

KONRAD WEISS, 1882—1948, my grandfather.

Conrad (actually spelled with a “K” in German) was born in Selz on 14 December, 1882. In later years he would tell his children he was born in Selz, Kherson Gubernia, Odessa Uyezd (Kherson province, Odessa district). His parents were Joseph Weiss and Margaretha Goldade. The Goldades were among the original colonists in the establishment of Selz in 1808, having immigrated from the Rhineland province of Pfalz. The Goldades who pioneered at Prelate, Saskatchewan descended from this same family, and would have been my distant relatives. Conrad was born just as many changes within Russia were beginning to affect the lives of the German colonies. Men were now subject to conscription and Conrad would get his turn. Growing Russian nationalism meant the Russian language was used more and more. It became the language of instruction in school. Conrad would become fluent in Russian, as well as German. More and more commerce was being conducted with the Russian population and generally there was more interaction with Russian citizens. The name of Selz was changed to Uspenskoje. Riots and strikes were occurring within the larger Russian society, especially around the capital of St. Petersburg. A repressive police-state was emerging to deal with radicals and the assassins of public figures. The fermenting anti-German propaganda grew into active aggression towards the Germans in the 1905 mini-revolution. Conrad’s mother, Margaretha, died when he was a young boy, and his father remarried a month before he turned eleven. His “new” mother brought a step-sister, Regina, into the family, and before he was twelve, Conrad had a new half-brother. Conrad later told his children that he and his stepmother did not like each other, and that he left home when he was fourteen. As previously mentioned, Selz had many cabinet and wood-working shops, and it could be in one of these shops that he learned the trade he brought to Canada. However, on the ship’s record at the time of emigration, Conrad was asked these questions:

“What was your occupation in country from which you came?” Answer – farmer.
“What is your intended occupation in Canada?” Answer – farmer.
“Have you ever worked as farmer, farm labourer, gardener, stableman, carter, Ry. surfaceman, navy, or miner?” Answer – yes. “Which?” Answer – farmer
“How long?” Answer – always.

So it would appear, apparently at odds with what I was told as a boy, that Conrad was a farmer in Russia, and he was lured to Canada like so many others by the prospect of owning his own land. It could also be that he had been coached into providing these answers, believing that that is what immigration officials wanted to hear. But Conrad’s story in Russia is not over yet.

In 1902, Conrad would have turned twenty years of age, and now eligible for service in the Russian army. My dad related to me a story told him by his father. While serving in the military, Conrad was on a ship as it crossed the equator and he remembered many people being very ill from the heat and seasickness. The deck was so hot that he could not walk in bare feet. Aunt Ann says her father told of being a prisoner of war in Japan, and that he even learned to speak some Japanese. Russia did indeed fight a war in 1904/05 with Japan over territorial control in Manchuria and on the Korean peninsula. Troops were sent over the partially completed Trans Siberian Railway to Vladivostok. More than 160,000 Russian and Japanese soldiers lost their lives as they fought for control of Manchuria in February, 1905. It was at the time the largest and bloodiest battle in history. Russia suffered a humiliating defeat, putting an end to Russia’s imperialistic expansion, and awakening the Western World to the emergence of a new force to be reckoned with. Czar Nicholas’ poor handling of this war was one of many factors which led to the rioting in 1905 and ultimately led to the fall of the autocracy. But where did the story about crossing the equator on a ship fit in? It certainly was not on the trans-Atlantic crossing to North America! After I chanced to meet a fellow G-R researcher, Norm Fischbuch of Calgary, and after reading “The Battle of Tsushima” by Constantine Pleshakov, I learned that many peasant-soldiers from all over Russia were used by the Royal Navy to send an armada of forty

