

Mrs. Minnie Larson, Squaw Gap

Pioneer, Celebrates 84th Birthday

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The eighty-fourth birthday of Mrs. Minnie Larson was celebrated at the Home Sunday, July 9, by relatives, friends and fellow residents. She was born on July 4, 1883. The party was sponsored by the Banks ALCW. Mrs. John Wahus made the special cake, a replica of a prairie schooner. Special guests at the honored lady's table were her son, and daughter-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Larson, Sidney, her son in law and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Floyd Whitehead, Sidney, Mrs. Olaf Simonson, Mrs. Artie Johnson, Mrs. John Wahus, Mrs. O. A. Becken, Mrs. Sena G. Moo and Mrs. Oluf Erickson.

Brush Creek is a settlement of Norwegian immigrants in the western part of Wisconsin. It is a pleasant valley that winds its way to the Kickapoo, a small river that joins the Wisconsin River on its way to the Mississippi. In this settlement lived Cristian and Mari Frandson and family. The farm provided much of the food for the family, from its wooded hillsides it provided fuel, and from the crops and cattle, an income to defray household expenses and farm operation. Cristian and Mari's family consisted of four girls. On that special day, however, the anniversary of the birth of their adopted country, July 4th, 1883 twin girls joined their four sisters as members of the Frandson family. These girls were Sina and Mina.

Minnie, as Mina came to be known, grew into womanhood on the farm where she was born. In the district school she learned to speak English, to read and to master the basic studies of the elementary school system. During the vacation from public school she attended the parochial school held in the same school house.

In 1897 she was confirmed in the Lutheran church at a service given wholly in the Norwegian language. There were not many at that time who continued their education beyond this stage. Most of the young girls went out to earn money as a "bred" girl. The "bred" girl was a servant who learned to do all the house hold duties in a home. Minnie worked as such to Louis in the



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community.

The young country girl, desiring to widen the horizon of her life, went to the city. She went to LaCrosse. Every businessman and professional man in the city employed one or more servants in his home. She obtained a job and enjoyed an acquisition of sophistication which city life could give to a girl in her position.

Whenever her help was needed at home she would return there, but would go back to the city again when her help was no longer needed on the farm.

In 1906 Minnie terminated her services for others. She became the mistress in her own home. After a life long acquaintance and a courtship she accepted an offer of marriage from Axel Larson. They were married March 7, 1906. The bridegroom, a farmer's son, took his bride to a farm which he had rented. There the

happy young couple made their home for four years. The prospects for the couple to make a home on a rented farm were not bright. One could obtain a quarter land from the government merely complying to the requirements of the grant. Minnie Axel decided that this was an open door to the future they desired, a home of their own.

In 1910 the Larsons terminated their family and some of their possessions and moved west. She obtained homesteading rights on a land grant in the western part of North Dakota. The grant was in a community which came to be known as Squaw Gap, close to the Montana state line. Her two-room frame house was built.

Life in the infancy of a settlement and life in the more advanced years of a settlement differ greatly. Mr. and Mrs. Larson found life now very different from that in their na-

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settlers put up small buildings not only to limit the outlay of money but because of the great distance they had to travel to buy the lumber. For many of their purchases they had to travel to Beach, a city 40 miles distant. When their grain was harvested and threshed the early settlers waited until winter had come and the Yellowstone River had frozen over. It was then possible for the farmers to load their grain on horse-drawn sleighs and haul it either to Mondak or to Savage, Mont. At such times Minnie and the children were left alone for a couple of days. The homecoming of father was a happy event. He returned with a sleighful of provisions for the entire winter. There were many sacks of flour and certain amounts of sugar, coffee, dried fruit, etc. What the housewife failed to get she had to do without. Minnie recalls that the first winter she was on the prairie homestead she did not use a single egg.

Two years passed by. They were happy years for the husband and wife. There was an appealing challenge to building a home and a farm on land that had not been touched by a plow. There was a parental joy in their ² three small children. In 1912, however, sorrow entered their small cottage. Their ~~first~~ born child, five-year old Chester, fell victim to the scarlet fever epidemic in the community. Death claimed one whom they loved. Another grave was dug in this land where the services of a grave digger were seldom required.

Life on the homestead was a busy life for the farmer's wife, the housekeeper, mother. The methods that Minnie used in doing the baking, the tanning, the cleaning and the laundry were time-consuming and laborious. She did not have the use of electricity, gas nor running water. A day which took the busy woman out of her home to share it

er. Her social life, however, was limited. Some days it would be a walk across the prairie with the children to visit a neighbor. On a Sunday the family might set forth in the horse-drawn buggy for a visit with a more distant family. There were school programs and school socials that were enjoyed. There were Sundays when the homesteaders could look forward to meeting at the school house for religious services conducted by an itinerant pastor. After a number of years a congregation was organized in the community. It was called the Scandia Lutheran church. This name was later changed to the Grace Lutheran church.

Minnie and Axel retired from farming in 1943. They rented their farm to their son Harvey and moved to the city of Sidney. Their five children were grown and had left home. Their youngest son was serving his country on the battlefield in WW II. After the signing of the Armistice he continued serving in the army of occupation in Okinawa. In 1946 the father and mother received the sad news that their son Howard had been killed on the Pacific Island where he served. The following year on September 5, 1947, an ever greater loss was experienced by Minnie. Her husband died suddenly from a heart attack.

The bereaved widow continued her life in the home which she and her husband had purchased four years earlier. There was comfort in the fact that two daughters and a son and their families lived close enough to pay frequent visits and thus assure her of their concern and affection. The time came, however, when her advanced age made it unwise for her to continue living alone. In December, 1966, she entered the Good Shepherd Home in Watford City where her needs are well met. Frequent visits from relatives

brighten her days. This 84 year old pioneer has 24 descendants, four children, 12 grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. Her children are Mrs. Alfred Olson, Lenore Heim, Calif., Mrs. John McMary Ann, Mrs. Floyd V. head, Ill., and Harvey I. all of Sidney.