
MANFRED HISTORY AND PRESERVATION

P.O. Box 321 Harvey, North Dakota 58341

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Greetings from Manfred!

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Soo Line Railroad Attracts Settlers

It was the coming of the Soo Line Railroad that brought home seekers to Wells County. Settlers had arrived before the eighties in the Sykeston area. The first general election in Wells County, Dakota Territory was held at Sykeston, November 4, 1884. The main issue was the location of the county seat. In those early years, the site of Manfred was known as the James River Crossing of the Mouse River Trail.

Manfred was named after the gloomy, solitary hero of Lord Byron's tragedy by that name. The Manfred Post Office was established May 3, 1894, and Mr. T. K. Rogne was the postmaster.

Early settlers were of German decent, a small colony of Russian born, a few Englishmen and numerous Norwegian Lutherans all seeking to acquire permanent homes.

Strength of Character

The early settlers were of hardy stock. They were courageous. They were people of conscience. To practice their religion they were willing to sacrifice and risk funds. They were energetic and inventive. Grueling tasks were merely challenges, and they knew how to make crude substitutes for tools, equipment, clothing, and materials they lacked.

The majority of them had great physical endurance - men and women of character and vision. Without these qualities, the bounties of nature would have been as valueless as it had been to the Indians.

Enjoying the Company of Friends

The spirit of kinship, congeniality and helpfulness existed among the pioneers. Fun parties, lasting until dawn, were held in various homes, especially during the Christmas season. Neighbors took turns when social events were the order of the day.

Christmas Tree programs were well attended. Generally a minister was present to deliver the ever beautiful Christmas Gospel story. Children would speak pieces and the audience joined in singing Christmas hymns and carols. A barrel of luscious, sweet-smelling apples served as refreshments. Season's greetings and pleasantries were exchanged. The spirit of good will, was easily felt.

Popular places for social gatherings were in the various homes of Ladies Aid members who met once a month. It was quite an ordeal for the hostess to make the necessary preparations.

First a thorough house cleaning had to be done. Unused items were taken out to make more room in crowded quarters of the modest homes. Then came several days of preparing foods for the feast to be served.

Whole families attended, father, mothers with children wrapped in quilts arrived in bob sleds to enjoy the social doings. In summer, buggies and wagons were modes of travel. After the business session was completed, the guests were invited to be seated at long tables decked out in white table cloths, and fairly groaning with innumerable varieties of foods and Norse pastries, lefse, and Rømmegrøt. The children waited impatiently for their turn at the second table setting.

Fashion of the Time

Skirts were floor length, wide at the bottom with stiffening and bindings to hold them out. Shirtwaists in pretty striped percales were good standbys. Sailor hats were quite the rage, as were the large, beribboned, gaily flowered creations of the period. Elbow length capes, trimmed with rich, heavy lace and rows of shining braid added chic to the costume.

Men, as a rule, were bewhiskered and Derby hats and still white bosom shirts were the style. Watch chains fashioned of human hair, crocheted, and finished in gold settings, were proudly displayed by young men - generally gifts from their best girlfriends. Growing boys wore knee pants.

Generations of Loyalty

The first generation of pioneers who settled in Manfred Township 73 years ago, have long since gone to their reward.

The majority of farmsteads are owned and operated by the second and third generations who continue tilling the good earth, which has produced these many years.

When we look back across the years, we are reminded of the high hopes, the stunning disappointments, the heroic struggles' pioneers endured, we realize that every food of soil was hallowed with tears and toil and prayers.

Source: Chapter excerpt from Pioneer History of Wells County

Author: Sennev Nertrorst Whipple

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