destroyers, cruisers, battleships, and colliers, on an epic nine-month voyage from St. Petersburg to Japan, a trip of 30,000 kilometres. Lead by Admiral Zinovy Rozhstvensky, they sailed out into the Baltic Sea in August, 1904, through the North Sea, the English Channel, down the west coast of Europe, the west coast of Africa, around the horn of Africa past the cliffs of Cape Town, past Madagascar through the Indian Ocean, through the Singapore archipelago, the Sea of China, finally to engage the Japanese navy in the Straits of Tsushima on May 14, 1905. Within hours the battle was over with every Russian ship sunk or disabled. An estimated seven thousand Russian soldiers and sailors died. The few crippled ships drifted to shore where the survivors were taken prisoner. The twenty-five hundred POW's were held only about six months before being released when the war was over. They returned via Vladivostok and the Trans Siberian Railway. If Conrad made this voyage, he would have crossed the equator not once, but twice. What a story! I am corresponding with several sources in an effort to obtain a service record which would corroborate, and make sense of, Conrad's stories. To this day, Russian ships travelling through the Korea Strait throw wreaths upon the waves.

After his military service, Conrad must have returned to Selz. On 10 August, 1908 Conrad married Brigetta Fetsch. Conrad was 25 years old, Brigetta 20. Brigetta was born 10 January, 1888 to parents Michael Fetsch and Barbara Schwab. Brigetta is a direct descendant of the Michael Fetsch who was an original colonist in Selz in 1808. He and his wife, Margaret Senhauser or perhaps second wife Elizabeth Reinhardt, emigrated from Neeweiler, just north of Seltz, Alsace. This first Michael Fetsch became the first mayor of the new Selz, Odessa district and the first of several Fetsches to serve as mayor of Selz. Brigetta's sister, Barbara, was married to Joseph Goldade who was the last mayor of Selz when it was evacuated in 1944. The prolific Fetsches became one of the largest families in Selz. Brigetta's mother, Barbara Schwab, was from Mannheim, a Kutschurgan village to the south and east of Selz. Mannheim too was established in 1808, and one of the original colonists was Ignatius Schwab from Busenbach, Karlsruhe, Baden. He was one of Brigetta's four great grandfathers. Ignatius was married to Barbara Degenstein. My great great grandmother, Elizabeth Degenstein, second wife of Karl Joseph Weiss and mother to Joseph Weiss, was a niece to this Barbara Degenstein. The Degensteins were also original colonists of Mannheim.

Aunt Rosemarie has told me that the Fetsches did not approve of Brigetta marrying Conrad Weiss. If the ship's record tells us that Conrad was a farmer, it is most likely Conrad and Brigetta would have been living in a daughter colony. There would not have been land for him at Selz. These two facts might explain why the birth records of their three daughters born in Russia do not appear in the Selz Church archives. According to oral history and the ship's record, the oldest, Barbara (named after her grandmother), would have been born in 1909, Emelia in 1910 (The ship's record says she was 3 ½ in March of 1913.) and Agnes in 1912. My aunts recall that their parents talked often of Barbara who was trampled under a wagon shortly before they left for Canada. This death record too is absent from Selz records.

Married four years, with three children, Conrad and Brigetta would have begun planning to emigrate in 1912. Through his military service, Conrad would have learned about the uglier side of Russia. He would have heard about "Bloody Sunday" in St. Petersburg, on 09 Jan 1905. Estranged for the most part from his family, the decision was probably easier for Conrad than it would have been for Brigetta. By 1912, tens of thousands of Black Sea Germans had already left and were well settled in North America. One of these was Brigetta's older brother. Adam Fetsch married to Anna Marie Thomas, with two sons, Joseph and John, had emigrated, in 1909 to Orrin, North Dakota. (Orrin was very near another village named Selz.) Not finding suitable land, they continued north into Canada, and settled on a homestead 12 miles south of Prussia, now called Leader, Saskatchewan. They lived the first winter with Adam's first cousin, Anton Riffel. The Riffel brothers, Anton and Peter, with their families and their parents (Casimir Riffel and Fransizka Fetsch) had homesteaded already in 1906 in the Blumenfeld district south of Prelate. Fr. Tim Riffel, parish priest for many years at Fox

Valley, was a son of Peter.

