

## History and Memories of Joseph Robert Samek

Written by him in 1967 at Stayton, Oregon

This is the story of Joseph Robert Samek's life as he remembered it in 1967. He wrote it and Bob and Margie Samek, his son and daughter-in-law helped him to get it all written down and Margie typed it for everyone to have a copy. It is an interesting story and really tells the story of how we came to be in America and how they started their life in ND.

### LIFE IN RUSSIA:

My parents moved from Czechoslovakia to Russia, the reason they moved was because they had no land in Czechoslovakia to farm and Russian Czar offered homesteads to anybody who wanted to move into Russia, so my parents moved to Russia and they got land as homestead. They got 45 Desatins which is equivalent to about 112 acres of land, each Desatina is about 2.5 acres, so my parents and 1 child got 15 Desatins for each member of the family. Those with large families got lots more land to homestead than those with small families. My folks were young so father was drafted in Russian army for five yers, as in Russia at that time every male 21 years of age or over had to serve five years in army.

Oh yes, all the people that moved to Russia from Czechoslovakia lived in one village or settlement, all Czechohrad, adn their farm land was all around the settlement, our closest neighbors were two other settlements. A German one was Darmashtad, anotehr one was Kaisertal. All this country was level as a table. The settlement was in the county of Ukraina. Our largest town was 20 Versta or miles away, it was called Melitopol.

My father was a gunsmith and blacksmith, so he spent his five years in shops in the army, after he got out of the army he built a shop and he spent about half of the time in farming, and half in the shop. Our settlement, Czechohrad, had 100 members, all settlers. We had a nice church and school. Our school ws all in one. Half were Bohemian children from six years of age up to nine years of age, who went to learn to read and write in our language and religion. From nine years of age we had to go to Russian schools. As we didn't have a priest there was a lay teacher, a Catholic, so we learned our language first a priest came out there twice a year for confessions and baptisms. One thing it was hard to get used for us kids in America, even when we grew up, was lack of manners, all of us in the settlement were trained in manners, especially when we met older people on the street, we had to give a Christian greeting, "God give you good afternoon, or morning" or if you came home and there were some visitors in your house or maybe a neighbor, you just couldn't go in and ignore him, you also have to give him "Good Welcome, welcome to our home." In this country (America), when I walked thru the street and I met some Catholic, American, raised kids all they could say was "hey, you dirty Russian," if they had a dog with them they would sic em after you. I hope it's better now.

In Russia the children had to work when we got six years of age. Having to weed in the corn, gardens and most of us worked at harvest time. All the grain was cut loose with machines, then hauled home. At home we had a smooth, clean, round place in the yard and the grain was put around in a circle and the wheat was spread about 2 feet thick, leaving the middle open. Then we had big heavy stones which had heavy cogs just like wheels had in it. 2 horses were attached to each one, as those stones were about 1/2 ton and us children hd to ride the horses round and round until the top wheat was all threshed out, then the folks had to go and turn it over, and then we drove the horses round and round until other side is also all threshed out, then we had wooden forks and we would shake all the chaff and straw and carried it on stacks, just the straw, and the chaff was pushed to the center of this threshing circle and so it went with the whole crop until it was all threshed out. This wheat and chaff were sometimes 12 or 15 feet high as the whole crop went on this pile, then a small fanning mill was put next to this pile and one person cranked the mill, one filled the hopper, one took the chaff away, they had a special building for the chaff, as was valuable feed, and one put the wheat in the sacks after it was all threshed out and they called a buyer and he came and graded the wheat and offered the price per sack, and he bought whole crops and hauled it away, finally the farmer is done with the crop and hard work, of course then comes the corn

pickign, and husking, that's just about all the Russians harvested at that time, I think it's different these days.

Well in about 1898 father and some neighbors decided to sell out and move to America, there were 11 families that decided to move. My father told my mother he was going to move his family if it was the last thing he would do, and it was. When we got to Berlin, Germany, father got sick and mother called the doctor and he gave him some pills and after he took them he got worse, so he told mother he should never have taken them, he felt lots worse and he lost consciousness, which he never regained, so the next day the rest of the group left for Hamburg and they held us in Berlin. They were going to send us back to Russia, so the next day they asked mother if she wanted to follow the group, or if she wanted to go back to Russia. Mother wanted to follow the group, so we caught up with the rest in Hamburg and that's where father, Joseph, died and was buried in Hamburg, Germany. We stayed in Hamburg a week waiting on the ship, it took us 12 days to cross the ocean as it was a slow going ship. The whole trip took us five weeks to reach Dickinson, N.Dak., where my uncle or mother's brother Emil Stransky was waiting for us. Oh yes, the folks left Russia because it was a hard life there and also we had some good years and some bad years with farming, and also because when the boys turned 21 years of age in a family they had to serve five years which wasn't too good in those days. Mother had only one brother left in Russia and father had one brother left in Russia.

