group Sheet

### Husband: Louis Selinger

\_ Birth: 26 May 1904 Scheffield, Stark County, North Dakota  
Death: 31 Mar 1990 Little Falls, Minnesota  
Marriage: 19 Oct 1926 St. Pius Parish, Stark County, North Dakota  
Father: Gregor Selinger (1879-1937)  
Mother: Anna Wandler (1879-1939)

### Wife: Rosemary Frank

\_ Birth: 8 May 1906 Scheffield, Stark County, North Dakota  
Death: 30 Nov 1988 Little Falls, Minnesota  
Father: Lawrence Frank (1883-1966)  
Mother: Anna Maria Wock (1886-1958)

### Children

#### 1 M Wilfrid Joseph Selinger

Birth: 15 Mar 1928 Stark County, North Dakota  
Death: 1 Dec 1996 St. Cloud, Minnesota

#### 2 M Bernard Selinger

Birth: 19 Jun 1929 Stark County, North Dakota

#### 3 M Gerald Selinger

Birth: 16 Jan 1933 Stark County, North Dakota

#### 4 F Marian Selinger

Birth: 13 Apr 1934 Stark County, North Dakota

#### 5 M Lawrence Gregory Selinger

Birth: 3 Apr 1937 Stark County, North Dakota

#### 6 F Angela Joanne Selinger

\_ Birth: 20 Apr 1941 Dickinson, North Dakota  
Death: 10 Nov 1997 Foster City, California

#### 7 M James Francis Selinger

Birth: 16 Jan 1943 Dickinson, North Dakota  
Death: 18 May 2011 Colorado Springs, Colorado

#### 8 F Julitta Jean Selinger

Birth: 15 May 1945 Little Falls, Minnesota

#### 9 F Leona Louise Selinger

Birth: 26 May 1948 Little Falls, Minnesota