

Biography of Frank J. Pfeifer
--Reynold Hovel

Frank J. Pfeifer was born at Michaelisdorf, Bohemia, Austria on July 10, 1858. In 1871 he came to the United States with his parents in order to improve their opportunities. They embarked on the ship Baltimore and landed at Baltimore after a trip of eighteen days on the ocean. From Baltimore they came by rail to Waterville, Minnesota where Mr. Pfeifer lived for ten years.

He came to Casselton, North Dakota for an adventure, with the intention of returning in a short time but he stayed one year. While he was in Casselton, he was persuaded by Joe Bartos, an acquaintance, to go with him to Cooperstown, North Dakota. From Casselton they shipped to Buffalo, North Dakota, and from there they drove to Valley City with oxen. In Valley City they loaded up with lumber and kitchen utensils and continued on their journey.

Near Valley City the roads were being worked on, and they got stuck three times. That night they camped along the south side of the Ball Hill Creek. After another day's journey, they reached the place where they finally settled. Another family came up at the same time, so they built a shack fourteen by sixteen with a roof of lumber and walls of sod. After it was completed, it rained for three days straight. They had no other shelter for the two horses, so they had to keep them in the shack, and they also had to eat and sleep in the shack themselves. They had two teams of oxen and during the rain they grazed off, and they were not able to find them for a week.

The government survey did not include the land on which they wanted to settle. They started to measure by tape line from the land that had been surveyed, and marked off the land they wanted to file on by stakes. Then they squatted on the land until it was surveyed by the government.

In those days people filed on land and did not have to make improvements for six weeks. Therefore, if they settled on some land that had been taken by somebody else, they would have to move.

Mr. Pfeifer filed a preemption. To file on a preemption you had to put two hundred and fifty dollars of improvements and pay one dollar and twenty-five cents an acre and in six months the deed would be signed to you. The same year he filed on a homestead in the same section which he proved up in five years. In 1884 he took a tree claim near McHenry which he later traded for a team of horses.

He then built a sod shack on his homestead, and a little while later he built a house of lumber (12x 16) which is still a part of the house on that farm. He had to get his supplies and haul his grain to Cooperstown, a distance of thirteen miles. He sold some wheat for 80¢ a bushel, but prices went down as low as 38¢ for number one hard wheat. Oats sold for as low as seven cents a bushel, although if they wanted to buy any, they had to pay about 25 cents a bushel. Barley sold for twenty to thirty-five cents a bushel. They had to pay as high as \$2.25 a bushel for seed and sell it for 68¢ a bushel.

Pfeifer

Threshing machines were scarce, so two of his neighbors, John and Frank Ressler, and he bought a horse power machine and threshed for themselves.

The storms were much worse those days because there were no trees to stop the wind. The buildings were small and many times covered up in a snow storm. In order to feed the stock, they had to shovel out a place to get into the barn, and that would cause the snow to drift up so much.

Every fall several of the neighbors would go together and haul enough wood from the river to burn during the winter.

He was married March 8, 1886 to Marie Kuntz at Janesville, Minnesota. They reared a family of five girls and five boys.

He lived on the homestead for 24 years and then sold out. After this he made three trips through Oregon, Washington, Canada, Montana, Wyoming, and Nebraska with the intention of buying land. He then came back to Cooperstown and bought one section and one quarter of land with one corner of the section joining the city limits on the east side of Cooperstown.

He lived there until in the fall of 1925 when he moved to Coopers-town where he is now living.