

GILBERT OLSON

by

GARFIELD OLSON, GRANDSON

Gilbert Olson was born Oct. 15, 1858 in Winneshiek County, Iowa, near the town of Decorah. Here he passed his early boyhood with his parents, Ole Bjornstad and Maria Bjornstad.

He went to school from the age of eight years until he was thirteen years old, but during this time he actually went to school only about twelve months because the times were hard and he had to work out to help fill in payments of his own expenses for the family.

In all his boyhood in Iowa he showed great interest in nature, in all activities of the community, and in hunting and athletic contests. He was one of the fastest runners of the vicinity and took great delight in participating in athletic contests where strength was involved.

On March 20, 1879 he was married to Maria Anderson at Osage, Iowa, a town in Mitchell County. In the spring of 1880 their first son was born.

At this period they set out with some other settlers towards the northwest as it had been rumored that the soil was richer in these parts. They had four covered wagons and they used horses to pull them with. Gilbert had a cow and three chickens. They had to keep the wagons spaced a little distance from each other in order to keep the cattle together. This proved to be a difficult thing to do because it rained virtually every day and night for two weeks.

However, troubles were not the only scenes of the trip, because they had different amusements the most enjoyed being the game of base ball, which was very peculiar, comparing it to the modern game. Mr. Olson received his heaves. On the other side there were five or six men, and the peculiar part was that the two men would win nearly every time they played. For bats they had handles of grub axes and they used sweat pads

for bases.

The rain had washed out the soil in many places, so this caused more troubles for his parents who came later on, because they had to cut down trees to make bridges over gullies and streams.

Mr. Olson arrived in Mayville, N. Dak. June 23, 1880, and celebrated the 4th of July there. They tried to start a base ball game there but could not find enthusiastic interest enough, so they spent the day watching the racing events.

On July 5th they continued their journey and Mr. Olson stopped at a place they now call Northeast quarter, Section 25, Twp. 147, Range 58, in Griggs County. The land was not surveyed at that time so they called themselves squatters, that is they took chances on settling on and working the land. When it was surveyed in 1881 it was said to be railroad land, so he had to defend his claims and he finally won out but not until Grover Cleveland became President in 1893 and he signed Mr. Olson's deed to the land.

Immediately on his arrival he saw great possibilities of good crops because the soil was rich. He hired all his breaking and in the spring of 1881 had seven acres prepared. In 1883 he bought a plow and harrow and the seeding was done by hand. He planted two bushels of potatoes from which he received twenty-five bushels while the wheat seeded brought a yield of thirty-two bushels to the acre. The prices were good considering the value of money at that time, the wheat being sold at \$.85 per bushel.

The living house was very unhealthy, it being a dugout, and was dug in the ground three feet. For finishing they had logs, while the floor was lumber, with a bark and sod roof. The house was also small, only being 12 X 14 feet. In the spring of 1881 the river overflowed to such an extent that he had to make an outlet from the low place on which the dugout was situated. The house had only two half-windows which at their base were level with the ground, so many times they had to dig their way

out in winter. The water also came into the barn, so until the water was drained out, he put up a structure of poles, with hay placed on this, on which the cow stood while they milked.

When the haying season arrived he borrowed a scythe for doing the cutting. For the stacking he had only a yoke of oxen, with a home made rake, and one fork. The fork was a long handle taken from a tree with two wooden tines fastened on to it.

For fuel he gathered dry wood. And in winter they killed rabbits for meat and also fish. During spring time prairie chickens were snared by putting up a net wire fence into which the birds were chased, so they hardly ever were without meat.

Buffalo bones were gathered in piles from whence they were thrown up into wagons and hauled away to the nearest market which was Valley City. Therefore he only received half of what the bones brought as the dealer received the other half.

When the harvest and threshing seasons arrived Mr. Olson walked down to Goose River and worked for two dollars a day.

Many exciting and interesting things happened in Griggs County, one of the most noticeable being the preparations against Indians being made by the blacksmith of Cooperstown, who made a gun, using a flue from an engine as a barrel. The Indians had great fear from guns, but most of Indians that passed thru were very friendly to the whites.

Another happening worth remembering was the return trip of a party of four men and two women who had been to Mayville for provisions. A great blizzard came up, snow falling so fast nothing could be seen but flakes. One of the horses broke loose, so Esten Johnson, one of the party, jumped off the wagon and attempted in vain to catch the runaway horse. He unhooked the other horse, and attempted to catch the other one on horseback, but his efforts were in vain. However, he kept going with the one horse and suddenly found himself in front of Gilbert Olson's house.

The runaway horse had also stopped there, being well known to the place. As it was night he woke Mr. Olson and they started a search on skis for the lost party but were unable to find the lost party until morning. They were between two hills about one mile northeast of Olson's place. The covered wagon had been tipped over, under which the five lost persons kept sheltered from the snow.

Mr. Olson was the first fiddler in Sheyenne Valley so he was kept quite busy in the first years playing for parties.

In 1882 he took first prize in the running races at the fourth of July celebrations at Mardell, a place consisting of only a postoffice and a store. This place was located about three and one-half miles south of Olson's homestead.

The congregation of the community was named Ringsaker, which was the name of the place in Norway where Mr. Olson's father came from to this country. The congregation was organized in 1883 and held its meetings in a little log schoolhouse. In 1897 the church was built which is still being used by the congregation.

In 1882 another boy was born on May 31. In that year both children became sick with diphtheria, and as the nearest doctor was at Valley City, nothing could be done to save them. Their sorrow was great in these deaths as they lost the only children they had at the time. The coffin had to be made from common lumber and there was no minister near here at that time so they had to arrange everything the best they could by themselves.

Mr. Olson's neighbors were few and lived far from each other. Bent Olson, his brother was the nearest neighbor, others were Ole Olson Bjornstad, Martin Olson, Andrew Nelson, John Hogenson, Iver Seim, John Quelley, Andrew Knudson, and John Dahl.

After the death of the two sons, he became father of five children, all of whom are living in or near Cooperstown and take their mail at this

nm. They are Mrs. Annie Hilstad, Henry, Albert, Mrs. Gena Hogenson, and
s. Clara Midstokke.

In 1898 Mr. Olson moved one and one-half miles north, where he now
lives on southwest quarter, section 13, twp. 147, range 58 Griggs County
with the address of Box 27 $\frac{1}{2}$, Route 1, Cooperstown, N. Dak.

Biography of Gilbert Olson
--Garfield Olson (Grandson)

Gilbert Olson was born October 15, 1858 in Winneshok County, Iowa near the town of Decorah. Here he passed his early boyhood with his parents, Ole Bjornstad and Maria Bjornstad.

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However, troubles were not the only scenes of the trip, because they had different amusements, the most enjoyed being the game of baseball which was very peculiar comparing it to the modern game. Mr. Olson and Hans Prahmus were on one side, Prahmus doing the pitching while Olson received his heaves. On the other side there were five or six men and the peculiar part was that the two men would win nearly every time they played. For bats they had handles of grub axes and they used sweat pads for bases.

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