

Betsy

HISTORY OF THE MITCHELLS

BY SIDNEY W. MITCHELL

My father's father was a sea captain during the civil war. His name was William Mitchell. He was of Scotch and Irish descent. They were here for generations. My grandmother Mitchell was from Holland, born there, Her maiden name was Van Traverse. They were wealthy. They had a plantation across the Potomac river from Washington D.C. This is where my father was born on December 6, 1861. He had one brother named Laurence and four sisters namely Mary, Alice, Margaret and Elizabeth. Mary and Alice married and had children. Laurence died young. They all lived in Washington D.C., 3130 West Point Street, and 1515 31st Street West.

My father never would have got to Minnesota but in the late 1880's about 1888 the government was surveying what was then government land in northwest Iowa and eastern South Dakota and Minnesota and selling it at one dollar and twenty five cents an acre. It was called a land grant. My father's mother bought 166 acres of this land near Council Bluffs, Iowa without seeing it, so she sent my father up there to see what she had bought.

It ended up dad got a job with the surveying crew. About two years later when the job was done he ended up in Minneapolis. About 1890 dad got a job sorting mail at the downtown post office in Minneapolis. Four men handled all the mail that came through the Minneapolis Post Office at that time. They were my dad and namely Tim O'Leary, Ed Hodgeden, and a man named McPhearsan. Dad worked there five years, then he got typhoid fever. It almost killed him. When he got over that he got a job at the T.K. Gray Drug Company. About 1895 dad told Mr. Gray that he was looking for a place to board and Mr. Gray said, "My wife has some boarders but could take in one more or so." Then he met my mother. She was working at Minneapolis Dry Goods. They were married on December 21, 1897, at St. Laurence Catholic Church.

I was born a year and a month later on January 17, 1899 in a "dam" cold house on the corner of 26th and Newton, North Minneapolis. They lived there about a year. In the year of 1900, dad and a carpenter by the name of Gust Kehn built a house at 2111 Willow avenue North, about five blocks from where I was born. In the house Ben, Betty and Sal were born.

(Oops) I forgot my mother's family. My mother's father came from the southern part of Germany, his name was Peter Keiser. There were 11 children. My grandmother's name was Mary Arens, born 2 miles east of here. On March 4, 1908 Dad bought this farm we are living on, 84 acres for \$5,800.00.

On November 11, 1908 my mother died of cancer. Buried in Loretto cemetery. Dad was left with four small kids, ages three years to nine years. He took it so hard that for years if you mentioned Ma's name he got tears in his eyes.

For five years we lived on the farm in the summer and went back to Minneapolis in the fall from September to June. Since 1913 we lived here all the year around. We started going to Rockford school in September of 1913. Drove with a horse and buggy. The horse's name was George. He was the best horse we ever had. He was 25 years old when he died, about a week before my dad died on April 23, 1927. Dad loved that old horse.

In 1916 I was thru school and dad bought what I had to have to farm with and get started in 1917. Between 1908 and 1916 he rented the land out for a share of the crop. He was no farmer but he had about ten boats to rent on the lake, a big garden, and kept the buildings in good repair and painted. I never inherited his desire to paint.

During the years 1914 thru 1918 World War I was being fought. If it had lasted a little longer I would have been in it. It ended November 11, 1918. I can remember it as if it was yesterday. Ben and I were husking corn early morning, a still day, when all of a sudden all the school bells started ringing and kept on ringing. I walked

over to where Ben was and said, "I bet the war has ended."

I went to the house and phoned Rockford. The war was over.

I went to Minneapolis and got in the parade on Nicollet avenue with a 1917 Model T with no starter and killed the engine and held up the parade while we cranked the dam thing. No one got mad. They were all happy.

Four years later about ¹⁹²⁰~~1902~~ we got into a short depression and banks were failing. I had around \$400.00 in the Rockford Bank so I bought a corn binder and manure spreader and when the bank closed I had .45¢ in my checking account. Those machines served me for many years. Things straightened out and we had a few good years of prosperity until the 1929 depression.

Between 1920 and 1927 I farmed in the day time and played for dances at night. Sometimes three or four times a week. It is funny there is anything left of me.

On April 23, 1927 dad died. Until then us kids did not appreciate or realize how much he did for us between 1908 and 1927.

I agreed to buy the farm at \$15,000 and paid Ben, Sal and Betty each one fourth of \$15,000. It took Laura and I until 1940 to pay them all. Then the barn and five other buildings burned. In October 27 I met and fell in love with Laura and thank God I am still in love with her. Over the 52 years I have had her I have never saw any other woman that I would rather have. We were married on February 14, 1928. Lake Sarah in those days was quite of a resort lake. It had five resorts on the north side and one on the south. We had a Lake Sarah depot, trains stopped four times a day if necessary. I have seen 50 or more people get off the train on a Saturday night. The lake was covered with boats. In the winter of 1931 into 32 we built Lake Sarah Pavilion and ran in till 1964. When we had Whoppe John playing we often sold 700 tickets and five barrels of beer. In October, 1929 the New York stock market crashed. The bottom dropped out on everything. If you had anything you got next to nothing for it. No jobs to be had, Millions of men were working for \$1.50 to \$2.00 per day. I sold beef by the quarter for five cents per pound. I shipped a truck load of hogs, got \$100.00, milk .75¢ per 100 pounds, eggs 10¢ per dozen.

Next came the 1934 drought. It started with little snow, by the end of May it hit 100 degrees and no rain until fall. From then on things got better. It reduced the over production and brought farm prices up and Laura and I had the farm all paid for in 1940.

Then came the fire on September 20th, 1940. It took six buildings. We got a new barn built before winter set in and got the cattle in before the November 11 storm by one day. By January 1, 1944 we had all the buildings replaced and paid for, so we bought large milker. Then in April 1944 I got my first tractor an Allis new and paid cash for it. I was happy, One year later in August 1945 World War II ended. Then bought some tractor machinery.

In November, 1946 we made a trip east to New York, then south to Washington D.C., visited the last one living of my dad's sisters, 85 years old. Went to the top of the Washington monument. Went thru the capitol and other government buildings, also the Smithonian Institution. From there we went thru Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa and home. Altogether thru 15 states. That year I bought a second tractor and sold the last of the horses to Herman Henning at Lyndale. Gosh I hated to see that last team go.

Between 1928 and 1939 we had four kids, one boy and three girls. They give us some headaches and sleepless nights when in their teens but every thing turned out all right in time. They sure are a joy and a blessing to us in our old age. Thank God. By 1949, Susan the first grandchild was born, after that there were plenty. They range in age from 30 years old to one year old or less. There are 24 regular grandchildren and 14 great grandchildren and more on the way. Ma and I sure started something.

On November 3, 1963 I had an auction, sold all my cattle, but before the winter was over I filled the barn with cows again and milked cows for a few years more. In 1974 I quit farming at age 75. Rented the land for cash rent. This time I was ready to retire. The last year was more than I could do. As long as I have Laura I will be happy. All I do now is a little gardening, bowl on Mondays and again later some weeks. I am not so good at it, Laura does better. I am enjoying my retirement and as long as I have Laura I am all right. I would not want to live without her.

Thanks again Laura for more than fifty hears of Heaven, May God Bless You

Love to all Dad