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German-Russian Couple met in Denver

Weitzel, Judy. "German-Russian Couple met in Denver." *Grand Island Independent*, 25 April 2005.

My grandfather, George Weitzel, was born in Noroka, Russia, on July 7, 1885.

At the age of 6, he came across the Atlantic Ocean to the United States on the ship S.S. Weimer. On Dec. 31, 1891, they landed on the East Coast and on Jan. 3, 1892, they were in Baltimore.

His family settled near Sutton and then moved to Harvard. During the early years, they lived in Kearney, where George worked in a cotton mill, where my grandfather swept floors for 15 cents a day. The family also lived in western Nebraska, where they worked in the sugar beet fields.

My grandmother, Christina Schmer, was also born in Noroka, Russia, on July 3, 1889.

After the early death of her father, Christina, her mother and two brothers came to the United States in 1906. She often talked about being on the ship on her 17th birthday.

Her brother, Louis Schmer, was one of those who came over with Christina. Louis always said if he returned from the war, they would go to America. An uncle from Superior sent her family the money for the trip. Her fare was \$75, which she had to repay.

They landed in America and went to Superior. The town confused Christina because she thought they meant Siberia -- the frigid, cold, northern Russian country where some people were sent.

Later they moved to Denver, where Christina went to work for Jewish people who taught her to cook American foods. She was quite impressed when they put butter on their beef steak.

On Sundays, she would take the street car to Globeville, Colo., to visit her mother. This was a German settlement in Denver. Although George and Christina were both from Noroka, Russia, they did not know each other until they met in Denver in 1910, where George was visiting relatives.

(Maps of the Soviet Union were changed in the 1990s and Noroka is now called Hekpacobo. It is located along the Caspian Sea and near the Volga River.)

In 1906, George's parents and my great-grandparents, Henry and Dorothea Weitzel, bought land 1 1/2 miles south of the Harvard cemetery corner and farmed for many years. Henry and Dorothea, my great-grandparents, had been born in Germany and moved to Russia at an early age.

George and his brother Louie farmed with their dad until he retired and moved to Harvard.

George and Louie "drew straws" to determine which brother would stay on the farm. George won, and he and Christina lived on the farm for more than 40 years. Their seven children -- Norman, Paul (my father), George Jr., Lawrence, Dora and Mildred -- were born and raised on the farm. One son, Heinrich, died as an infant.

During the Depression years of the 1930s, there was very little rain, only a few crops and no jobs. George Jr. and Lawrence joined the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and did road construction and soil conservation work, and planted trees.

They worked on projects away from home near Nelson and Hebron. They were paid \$30 per month, or about about \$1 per day. They sent \$25 home to their parents, and kept \$5 per month for their spending money. The four brothers also worked on the Burlington Railroad at different times after fall harvest.

Grandma Christina spent many lonely hours on the farm, having left her mother to move to their Nebraska country farm home. During the first week of September, the Burlington Railroad would offer a special fare - \$9 for a round trip -- to Denver. Christina would take Dora and Mildred along to visit their grandma for a week. They would miss the first days of school, but their mother always said the first week "wouldn't count any how."

By then, her mother had remarried in Denver, so she had several stepsisters. One of them married George's brother, Henry Weitzel, and they lived in Mitchell, Neb.

George and Christina retired in Harvard. George passed away on Sept. 13, 1969, and Christina died on March 2, 1958. Both are buried in the Harvard cemetery, along with Dorothea and her husband Henry.

After serving four years in the U.S. Army, my father, Paul Weitzel, came back to Harvard to live the rest of his life where his grandparents settled after their journey from Russia. He died in 1986 and also is buried in the Harvard cemetery with his wife, Berneitta, who passed away in 1999.

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