At the time we came to America on the ship there were 4 boys in my family. My brother Frank was 14, myself 12, younger brother Emil 10, and baby James 2 years old. We are grateful that we are here, at least we are free people, first years we wrote each other to Russia, as we had relatives out there, uncles, aunts, and cousins, but after the 1st World War the letters stopped, they didn't get them. We did get some letters after the war begging for help as they didn't have any food, they were starving, so we sent them in letters some money, but most of the time they didn't get it. We sent them \$1.00 or \$5.00 bills in letters, some time they got it, but most of the time they didn't. My cousin wrote me after he got American \$1.00 bill, he got 1-1/2 million Rubles for 40 pounds of wheat, but his folks died from hunger and that was the last we heard from that country.

## ARRIVING IN AMERICA

After arriving in America in November 1898 an uncle, mother's brother Emil Stransky, took us to their farm which is about seven miles west of Dickinson, where we stayed until the spring. The farm is still there, his two grandsons are on the place yet.

Mother had exchanged our Russian money for American in Hamburg which was only half of 50 or 100 Rubles. Mother then filed a homestead and Stransky's helped us to build a sod house with three rooms. Mother bought some cattle, a walking plow, wagon and drag with what money we had, that was all the farm tools we had. My brothers and I bought 3 horses and we plowed a few acres of prairie and mother broadcast the wheat. She did this for about 2 years, carrying about 50 pounds of wheat and seeded it by hand, and we dragged. Our first crop was not too good, all we thrashed was 3 sacks or about 8 bushels, just enough for seed. Mother had a pretty rough life. When my older brother Frank reached 19 he died, so I took over and when I reach 20 I got married.

## MARRIAGE TO ROSE ANN RIDL

When I got married to Rose Ann Ridl I also filed a homestead about 12 miles S.W. of Dickinson. I married on November 12, 1905 at New Hradec, N.Dak. by Father Grunt, we belonged to Saint Peter & Paul Church in New Hradec, it was 20 miles from our homestead, we drove with wagon and horses.

In later years our neighbors got together and decided we should go together and build a church in Dickinson as it was too far to go to New Hradec, there were 20 of us so we built a small church in Dickinson. (Saint Wenceslaus)

When I filed a homestead in the spring of 1906 we started to build a house, only this time we got a bunch of railroad ties and we built a 2 room house. Then of course we had to have water so we started to

dig a well, and that's where we first ran into trouble. We couldn't get enough water for our livestock. First several years I and the wife dug wells, I counted, we dug 18 wells, I dug and she pulled the dirt out, we dug up to 30 feet, we always got some top water, but when we got dry weather the water disappeared. Finally in later years we got a well digger and had dug several wells up to 120 feet deep, but no water. I and my neighbor hauled water for 2 years for livestock in barrels for 2 miles in dry summer but we struggled for 40 years on this farm, I guess you remember in the 30's what bad crops we had in W.P.A. days, one good crop we had was, we raised a large family, 10 children, 6 girls 4 boys.

I was raised as a farmer, but I had to take or learn a different trade to make a living, so I worked as a carpenter. In bad years the wife and children took care of the farm and I went to work building mostly farm dwellings, at 25 cents an hour. I had to work 12 hours a day to make \$3.00 per day. In later years I made up to \$1.50 an hour so that was a lot better.

Finally all the children grew up and got married, except the youngest one, Robert stayed with us on the farm, he was 15 when we decided to sell the farm and move to Dickinson. The oldest girl, Eleanor, married Anton Ridl north of Dickinson, a farmer; Mary married James Haverlock in South Heart, a mechanic; Dorothy married Melchoir Fisher, a farmer; Frances married Fred Kostelecky, a farmer; Rose married Vincent Fridrich, a mechanic, Nampa, Idaho; Joseph married to Joe Stefan's daughter, Hattie in Dickinson, retired farmer, he is an electrician working for Pacific Power & Light Co. at Stayton, Oregon; Georgianne married to George Braun at Spokane, WA; William in Nampa, Idaho; James in in Montana, didn't see him for many years, since 1953; and Robert, youngest son, he is married to Mr. William Appledoorn's daughter, Margie; so thanks Lord all the children are taken care of. When we sold the farm I bought a lot from the county on 5th Ave. West and built a good house, and later on I worked for Kovash Construction Co. for 2 years, then I worked for myself.

