

*Biography of John Franzman
May 5th, 1964*

INTRODUCTION

In the year of our Lord 1964 we are going back one century and try to as accurately as possible report some of the highlights in the life of our (now sainted) beloved father, John Franzman. He came to this country as a young man, a carver, wood-finisher and cabinet maker; who in the struggle of pioneer life never had the opportunity to prove to his family and community his capabilities until the retiring years of his life.

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

John Franzman was born in Lemberg, Austria, to Phillip and Caroline Franzman on January 6th, 1866. He was just a child when his father was lost in a forest during a heavy snow-storm and froze to death. A few years later his mother also died, leaving John Franzman an orphan. The government then took over his care and schooling.

YOUNG MANHOOD

As a young student he learned to read and write in several languages. He had an aptitude for drawing and wood-working and it wasn't long before he learned the art of wood-finishing, carving and cabinet making. While he served in the Army, his superior officers had him devote much of his time to making fancy furniture, such as dining room sets, bedroom furniture, fancy tables, etc., for their homes. They appreciated this beautiful work. He drew his own designs and drawings and did hand carving. He had learned the secret of wood-finishing, which put a permanent shine on wood and retained a satiny finish. He was in his glory doing his work.

It was time now to be looking forward toward marriage and a home. He often related this little story to us:

Father was concerned about finding a good wife, so one Sunday while attending church, a very beautiful young women came in and sat down next to an old crippled woman. Being impressed by this he decided that he must meet this young women and soon came the opportunity. Her name was Katherina Schick, and since John was such a handsome and charming young soldier, mother said, she was happy and pleased to date him. They were soon engaged and later were married. They decided to come to America, the land about which they had heard and read so much.

Father came first as far as Canada and when he had earned enough money he sent for mother. They lived in Canada for several years. Their first child was born there but died in infancy. He was christened by the name of Gustaf.

It was impossible to find work for John Franzman in this new land for there was not much need for this line of work, as most people were living on farms and were hard up. Beds were being made of metal and people couldn't afford fancy furniture, so he looked for work on the farms. He had never done farm work, and language was also a draw-back. He often told us this little story:

(He was told by his friends never to say no he couldn't do a certain job, but always be willing to try anything.) A farm widow asked for a gardener, so he immediately posed as such. He was to set out a quarter acre of onions. He didn't know how to do this but didn't dare ask, so he went to work and set out all the onions. When the land lady appeared she was shocked. "You have the roots up!" she screamed. He then shamefacedly explained the situation and reset all the onions.

His next adventure was in the Dakota harvest fields among the German farmers. It was here that he gradually learned the English language, he learned the art of farming and also made life-long friends. Since mother was an expert cook and pastry maker, she helped along in the farm kitchen. During the years they lived here in Crystal, North Dakota, two children were born to them. The oldest, a son, born June 11, 1894, was named Alfred; the next a daughter, born January 18, 1896, was named Wilhelmina Francis (Minnie).

About this time a new territory in Northern Minnesota was opened up and advertised - "Free land of 160 acres". If one lived on it for five years, one could obtain homestead rights. Since they were anxious to own a home of their own, they ventured into this new pioneer country.

In the fall of 1897, a choice, wooded 160 acres, which had rich soil, but needed much work, was chosen. The nearest station named Grygla was three miles Northeast. They had to live in a nearby shack until a house could be built the following spring. On December 26, 1897, that first winter, the next child was born, a daughter named Ida. A midwife from many miles away came and delivered the child.

The following spring they cleared a piece of ground, felled trees, and built a log-house with a sod roof. Three dollars was the entire cost of this house in which they lived for three years. There was a wide shelf on one wall, when the heavy rain-storms came the rood leaked, mother set her three little children under the shelf and put felt hats on their heads. This way the rain dripped off and they didn't get wet.

Many a story be told of the struggle and hardships of these early days. Land had to be cleared, a small crop seeded, a garden planted; and then the men went out to the Dakota harvest fields and the women stayed alone and took care of the children and the gardens.

As time passed more settlers moved in, and soon school houses were built. The first teacher taught pupils from ages 7 to 20 and over.

In the year of 1902 another child was born, a son this time, again delivered by a midwife. The Scandinavian neighbors said to please call him "Ole", but mother said, "No, we will call him John Jr."

During these early years they had to haul the grain 40 miles, during the winter months and then exchange the farm products for flour and sugar and fruit and cereals. It usually took four days to make a round trip by team. At first oxen were used, later horses. In this way, they also made new friends. The chores, however, had to be done by the wife and the oldest children.