The desire to own their own land was the driving force for all these German farmers from Russia.

The first Germans from Russia had left already in 1873. These were 175 Beresaners who settled in Yankton, South Dakota. But immigration numbers remained small until after 1885 when railroad expansion had made the agricultural plains more accessible. Ironically the simultaneous expansion of railroads in South Russia, designed to improve marketing and shipping of the German agricultural and industrial production, instead facilitated the flow of communications and the mobility to emigrate. The largest waves of German immigrants from Russia occurred in the years 1900 to 1913 during which annual totals exceeded 10,000. The peak year was 1912-13 with 17, 857 G-R immigrants to North America—the same year Conrad and Brigetta arrived. It is interesting to note that Russia seems to have done nothing to interrupt this outflow of a valuable resource. This may partly be a result of a growing relationship with the United States, fostered more so by Russia as its relations with the Kaiser's Germany deteriorated.

All over Europe, the government of Canada had been actively promoting emigration to Western Canada. Under the Homestead Act, males 18 years or older or a female head of a family could apply for a 160-acre homestead by paying the \$10.00 filing fee. Settlers had to live on their homesteads for a three year period, clearing and farming some of the land, and making building improvements. Canadian Government Representatives held meetings to acquaint emigrants with conditions in Canada. Steamship companies were encouraged to bring over immigrants by government bonuses of \$5.00 for each head of a family and \$2.00 for anyone else. The CPR had their own recruiting agents, looking for customers for their trans-Atlantic steamships and their railroads, as well as buyers for the CPR's allotted lands in each township. The lure of free land in a country of great riches was present in every advertisement.

After liquidating whatever assets he had managed to accumulate in the sixteen years since he had left his father's home, Conrad went to the city of Kherson to apply for a passport to emigrate. He turned 30 in December, 1912 and Brigetta, 25 in January, 1913. Although Odessa was the main commercial centre and seaport in South Russia, Kherson was the seat of provincial government. Kherson lies to the east of Odessa, at the mouth of the Dnieper River. One passport was issued for the family in Kherson on 15 January, 1913. Aunt Betty has Conrad's original passport. They wasted no time boarding a train, and the passport is stamped on 20 January, 1913 at the border, leaving Russia behind forever. What were their thoughts as they crossed the border? Were they excited by the adventure? Were they dreading all the unknowns that lay ahead? Did Brigetta entertain any thoughts of ever returning?

Conrad, Brigetta and their two small girls were finally on their way. The main train station for the Kutschurgan district was in Strassburg. Baggage taken onto the train was expensive which explains why few of our ancestors had much luggage with them when they arrived in North America. Their route would have taken them to L'viv, in the northwest of today's Ukraine, through Krakow, Poland, through Berlin and on to Hamburg, one of Germany's two main ports with access to the North Sea. The other is Bremenhaven. The train trip would have taken three days. In Hamburg, they would have inquired about the next sailing for Canada. In fact, the city would have been full of people of all nationalities asking the same questions. There were many inexpensive boarding houses which had been set up specifically to accommodate would-be emigrants as they waited for their ship. Once in Germany they would have begun to mark time on a different calendar system. While they would have arrived in Hamburg around January 23 according to Russia's Julian calendar, they would find themselves 12 days ahead or February 4 according to the Gregorian calendar, which the rest of the world used. Lenin discontinued the use of the Julian calendar after the Revolution.