#### MEMORIES OF A 13 YEAR OLD SHEEPHERDER

When mother moved on the homestead the second year in America in the month of September we threshed our first crop, we threshed with horses, we didn't have enough wheat to get machinery and have it threshed for us. I was 13 years old at the time. In September of that year some sheep rancher came around and was looking for a sheep herder, so mother needed money and she hired me to herd 1000 head of sheep on a ranch out north, close to Kildeere for \$10 a month. He took me late that night and we traveled all that night so I didn't know which way my home was. We got to the ranch in the morning, there was nothing there but a sod house with two small rooms and some fence for the sheep, all open country. It was about 3 miles from the badlands and we had a very bad winter, 40 below zero and lots of storms and he didn't have any feed for the sheep so I had to go out with them every day regardless how cold it was, I stayed home only 1 day in the 7 months and how hungry I was. Winter time when it was 30 or 40 below I got out early mornings after breakfast, I had for noon lunch a slice of bread and 1 egg and you know how hard the bread was in 30 below zero weather, just like a rock, and same with the egg, if the egg was good. They bought this on the farm, some of them were pretty old and when I broke them they were black inside and rotten, had to throw them away, and I didn't wait until noon, I ate my lunch about 10 and how hungry I was, but I was afraid to complain, finally I did ask him to take me home, I was so homesick, but he said he has to get somebody else in my place, but he didn't. Finally I had rubber overshoes and what they called German socks, heavy, but tramping in deep snow lot of the time they filled up with snow and it melted inside, and this heavy sock got wet and then during the night didn't dry so when I put them on in the morning they were wet, and when I got out in the country with the sheep they froze on my feet, finally I had big blisters on all my toes and the feet and also on my hands, and believe me how it hurt when I put them in my shoes the next morning. Finally it was the last part of March, we got this early spring, it was warm and all the snow started melting and all the creeks and rivers got full and all the ice on the rivers raised and were flowing from bank to bank, so one day I got so homesick I decided I'm going home, and I did know that we traveled north, so figured if I go south, I had to get some place close to home, only trouble was the rivers were full and how was I to cross all the rivers. So one day toward evening I chased the sheep close to the ranch and I started walking home, I crossed the first river that evening, they called it

the Little Knife, when I got there it was full from bank to bank, but ice was floating also from bank to bank so I crawled on one of them icebergs and I crossed the river, then I crawled under the large rock on a hill and spent the night there, but it wasn't as cold as it was early in spring, it took me 3 days and 3 nights to cross Small Knife, Crooked Creek, Big Knife River, Green River and Heart River, I came out west of Zenith. From there on I knew where my home was, I didn't have anything to eat for three days and nights, I was hungry, and when I did get home, my mother didn't know me, she offered me something to eat, she thought it was some bum, as I never had a hair cut in seven months, it was over my shoulders and I guess at that time I wasn't in good shape. I guess my Angel was with me that I didn't drown in some of the rivers. In later years when I got married, I met this man again (the sheep owner) as he lived north of South Heart about 3 miles, he had a coal mine. O yes, when he paid mother my wages which was 10 dollars a month, he docked me \$10, so when I met him, he said you know I didn't treat you right at the time when you worked for me so come down to my coal mine and get a supply of coal for winter free," I refused and told him to keep the coal, you can't make up anymore.

In later years when mother owned the 320 acres of land, so we could farm more land, of course from then on neighbors got together, 5 or 6 of them and they had plenty of help to thresh with machines. The first years we put all the grain in stacks, then threshed, later we threshed right from the field, and now farmers take care of their crops by themselves with combines.

#### MY LIFE IN STAYTON, OREGON

After my youngest son Robert got married he lived a short time with us, I had 2 lots which I bought on auction. What they called the College Addition, so I gave one to Robert and we bought a cabin in town which we moved onto the lot and remodeled and Robert and his wife Margie moved on and that was their property. In 1952 they sold the place and moved to Stayton, OR. His trade is partsman, he worked for Ward Johnson in Dickinson Ford Co. and has the same job at Stayton Philippi Ford Co., but he sold his house in Stayton and he bought 3 acres of land, I helped him to build a nice big 4 bedroom home, its only 2 miles from Stayton, he has a very nice place, lots of trees, and lots of fruit trees, lots of berries, big garden, 3 acres is a big place in this country. Everything is growing so.

After my wife died I lived with them, my wife died June 25, 1953, she is buried in St. Wenceslaus Cemetery. After my wife died I moved with Margie and Robert and I have a good home. They have 3 children Evaleen, 15, second year in high school; Tommy, 13 in seventh grade; Linda 11, in 5th grade, all going to parochial school, Parish Immaculate Conception.

#### MORE THOUGHTS ON GRANDPA FROM MARGIE FRIDRICH FORREST:

I would like to add just a few things to this story that I remember about Grandpa Samek. He was an avid rock hound and for many years travelled to the mountains and picked rocks and made many things with them, jewelry, tables, and polished ' and sliced agates. He loved to go fishing and spent a lot of time with Bob and Margie and Uncle Joe fishing and especially loved the coast. He also did a lot of gardening at Margie and Bob's place, he kept very busy and active, I also remember that Grandpa knew his Bible very well.

#### MORE THOUGHTS BY JIM HAVERLOCK JR.

I loved Grandpa Samek for he taught me many things and spent some time with me. Those were moments I treasured. We would lay on the grass at night and he would point out constellations in the stars and we would talk about how the stars twinkled and why. We went rock hunting together, and we spent many hours fishing in the ND rivers and one small lake by Kildeer, Lake Ilo. I also enjoyed his musical talents, for he played several instruments - all self taught.

He was patient, kind and had a special twinkle in his eye when something amused him. The times together were few, but memories were made to last a lifetime.