About this time new roads were being built; land was dredged so the water could drain off. Father always took an active part in any improvements, such as these, that could be made. He read up on tame grass such as alfalfa and clover. He specialized in pure-bred, short horn cattle. He served on the town board. He also helped out in building beautiful little coffins for some of the neighbor children that had died in the community.

In the year of 1906, a German Lutheran Pastor started a little preaching station in Esplee township. All those who had been born in this new land were now baptized by this Pastor Foss. Soon after this, a young minister by the name of F.J. Seltz was sent out from Thief River Falls to serve Esplee Lutherans about once a month. He drove out with a team of horses. We drove across country which made it about seven miles by team for us to attend these services.

In the year of 1907 the youngest child was born, a daughter, with golden curly hair, named Alice Bertha.

These early days were also happy times. Ever so often a group of the older German neighbors would come together for a social time. They came by team and stayed over night. What a jolly time they had, for father had the art of story-telling. There were times he had his audience rolling in laughter and again other times wiping away the tears. He was a great entertainer, a good conversationalist, a wonderful story-teller, a music lover and enjoyed singing. He wrote several beautiful poems in German about his homeland.

As the years passed he was concerned about giving his children the right kind of schooling and religious training. He sent the older children sway to study for confirmation instructions. Later, while the oldest daughter studied music on the new organ, he bought for his girls, and took a course in sewing, the next daughter went to high school at Thief River Falls and later Teacher College. The boys took short courses in Agricultural School.

Then came the struggle of World War I in which the oldest son was drafted. There was much work on the farm then. They owned much live-stock, milked many cows, and so mother and the youngest son had to help out on the farm. Father built a big new sturdy barn with the help of his youngest son.

After the war, when all the young men returned home, it was time for weddings. The oldest daughter was married first. It was the first big wedding held in this community. As a seamstress, she fashioned her own beautiful wedding gown in white. She also made those of her bride-maids in pink. It was an out-of-door wedding which the whole community attended. She married a handsome, progressive young farmer and returned soldier by the name of Fred Bucholz. Father was a proud man that day. They moved to a nearby farm. A few years later the oldest son married a sister to his new brother-in-law. She was the local telephone operator, a lovely sincere young woman. They also lived on a farm nearby.

In 1920, the new Pastor, by the name of Rev. H. Lutz, from Goodridge Parish, started English services at Grygla and also German services in the country school house. He instructed and confirmed the young folks in this community. During this time he stayed in the John Franzman home. They became fast friends. In June of 1922, this Pastor married John Franzman's second daughter, Ida, a local country teacher. Again a big community outdoor wedding.

As more Germans moved in, mission work expanded and assistant student pastors were called in to devote all their time in and around Grygla. The John Franzman home was always open to these missionary students and pastors. It became a central meeting place. Father and mother were very hospitable folks, who heartily welcomed any strangers.

It was at this time that Model T Fords began to appear in this little town of Grygla, they even talked about radios. Father and mother had been blessed with a few grandchildren and so time passed intermingled with joys and sorrows.

It was in the year 1924, when the sudden death of his son-in-law, Rev. H. Lutz, shocked father and the whole community and brought his daughter and one year old granddaughter to live with him for the time being.

The little town of Grygla was growing fast now and a new pastor, the Rev. O.F. Knauft, soon replaced the vacancy of Pastor Lutz, in fact, two new pastors were called as the mission had grown from 3 places to 11 under Pastor Lutz.

As time passed father landscaped his yard, set out many rows of boxelder trees, set out fruit trees and berries and kept a beautiful lawn. Mother always had a gorgeous flower garden.

In June of 1926, the younger son, John, married a local school teacher. A lovely young woman who had only recently moved here from the cities. The youngest daughter was now through high school and teachers college and ready to start teaching. She was also the local organist. His widowed daughter was also back in the teaching profession and the little granddaughter became the favorite of father and mother, although they enjoyed all seven of their grandchildren.

The new Pastor was now stationed at Grygla and did intensive mission work in and around Grygla. More German Lutherans moved in and they started discussing ways and means of building a church. However, people were hard-up and crops were poor, so people were not ready yet. It was not until 1929 and the 1930's under the guidance and direction of Rev. Lorenz that the congregation was organized. It was decided that the church be built in Grygla and combine the little country school congregation plus the Esplee congregation and the Grygla mission. They all pledged to donate time and money and father offered to build the Altar. At last he was getting back to the work he so dearly loved.