Conrad and Brigetta would have to wait nearly a month before they could board the S.S.Willehad in

Hamburg on 01 March, 1913. The Willehad had to make stops in Brementhaven and Rotterdam, Netherlands to take on more passengers. The names of Conrad, Brigetta, Emelia, and Agatha are on this ship's manifest, and there are ruler lines drawn through all four names. There is also a notation on the front page of the manifest: "*No. detained by Medical Examiners for Canada – one*". This "one" was Conrad Weiss, detected with an eye infection, common among European emigrants. He was placed in quarantine. According to Aunt Betty's notes, grandfather finally cured his eye infection himself by using his own urine as an eyewash. He always grumbled that the authorities only kept him in order to get most of his money. This must have been very traumatic for the young family, all alone in a strange city. I am not sure if Conrad spent his quarantine in Hamburg or in Rotterdam, because the next ship's manifest which contains the names of Conrad, Brigetta, Emelia and Agatha Weiss is the S.S Belgic of the White Star Line, which left Rotterdam on 01 April, 1913, exactly one month after they were supposed to depart the first time. I wonder if they knew that another, much more famous, steamship of the White Star Line had sunk in the North Atlantic exactly one year earlier (Titanic, the night of April 14, 1912).

Conrad was either pulled off the S.S. Willehad in Rotterdam on the third of March, or they were not allowed to board the ship in Hamburg after they had been registered as passengers. He could have been quarantined in Hamburg, and the family then may have taken a train to Rotterdam to catch the S.S. Belgic. Regardless, Conrad and Brigetta must have heaved sighs of relief as they finally got underway. Sailing past the white cliffs of Dover out into the English Channel, the ship was bound for Portland, Maine with 1328 passengers and 40 crew. One hundred and ten of the passengers were children under 14 years. Twelve days later, they would dock in Portland at 11:20 am the morning of 13 April, 1913. As alluded to earlier, the ship's list contains much information about the traveller. Besides age and marital status, the Weiss family members are identified as German, Catholic, from Russia, destination Maple Creek, Sask. and will travel inland via G.T.R. (Grand Trunk Railroad). The ship's manifest has a notation that the GTR passengers left via "Specials at 5 pm and 11 pm". It also informs us that Conrad is travelling with \$40.00 cash. He would have already exchanged his rubles for American dollars in Hamburg. Each passenger was also asked two questions: "*Are you able to read? Are you able to write?*" Beside Conrad's name, there are two "no" answers, and besides Brigetta's name there are two "yes" answers.

The ship's manifesto does not identify the numbers of second class, third class or steerage passengers as I have seen on other records. That's because there were no differentiating levels of passenger service on the SS Belgic. Aunt Eugenia recalls her parents talking about their trans-Atlantic crossing on a "cattleboat". And this is a common recollection of many immigrants. These steamships had indeed provided passage for a growing trade of purebred American cattle to the European market. All ships need paying cargo both ways. Once unloaded in Europe, the ship was scrubbed out, rudimentary partitions were framed, and the ship was ready for human passengers. But the smell of the previous travellers would last the entire trip to the new world.

Conrad, Brigetta and the two girls, Emelia 3 ½ years old, and Agatha or Agnes only 7 months, travelled on the Grand Trunk Railroad to Montreal, crossing the border somewhere in Vermont. This was the preferred route in order to get passengers onto the CPR as quickly as possible. All of these tickets would have been purchased in Hamburg, for the convenience of the immigrants. The majority of them would never have heard an English word spoken before stepping foot in North America. From Montreal, they travelled to Maple Creek, a trip of three to four days to sit on hard wooden slat seats and stare at the monotonous forest and rock on either side of the railway track. I wonder if Emelia ever asked, "*Sind wir noch da?*" There were no sleeping facilities, no dining cars, few stops where one could get out and buy a meal. Each family provided its own food and cooked on a stove at either end of the car.

The travellers finally reached Maple Creek around April 18. They were met at the CPR station by

Brigetta's older brother, Adam Fetsch. I wonder about the communication that must have occurred beforehand so that they could rendezvous at the correct time and place. Both must have been excited to see each other, and there would be plenty of time for Adam to catch up on news from "back home". The Fetsch homestead was sixty miles north, 15 hours by horse and wagon. Brigetta would have been very exhausted by the time they reached Adam's farm. She was breast-feeding Agnes, and changing diapers ever since they had left their home in mid-January, three months previous.

