THE PAINTING OF CAROLYN SPERLE
“THE LITTLE YANKEE”
FOR CONSIDERATION OF THE ND STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

About The Painting
This painting is of historical significance to the Germans from Russia in that it is an accomplishment to have lived so long and is a good record of Carolyn Sperle – a woman who lived through 101 years from 1916 – 2017.

The painting has the number 100 on one of the cards to commemorate Carolyn’s 100th Birthday. She is playing cards because Carolyn enjoyed the friends she played cards with throughout her life. Carolyn said that before starting school when she was young, she had been home without much of a chance to play with anyone so she adored any opportunity in her life to mix with people and make friends which is perhaps part of growing up on the Prairie – isolation can be a battle.

Carolyn is also wearing a hat as she was known for having lots of hats. It seemed to be symbolic of her independence wearing something that set her apart yet was normal at the same time. In the background is Carolyn’s living room couch with a quilt on it and another chair with a crocheted blanket on it, both typical for that era.

About Courtney Bae
Courtney Bae was born and raised in Sydney, Australia by a American mother and a South Korean father which made for some fun times at school as she found herself with an American accent in the midst of Australians. She is the Great Niece of Carolyn Sperle.

Later, she found that her American cousins and uncles and aunts sounded just like her mom, LeAnn (Kuntz) Martin, who is from Napoleon, North Dakota where many Americans who are Germans from Russia reside. As a special favor to her mom, Courtney did this oil painting of her Great Aunt Carolyn Sperle who turned 100 years old in 2016.

Courtney painted this picture while she was living in New York City by looking at a series of photos her mom took of Carolyn specifically for doing an oil painting. The painting was done in a week and then sent via UPS in time for Carolyn’s 100th Birthday Party which many people in Napoleon attended in 2016.

Courtney at age 30 places great importance on color, tactile drapery, print, and the composition in her works, but what she is most interested in is the “little moods” that she creates in general.

She studied Fine Arts at the University of New South Wales in Sydney. Later, she moved to New York City in 2008 and began studying Fashion Design at the Fashion Institute of Technology while working as a visual merchandiser, designing retail store spaces to showcase luxury designer brands.

In recent years, Courtney has been focusing more and more on portrait painting.
THE OIL PAINTING OF CAROLYN SPERLE AT AGE 100
BORN IN THE USA – DUBBED “THE LITTLE YANKEE”
BY HER RUSSIAN BORN SIBLINGS OF GERMAN DESCENT

(Size: 30 inches by 40 inches)
CAROLYN SPERLE

Carolyn was born on a farm northwest of Napoleon in 1916 and when Fr. Zimmerman baptized her at the local church, he said at that time she was the smallest baby he had ever baptized. Little would he have imagined, she would be one of the strongest as she was still walking around, living on her own and even looking after others in her spare time at the age of 100.

Originally, her family came to homestead near Napoleon like many others in the area from Russia via Germany when the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia and made it uncomfortable for the Germans in Russia. Carolyn was the first of her siblings born in the USA so her two Russian-born siblings sometimes teased her calling her “the little Yankee” she says with a smile on her face.

She was born at home and delivered by her Aunt Julianna Neigum. She lived there and attended school at a one-room country school where she loved the company of other kids and she loved reading. Her sister was seven years older so school was a fun social place with playmates for Carolyn. Even to this day, Carolyn is known for her love of cards and chatting with her pinochle friends so the joy of enjoying people seems to have stayed with her as she’s a regular card player, not known to miss a weekly card game!

She studied one year of high school and then later worked as a clerk at local Grocery General for three years. One day her cousin and sister-in-law Mag Sperle who was working in California encouraged Carolynn to move out to California and work at the Defense Plant there because it paid a lot better than what she was getting. Carolyn stayed there for seven years and earned the honor of an E-Award for delivering things ahead of time made by the plant.

In 1949 her future husband Frank came to meet her there and they were married. He was very shy and bashful and “the nicest man” as most people who knew him would agree and they were together to celebrate their 50th Wedding Anniversary before Frank died. Her Bridesmaid was Alice Neigum and the Best Man was Gottlieb “Slim” Neigum. Carolyn and her husband then came back to Napoleon and bought a farm. After she married, she took it for granted that she was to be a housewife as that was what women generally did at that time so she helped raise three sons: Kevin, Mark and John.

She is well-known locally for her volunteer work, for her many hats and for her smile!

She says she is very glad to have lived in a small town because “people are so good to you.” In her case, for example, they bring things to her that she needs and give her rides to places so she is able to continue to live at home which she enjoys. She has had many friends throughout the years and lots of relatives as her husband’s family gave her many in-laws.

She doesn’t think she has done anything any differently than others to make it to 100 years old, but that maybe her genes helped. She says she’d like to say it was “Clean Living” but she says people would laugh at her if she said that! Basically, she says she has enjoyed her life through all these years and perhaps many others in Napoleon would say they have enjoyed Carolyn as well!

Carolyn Sperle passed recently in August 2017.