Biography of John S. Byington

--Helton Ulstad

Parents--Mr. and Mrs. S. K. Byington

Pioneer--John S. Byington

Birth--March 14, 1861, in Cairo, Greene County, New York State.

Pioneer left former home to make a home for himself for he had always had the desire to take Horace Greeley's advice and go west. He came to North Dakota because there happened to be some neighbors of his that were coming here, and being so anxious to go west he embraced the first oppor­tunity.

We had no experiences worthy of being mentioned until the morning I arrived in Fargo where I saw a shower of small toads, the streets and sidewalks being literally covered with them. I came to North Dakota April 17, 1882.

We left Valley City on the morning of the 22nd of April, 1882, for Griggs County with a load of machinery and feed. At dark that night we arrived at a couple of shacks a little ways north of the Al Booth farm, the buildings of which still stand just north of Rogers, We slept in one shack and put our horses in the other. In the morning when we got up the ground was white with snow and it was still snowing quite hard. We had about 30 miles further to go with not another shanty in sight till we came to our destination. We were fortunate in having a man with us by the name of Wm. McDonald, who had traveled through this country with a bunch of surveyors at the time it was surveyed. This man had a compass with him and with its help we made our way on north through the snowstorm till about 4 o'clock in the afternoon when we arrived at what we were to call home for the time being at least. We were wet through, tired out, and somewhat hungry. We had nothing but a few biscuits, crackers, cheese, and some sardines. Since we left Valley City the previous day I was about as sick as I ever have been in my life, about 1700 miles from mother, 50 miles from a doctor with a bunch of 5 other men without any medicine whatever except a bottle of hennesey,   
which was the first I had ever taken but I must confess that since then there has been a warm place in my heart for it (for medicinal purposes, of course). We used to follow the harrow or seeder on foot all the week, and on Sunday we were in the habit of hiking over the Prairies looking for a place to squat on as this land was not surveyed north of Township 144. On the 20th day of May we just finished seeding our first crop of wheat and two days later we had areal North Dakota blizzard. We lived in a shack without tarpaper and were it not for the lath over the cracks you could have stuck your fingers right outdoors. Outside of the one woman that belonged to our crowd (the wife of Mr. J. W. Fiero) we didn't see the face of a woman till fall.

We finally got our land located but had to wait for it to be sur­veyed and put on the market before we could file on it. I signed the petition to get this township surveyed in January, 1883, and the following summer it was surveyed and in March, 1884, was placed on the market.

My homestead is the northeast ½, section 24, Township 145, Range 61. My first shack was built of shiplap with sod on the outside. I used to get my provisions from town through my neighbors. During the summer of 1882 a few settlers came and settled around there among them was Chas. Mosely (now dead), also Edward and Richard Sellwood, all coming from Union City, Michigan. That year was the first year the twine binder was brought into this country. Previous to that the old goose neck wire binder was used with an occasional Marsh harvester which had two men standing on a platform binding the grain as it came through the binder. A great many of the teams were oxen with a few mules and the balance were horses with an occasional cow used to fill in end make a full team. The only crops raised here at that time were wheat, oats, and barley with an occasional piece of rye or flax. Yields varied in those days the same as now. In 1882 wheat went about 25, in 1883 about 12 or 13, in 1884, a little better and in 1885 about 25. After that they were only fair till 1888 when we had prospects for e good crop but it was a little late on account of a late spring, but on the night of the 16th of August it froze ice inch thick and it made our wheat look like some of the rust smitten wheat we see now-a-days. I took two loads of it to Cooperstown, 18 miles away, and received the enormous sum of $10.00 for each load.

We went to the Sheyenne River and Lake Jessie a few times after fuel gathering up down timber and if we thought we would not get caught at it cut down a real good tree. But we came to the conclusion that it wasn't worth the price so we bought our fuel after that which con­sisted of hard and soft coal but at a price much lower than it is today (1927).

Pardon me if I leave out the hardship endured during the early days for I often hear the young people of today speak of the hardships they have to endure. (Self made the most of them). It might be hard for most people to believe that we had any hardships worthy of mention, in fact I have heard people say that the North Dakota people of the early days were the biggest liars on earth. The only time that I enjoy talking about those days is when I'm in conversation with someone who had a few experiences like my own. I have seen many bad storms and fires but was fortunate in never getting either burned or hurt in any of them.

I was married to Miss Nora. Sullivan on November 25, 1891, at James­town, North Dakota, who died on the 29th day of July, 1892, and was married again to Miss Ida Erlandson on April 5, 1894, to whom five children were born. Edna Ione, who is Mrs. Albert Nelson of Palermo, North Dakota, L. Kenneth who is at home in Sutton, North Dakota; Chester V. 899--11th, St. South, Fargo, North Dakota; Nina May, Mrs. H. K. Sorvik of Kathryn, North Dakota; and Lillian V. who is in training at St. Luke's hospital, Fargo, North Dakota. I am now living in Sutton, North Dakota, having left the farm and moved to town just a little over a year ago.

Early Sutton Vicinity

As related by John S. Byington, of Sutton, early pioneer.

As near as I can remember the first schoolhouse built in these parts was on the N. E. corner of Section36 in Dover Township on the homestead of D. R. Swarthcut in the year of 1883, at a cost of $4,000.00 the lumber being hauled from Sanborn. Mr. Swarthcut was a veteran of the Civil War and after the Soo Railroad was built he moved to Wimbledon, where his son and daughter now reside. The next school aside from the one in Cooperstown, that I remember