

Mary (Schwegal) Hoeving 1877-1962

By Vera Wodzinski

Survived the Hardships With Faith, Hard work and a Tender Loving Heart

Mary (Schwegal) Hoeving, my grandmother, the youngest of a family of nine, six brothers and two sisters, was born in St. Joseph, Minnesota, USA, on October 31st, 1877. She married Joseph Hoeving at the age of nineteen in the year 1896. Joseph and Mary made their home in Collegeville, Minnesota. They had two sons, and Mary was pregnant with another child, when in 1901, they heard the news from Assiniboia, N.W.T., telling about the free land with no bush to clear in Canada, the land of opportunity.



In the spring of 1902, Joseph and his brother, Barney came to Canada to make their claim. They arrived in Weyburn and were driven in a democrat to look at the available land. It was necessary to use a compass for guidance as it was a sea of beautiful, green prairie. There were many sloughs with firm bottoms; the country seem to be half water. The days of the buffalo were gone, but many of their trails could still be seen. There were a variety of wild flowers and also many strawberries. Each section was marked by a mound with an iron stake holding the number of the section stamped on a six inch square sheet of iron. To choose a homestead it was necessary to choose your land and make an application to the land office. The fee was \$10.00. A homesteader was required to spend at least six months of the year for the first three years on the homestead, break ten acres of land per year, and pay the taxes. Joseph chose land midway between Weyburn and where Fillmore is today. Barney claimed his land six miles east of there, and put up a small one room shack.

Joseph, returned home to Collegeville to prepare for the move. Mary, my mother, was born June 13th of that year. In April 1903, Joseph loaded box cars with their possessions, horses, cows, chickens, pigs, a walking plough, seeder, mower, grindstone, binder, some furniture and enough lumber to build a house. He rode along in the caboose of the train. At the time, other settlers effects were being loaded for two miles along the C.P.R. tracks in Weyburn. The rush for homesteads was in full swing at this time. Weyburn was booming and had grown from a hamlet to a town of 500 within a year.



In May 1903, Mary, my grandma and their three children: John (5), Matt (3) and Mary, my mother a babe in arms, arrived in Weyburn by train. Joseph, her husband, had arrived the day before and spent the night in the hotel. It had rained heavily. The streets were muddy and there were only a few wooden sidewalks. Joseph met the family at the station and took them to the hotel for the night. The following morning, the family set out for the homestead. I can't imagine how Grandma felt, as she rode along through the mud, with her babe in arms, two anxious boys and her husband by her side, heading into the wilderness, not a fence or tree in sight and going, she knew not where. Joseph's brother Barney had a one room shack on his homestead, but that was six miles from theirs, a good distance in those times. So a tent was set up on their homestead.

That summer was a busy one as Barney helped Joseph plough thirty acres with the walking plough, seed the crop, and make hay. A sod barn was put up for the stock. They then proceeded to build a small house 12'x20' from the lumber they bought. It had one window and a door to the east. The inside was lined with paper and sod was piled around the base on the outside for warmth. There was no chimney, only stovepipes. A small cook stove was used for cooking and heating. The crops were good that first year but on September 12th before the harvest was completed, the first snow came and there were drifts throughout the grain fields. Fine weather came later and the crops were taken off. That fall they lost twenty head of cattle, including five fresh cows which they found two weeks later at

Lewvan.

The first winter was severe with a heavy snowfall. Coal was scarce, so flax straw was twisted and used as fuel. It was on December 23rd, 1903 that their daughter Helen was born during a blinding blizzard with Grandpa being the only assistant. Grandma was the first and only woman to settle in their area for miles and miles. Later when women began to settle in, Grandma served as a mid-wife for several births.

In the fall of 1904, Joseph and Barney got work at Fillmore putting in a railroad track. Grandma stayed with the family at the farm. One morning about 2 a.m. Grandma awoke to see the prairie to the west ablaze. The long dry grass flared high and red. She was terrified and hurriedly dressed the children and got them to the only bit of ploughed land nearby, hoping that they would stay put. With wet sacks and pails of water she managed to save the house and barn; however, the winter hay was destroyed. I remember asking Grandma could you tell me that story more than once. I just couldn't imagine it happening and how frightened the children would be.

The winter of 1905-06 was very severe. Snowdrifts covered the sod barn and tunnels had to be dug to get feed to the cattle. Trips to Weyburn for supplies were a real hardship. The settlers would take turns going to Weyburn with one going each week and getting a load of coal and groceries for all. Grandma would hang a lantern outside as a guide for their return. There were no trees or fences to hold back the snow. It was necessary to leave before 5 a.m. as they had to break trail all the way.

Settlers from what is now Fillmore had to drive to Weyburn for supplies and Hoevings was sort of half way. Here they fed their horses, had their lunch, and stayed overnight if need be. Once or twice a year, wheat was hauled to the mill in Weyburn for a supply of flour. Grandma baked bread daily and would supply bread for many of the bachelor men.

