

Flour, Kerosene Soaked, But One Of Many Pioneer Hardships, Says Romness Settler

This is second in a series of articles being published by the Sentinel-Courier about living pioneers of the county. The Sentinel-Courier will appreciate the help of other pioneers in supplying information and their picture.

A diet of bread made from kerosene-soaked flour was how Gilbert Olson, pioneersettler of Romness township, was initiated to North Dakota.

It was in the spring of 1880 Mr Olson and a group of his friends in Iowa decided to head into the northwest. As if the late spring's cold rain had not been a sufficient handicap, the party, which consisted of four covered wagon-loads, was in need of supplies by the time it reached in addition to what they made

Borrowed for Flour

Mr. Olson borrowed five dollars, bought flour and a few other supplies. However, kerosene from the lantern leaked out, soaked the flour, but they were forced to use the flour nevertheless.

The following summer, Olson, his wife and son, moved into Romness township, selected a location and built a dugout with logs for the upper part of the walls. Bark and sod formed the roof.

While building their 12 by 14 foot home, they lived in their covered wagon. Mrs. Anna Nelson, a neighbor, baked biscuits for them but before they could obtain more food the pro-



GILBERT OLSON

visions ran so low it was necessary to put the family on ration.

Had Court Fight

The Olsons homesteaded their land but it took more to keep it. The area had not been surveyed at the time and the homestead was later claimed as railroad land. The fight went to court and during the presidency of the Grover Cleveland the Olsons received their government rights to the land.ached Fargo.

from the farming operations, Mr. Olson walked to Portland, Hillsboro and Mayville in the fall to work during threshing season. Mrs. Olson re-

mained in the Sheyenne valley home and did the chores.

Following one fall's work, Mr. Olson bought some wheat and took it to Grand Forks where it was ground into flour. This was augmented by wild game such as rabbits and prairie chickens which were plentiful.

In the summer and fall they fished and stacked up fish for the winter. They had no butter or milk while their cow was "dry" but occasionally received a little "pat" of butter from a neighbor.

Mr. Olson trapped during the winter and made shoes for the children from muskrat skins and old boots they had brought from Iowa. He made coonskin caps and mittens. One season he made \$100 by trapping.

Sold Buffalo Bones

Like most other pioneer settlers, the Olsons sold buffalo bones which they picked on the prairie.

Mr. Olson was one of the county's early baseball enthusiasts, being an active participant in the sport during the latter part of the 19th century. Romness men formed a team and would play Sundays after walking, often several miles, to meet their competitors.

Mr. Olson's full name is Elling Gunerious Olson Bjornstad but he shortened it to "Gilbert Olson". He was born October 15, 1858, at Highlandville, Winnesheik county, Iowa. He spent several of his early days in Wisconsin, however, before setting out for North Dakota.