

## Original Glarner Pioneer Settlers in Pleasant Township, Lincoln, South Dakota

Signed into law in May 1862, the Homestead Act opened up settlement in the western United States, allowing any American, including freed slaves, to put in a claim for up to 160 free acres of federal land. Following the end of the Civil War, thousands of people settled in Dakota Territory during the years 1871 and 1872. If certain requirements were met, the government gave title to land to these people. These settlers faced many hardships; and, those who remained went on to transform the land into farms. In 1870, the population of Lincoln County, South Dakota was 712 white people. In 1880 this population was 5896. A massive migration was made to this area by those seeking new government lands. By 1890 there were no more lands available. The population from 1880 to 1970 stayed about 12,000 people.

The Swiss who came to South Dakota were all in the Civil War (1861-1865) from the same military company. During the war they traveled across these very same prairies and saw the opportunities. The economy was bad in Wisconsin and the prospect of new land and new growth was enough to leave Wisconsin, stopping in Iowa to work and rest for a time and then to the open government lands.

These military men's names were **Fridolin Kundert** (1823-1900) and son Charles (1854-1942), **Mathias Schmid** (1830-1915) and sons Balthasar (1854-1939), Mathias (1858-1925) and Henry John (1869-1955), **Thomas** (1829-) and half-brother **Gabriel Voegeli** (1843-1921) and son Thomas (1869-1953), **Mathias Duerst** (1833-1917) and son Abraham (1867-1948), all came together in the mid 1870's. In addition, **Leonhard Hämmerli** (1818-1907) and son Samuel (1862-1957) and **Johann Heinrich (Henry) Kundert** (1850-1926) also came along. Later in the next decade new settler families like the Bovill (originally from Northern Ireland), **Peter Rudolf Tschudi** (1843-1900) and sons Fredric (1866-1945), John C. (1867-1933), Peter Rudolf (1871-1930), Jacob (1875-1957), Edward (1877-1958), Emil Samuel (1879-1953) and Otto (1885-1982), **Heinrich (Henry) Blumer** (1859-1920) and sons Marcus (1884-1961), Earl Herbert (1888-1977), Elmer Harry (1890-1924), Eugene (1893-1959), Fred (1900-1980), **Jost Stuessi** (1859-1939) and son George Mathias (1893-1959) and John Henry (1901-1966), **Jacob Voegeli** (1862-1910) and sons Mathias Jacob Grover (1893-1937), John Henry (1902-1999) and Erwin Lester (1905-1977), **Joseph Voegeli** (1859-1944) and sons Edwin Joseph (1893-1962) and George Jacob (1899-1976), **George Speich** (1869-1918) and son Edwin (1892-1969), Matt (1896-1965), Henry (1908-1988 and Harvey (1909-1992) and the Milliken family (originally from Northern Ireland).

About 1872/73 the small band of ex Civil War compatriots from New Glarus (Fridolin Kundert, Mathias Schmid, Thomas and Gabriel Voegeli and Mathias Duerst) set out for government lands in Pleasant Township, Dakota Territory (later South Dakota). They traveled to Wright County, Iowa where they rested and worked and then onward to take up these homesteads. The group arrived in 1873 and filed claims at the Yankton, Dakota Territory land office, more than 60 miles away. It could take a decade or more before they had free and clear ownership of the property. In addition to land claims, they filed Tree Claims to help plant trees to break up the prairie. There were cottonwood trees and other small trees along creeks and rivers. The wood was too soft for construction. Most wood had to be shipped into the area for buildings, although some maple and elm were available. Many foundations were made of the numerous field stones and very hard quartzite, called Sioux Quartzite. Stone boats, wooden

platforms pulled by oxen and horse, were used to remove stones from the land and heavy prairie grass was cut into bricks to build houses. Wells were dug by hand many times never reaching water supplies.



This house was built in the 1880's near Elk Point South Dakota. The Swiss who go to Elk Point about 30 miles away for supplies for the winter. Most of the sod houses in Pleasant Township would look like this.

They built sod houses, heated with twisted hay bundles and dried cow dung (called by the pioneers cow chips). They had a wood cook stove but found only a ration of corn meal mush and bread and what game they could find. They picked wild chickory to grind and make a coffee type drink. There were massive prairie fires and grasshopper invasions and the Indian population was still fairly unpredictable.

The families inter married and built a school, church and community to support one another. The females married also into the Scandinavians who settled nearby and took over some of the lands in Pleasant Township. However, 100 years later, the largest share of lands they originally claimed still belongs to the Swiss settlers. Most of the family names are still known in the area. The closest community was Beresford, South Dakota which was not founded until 1884.

### **The Beresford Zion United Methodist Church**

Reverend William Oehler, a young Evangelical missionary pastor, driving by horse and buggy from Luverne, Minnesota came to this area, and it was in 1873 that the first congregation was formed. It was a small group at first but when the minister came, they would gather at the home of Mathias Schmid, located just east of the former church site, to worship, or under the canopy of the blue sky.

After a few years, a schoolhouse was built at Pleasant Valley in 1880, which then served the place to worship for over eight years. On the evening of August 30, 1900, a meeting was called at the Mathias Schmid home, to consider building a church. The committee elected to supervise the building of the first church were Jost Suessi, Thomas Voegeli, Baltz Schmid and Andrew Johnson. Mathias Schmid offered land and so did Henry Kundert. Mathias Schmid had already donated land for a cemetery and so they thought best to build the new church near the cemetery. The church was built and dedicated free of debt on December 16, 1900. On the following Monday, the funeral services of Peter Tschudi (1843-

1900) were held from the new church. In 1902 the church was destroyed by a tornado. Soon after it was destroyed, it was rebuilt and constructed to the design of the first church except for a bell tower with an open window design. The new church was dedicated December 17, 1902.

Rev. Dexheimer came in 1916 and served for four years. He organized the Women's Missionary Society at this time. One of their first commitments was to send USD 35 to Nidfurn in Glarus to be used for the families in need.

During the thrashing season early morning on August 2, 1938 a bad thunderstorm with a bolt of lightning struck the church steeple and started it on fire. As the Beresford fire Department worked and had the fire almost under control, the water supply gave out. The firemen and the thrashing crew efforts became hopeless and only the east, west and north walls and the flooring were left standing. Luckily, the worship elements and records were saved. A third church was built with a larger entrance and a steeple not quite so tall to hold the bell in its tower. The church was dedicated December 8, 1938.

On November 5, 1943 the church was again destroyed by wind and the fourth church was built during WWII years and on June 17, 1945 the church was dedicated. During the 1960ies it became evident that the church sanctuary classrooms and other areas were too small. A building committee of George Voegeli, Erwin Voegeli, Mrs Fred Blumer, Mrs. Clifford Schmid, Clarence Lawrensen, Donald Stuessi and Freeman Swanstrom received the "go ahead" and the work began. Exactly six months after the ground breaking, the new addition was dedicated May 19, 1968. A beautiful organ was presented that same day, a gift from Mrs. Millie Speich in memory of her late husband Matt Speich.

The Bell Tower was rebuilt in the mid 1970ies and dedicated in memory of Wesley Schmid. 1989 the church building was sold to Alan and Erma Fossum of rural Canton, South Dakota who attached it onto their home, providing them a larger living space.



Parade in Beresford in 1910 on the main street. The settlers started out in sod houses in 1875 and by 1885 Beresford was a small village. This show the town with electricity, automobiles and brick buildings.