This delicate work took much time and patience. Father always drew his designs. Special kinds of seasoned hardwood and veneer had to be sent for. The wood was carved with special kinds of tools by hand and then polished. He used a jig-saw to cut the smaller pieces which had to be glued and pressed. Some was inlaid work. Finally it was decorated in gold.

It was on November 2, 1930, that this altar was dedicated. The sermon for this dedication was preached by the former Pastor, the Rev. C.F. Knauft. (A copy of this sermon is attached) The building proper had been dedicated shortly before. The altar was dedicated to the "God who is worshiped within these walls." The text being Gen. 8:20 - "And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord."

When the neighboring congregations saw this altar they asked John Franzman to build altars for their churches. He accepted a few of these offers and so kept on in this work for his remaining years.

It was soon after this that the youngest daughter while still teaching, met a handsome young man from Iowa, by the name of Henry Ennen. They were married on June 17, 1932 and moved to Iowa. In the meantime the second daughter had already gone to Iowa among relatives and remarried a brother to her former husband, his name was Edward C. Lutz, a widower and farmer with three children. The folks felt this loss of absence of their two daughters.

Father built altars, kneeling rings, pulpits and baptismal fount for three congregations, each one of them different design but all of the same fine work of art, and each very beautiful in its own pattern.

While building the last altar, which was spoken of as his "masterpiece", he became ill with an incurable disease. He put a special effort of love and care into this piece of art work. As a true christian and as a redeemed child of God, he realized this was one way of expressing his great love, his thanks and praise to his beloved Lord Jesus, for many blessings he had enjoyed through the years. It seemed as if the spirit of God shining through John Franzman, put the final glow on his work.

With the permission of his children this altar, pulpit and kneeling ring, were donated to his own church replacing the first smaller one. It was left in the care of his oldest daughter Minnie, who with her family had always lived nearby. While many others left the community, they remained faithful members, his granddaughters serving as organists and Sunday School Teachers.

Father passed on in 1938 and mother passed on in 1939, they were both given Christian burials and laid to rest in the Grygla cemetery. The Rev. E. Bauman being the officiating Pastor. Those left to mourn his loss were two sons, Alfred and John Jr. and three daughters, Minnie (Mrs. Fred Bucholz), Ida (Mrs. Edward Lutz), and Alice (Mrs. Henry Ennen).

This congregation kept flourishing for many years to come. When Pastor E. Bauman was called away, Pastor K. Seeback accepted a call to this congregation and served for a number of years. He was followed by Pastor Jansow and finally Pastor Uhlig served this congregation combined with the Mavie congregation.

As time passed all the old members passed on, the younger generation married and moved away. At last there were very few members left. When Roseau lost their Pastor, Rev. Uhlig was called away, it was decided by the mission board to ask all the members to join Thief River Falls, and the Grygla mission was dissolved and the church sold. What was to happen to the altar that John Franzman so beautifully made? Could they find another church which could use this altar? The leaders from the mission board decided they couldn't use it, since styles of altars had changed entirely of later years.

Then the thought came, perhaps the Historical Society could make use of it. So the altar found a home.

Perhaps a few remarks about the family in the year of 1964. The oldest son, Alfred and wife, Laura, both passed on in 1959 & 1961. They had 4 children and 15 grandchildren. His daughter, Minnie (Mrs. Fred Bucholz) and husband, who are now retired still live in Grygla. They have 5 children and 21 grandchildren. The next daughter, Ida (Mrs. Edward Lutz) and husband, who are both retired, live in Minneapolis, Minnesota. They have 9 children and 30 grandchildren. His son John Jr. and family live in Minneapolis also. They have 6 children and 13 grandchildren. He works as a shipping clerk for the Super Valu Stores. His daughter Alice (Mrs. Henry Ennen), now lives in Buffalo Center, Iowa, on a farm. They have 4 children and 7 grandchildren.

Among John Franzman's grandchildren, there were four in teaching profession. (Mrs.) Fay Bucholz Ness, daughter of Minnie and (Mrs.) Luverne Franzman Toll, daughter of John Jr. are both public school teachers and (Mrs.) Eunice Lutz Ahrens, daughter of Ida and the Rev. H. Lutz, and Prof. Bernhard W. Lutz, son of Ida and Edward C. Lutz, are both Christian Day School Teachers. The latter now Prof. in Concordia College. Other vocations among the grandchildren are construction supervisors, brick-layers, sheet-metal worker, body and fender worker, truck driver, road construction foreman, office clerk, mailman and department store clerk.

- Ida Lutz