There was at that time, a stopping place south of Fox Valley where they could water and feed the horses, and possibly spend the night. Adam was very familiar with this half-way rest-stop and the trail to Maple Creek. Up until the CPR branch line reached Prelate in the late fall of 1913, Adam had to haul his wheat to Maple Creek and do the family's shopping there at the same time. It was a two day round trip. There was nothing much to see yet at Fox Valley, because the CPR did not get there until 1924. On the way by though, Adam would have been able to point out possible homestead sites to Conrad. He would have explained that the Fox Valley and Richmond areas had been surveyed in 1910 and opened for settlement. All the best homesteads in the flat, stone-free, fertile land south of Prelate had already been claimed. Also on the way to Adam's farm, they would have passed close by Krassna Church, where the Weiss family would worship. My dad, not yet born, would be baptised in this church. There was not a church in Fox Valley until 1930. Besides Krassna, there were already Catholic churches at Rastadt and Blumenfeld.

Shortly after Conrad and Brigetta arrived in Canada, Brigetta and her brother, Adam, began planning to bring their younger brother Michael to Canada as well. They were very concerned about the prospects of war in Europe, but World War I came too soon, and immigration from Russia ceased immediately. After the Bolshevik Revolution, the Catholic and Lutheran Churches in Canada organized Immigration Boards to facilitate further immigration from Russia through North American sponsors; and about ten thousand more Germans did manage to leave Russia before Stalin closed the country in 1928. I don't know what efforts were made to foster Michael Fetsch's immigration, but this is the process that brought the Philip Schafer family to Canada in 1925.

Konrad wasted no time. He applied for his homestead entry to the NE 1-18-26-W3 at the Dominion Lands Office in Maple Creek on April 30, 1913. Under the Dominion Lands Act, settlers also had the option to reserve the quarter section next to theirs as a pre-emption. After the settler had gained title to the homestead quarter, he could decide to buy the "pre-emption" by paying the market price at the time which was about \$2.00 per acre. For his pre-emption quarter, Konrad chose the adjoining NW 6-18-25-W3. This is about one mile north and one mile east of the town of Fox Valley. (See RM map) In June, Konrad began building a 13 x 28 sod-hut for their first home, while Brigetta and the girls stayed with the Fetsch family. Konrad borrowed a team of horses to pull a blade he had fashioned out of iron to cut the virgin prairie sod. By the fall of 1913, they had a house and barn built of sod. Early in the spring of 1914 Konrad bought four horses, a wagon, plough and a drill. The first thing he would have had to do was pick rocks, and I am sure Brigetta was right beside him. But both girls were sick and died sometime in 1914, and Brigetta was pregnant with Joseph. Nevertheless, the homestead records show that they broke 51 acres that first year. Over the next four years, they managed to break the prairie sod on 164 acres, fenced 60 acres, and build a barn and granary. Konrad "proved" his homestead with the sworn statements of neighbors Klement Schlosser and John Worth. Title was issued on 07 March, 1922. Other homestead neighbors were John and Magdalena Sitter and Remigius Paul. Konrad was naturalized as a Canadian citizen on 22 October, 1920. Citizenship was a condition of the Homestead Act before title could be registered.

Both of the small girls died in 1914 and are buried in the Krasna cemetery (NE 35-18-26-W3). Another daughter, Barbara, had previously died in Russia. But nine Canadian-born children soon followed –

Joseph (1914), Frank (1915), Julia (1917), Remigius (1919), Eugenia (1920), RoseMarie (1922), Nicholas (1924), Dan (1925) and Anne (1927). All except Anne were born on the original homestead. Nicholas died as an infant; Julia died at age 20. Both are also buried at Krasna.