The Wheaton S.D. was organized and built in 1908. There were twenty children in attendance, all speaking different languages: Norwegian, Swedish, German and English. My mother remembered walking three and a half miles across the field with her older brother and falling asleep at her desk during the school hours.

In 1911 after the railroad and station were established, the town site of Talmage, two miles west began. The first building to go up was the general store. The farmers formed a bee and hauled the lumber by wagon from Hume in just one day. They gladly donated their time so that they might have a store and post office. The town grew quickly with a hardware store, restaurant, hall, hotel and blacksmith shop, an implement shop, a grain elevator, and two lumber yards. The lumber yards were doing a good business at this time.

In those early days, harvest meant long hours of hard work for all. When the grain was ripe, it was first cut with a binder making sheaves of grain tied with twine. The sheaves were then stoked by hand, piling the sheaves upright in a pyramid style. Grandma did her share of stoking. When the grain was dry and cured, six to ten men with hay racks hauled the bundles to feed into a threshing machine, separating the grain from the straw. Grandma, later with her daughters help, was required to prepare three hearty meals, beginning at 6 a.m. for ten to fifteen men, plus bring an afternoon lunch to the field. If it rained, the crew still had to be fed. Harvesting could take several weeks depending on the weather.

They raised eleven children, eight boys and three girls. Eight were born at the original homestead with minor additions and limited conveniences. By 1926 a barn and comfortable house were built and the shelter belt of trees Grandma planted was doing very well.

Grandma, when I first remember her, was in her early sixties and she never seemed to change. She stood 5'2" tall a rather petite build with a twinkle in her eye. Her long hair was brushed back and pinned neatly in a bun on the crown of her head. She was always neatly dressed in a cotton dress with a nice clean apron. Grandma was agile, had a quick step, never seemed to have any arthritic pains, and very seldom was she sick.

I found her most interesting and she always took time and was willing to share her experiences with me. Grandma had a keen sense of humour and a good, hardy laugh. Her outlook on life was always positive. She had an even temperament; never did I see her angry. Monday was wash day, an all day job. Although the clothes went through the washing machine, run by an engine, Grandma would still be rubbing socks on the wash board, late into the afternoon. I recall a certain chair without a back near the cook stove. This was Grandma's chair. Here is where she sat with her mending basket, repairing and mending clothes for all the family.

Housework was not her favourite thing as she loved the outdoors. Tending to the yard was a priority and, when all the jobs were looked after, she would work in the garden and never seemed to tire. It was here, I am sure, she communicated with her God. Her garden always flourished, and she would share her produce with many as well as preparing and preserving many berries, vegetables, and meat with the help of her daughter Helen.

Along with raising a family of eleven, preparing meals, and doing regular house work like many pioneer women, Grandma was able to adapt to many jobs which needed to be done. During harvest, after the grain had been cut and bundled with the binder, she would help gather the bundles, and put them in stokes. At haying time, she would help stack the hay. This was hard work and usually done during very hot weather. It seemed it was her job to help milk the cow's morning and night and tend to the chickens. The first years they lived on the homestead, she planted a shelter belt of trees, with twigs brought from Fillmore. She hoed and nurtured these little twigs which grew to be one of the most beautiful groves around. I always admired the beauty, shade, and protection of those trees.

Her sons were all keen on sports. They participated in baseball at the sports days around the country, as well as hockey games in the winter, often accompanied by their father. She would take care of the chores at home with the help of her daughter Helen. She would always be pleased if they did well, and never did I hear her grumble. I remember Grandpa driving with a friend to our home in the thirties in his new brown sedan car, canvassing for his favourite party in an upcoming election. He was making sure my dad voted the right way. Grandma was home with the family. Neither she nor my mother could vote. Grandpa was the business man (the boss) but it was Grandma who worked with patience, encouragement, and her kind and tender heart that kept the family working together smoothly to accomplish what they did.

I really looked forward to going to Grandma's house for Christmas. We usually went with the team and sleigh and I will always remember the warm welcome when Grandma would open the door, wishing us a Merry Christmas and urging us to come inside quickly and bring our overshoes in where it was warm. The aroma of the turkey roasting in the oven was something to behold and we knew there would be lots of popcorn balls stashed in the veranda.

During the long winter evenings Grandma had time for her many handcrafts. She could crochet, knit, embroider, and make patchwork quilts all by lamp light. If the family were a card player short for a game, she would fill in just as sharp as any. Grandma enjoyed music and had a good singing voice. She did me proud at our wedding reception. Some of my husbands' family were chanting a Ukrainian wedding song. When they finished, Grandma stood up, a little shy, but with great dignity, and sang her own wedding song in German. I loved her so for that.

Through her strong faith and love for God, she instilled in me a desire to live God's way. She looked forward to Mass on Sundays with great anticipation. On this day she would look very distinguished with her hat, best dress, and shoes. Grandma was dedicated to her God and her Church. She was a very special person to me.

Joseph Hoeving passed away; July 13, 1941, at the age of 71, 39 years after he acquired the homestead.

Mary (Schwegal) Hoeving passed away; October 27, 1962, at the age of 85 years.