They had their first real crop of wheat in 1915, and it was a good one. The wheat was hauled 24 miles to Prelate, which was the closest railroad depot at the time. Every fall though, they hauled one load of wheat to Maple Creek where it was milled into flour for the year's bread, baking and famous German dough dishes. But the following crops were not so bountiful. The land was very light and sandy and could not produce a crop without a lot of rain. They struggled to make a living on the land they had chosen to homestead. I have read that the government encouraged those who were struggling financially to seek out other areas that were still open for development. In the fall of 1925 they rented their land to Paul Obrigewich, and moved to Wabamun Lake, Alberta, 50 km west of Edmonton. The family overnights in the Empress Hotel where they boarded the train for Wabamun. They loaded two boxcars with their cattle, implements, and household goods. Conrad rode in the car with the livestock. My Dad was six years old. They rented land with a two-storey house and Aunt RoseMarie remembers that they could catch fish in a nearby stream, and that winter they snared enough rabbits that Grandmother pickled a whole barrel of rabbit "drumsticks". There were forest fires in the area that year and a very poor crop. Conrad had to sell most of the cattle to make ends meet. Where the Fox Valley land was sandy and rocky, this land was heavy clay and hard to break up. The roots and stumps were worse than the rocks.

In the fall of 1926 they moved to Beiseker, Alberta, another community of Germans from Russia. As well as renting farmland for his few remaining cattle, Conrad worked on construction of the Pool Elevator, and operated a dray (delivery) service. Ann was born in Beiseker on February 14, 1927. Aunt Eugenia recalled going to school in Beiseker with Julia and my Dad. In the spring of 1928, they moved back to Fox Valley. Because the homestead house was by now too dilapidated, they moved onto the Valentine Dies farm south-west of town. (Valentine Deis was married to Elizabeth Baumstarck, daughter of Peter. Conrad's sister, Genovieve, was married to Dominik Baumstarck, son of Johannes. Besides Conrad and Valentine being second cousins, I would bet they knew each other as young men growing up in Selz and neighboring Kandel.) The Weiss children attended nearby Tigh School. In 1930 the family next moved to John MacPhail's farm just south of what would eventually become the Weiss farm. That year the children walked or rode to Snowdown School to the south because there was no teacher at Tigh School. Finally in 1932, Conrad bought NE and SE 7-17-26, W3 from Paul Fulbright. This land was originally homesteaded by Konrad Müller. By now Conrad was fifty years old and had been in Canada nineteen years. Their family consisted of Joseph (18), Frank (17), Julia (15), Remigius (13), Eugenia (12), RoseMarie (10), Dan (7) and Anne (5). This became the Weiss family farm, and Conrad and Brigetta made it a home for their family. They lived here until the fall of 1947 when they moved into a house they bought in Fox Valley. Their son Rem farmed this land from 1947 until 1973 when he sold it to Harry Immel.

Conrad bought what would become the farm I grew up on, in 1932, just as the effects of the Great Depression or "Dirty Thirties" gripped the Canadian prairies. The crops in 1930, 1931 and 1932 were fairly good, but wheat prices hit an all-time low—30 cents a bushel. The great stock-market crash of October, 1929 had plunged North America and Europe into a severe economic recession. Prices of all goods and services dropped. Businesses could not maintain payrolls and hundreds of thousands became unemployed. People simply had no cash with which to buy anything. But the Western Canadian farmer was hit doubly hard with five successive years of severe drought, aggravated by heat, grasshoppers and cutworms. Some parts of Saskatchewan threshed no grain at all in 1934. Russian thistles had to be cut and stacked to feed the livestock. The wind blew relentlessly, blowing the parched prairie topsoil into huge drifts, often completely covering thistle-choked fence lines. I have never met anyone of this generation who does not wistfully recall the "hard times of the thirties". But at the time, they did not

know how fortunate they were compared to relatives back in Russia. They did not know that the great 1932/33 famine in Russia starved millions to death. Tough as things were, very few people would have died of hunger in Western Canada. The Canadian Government organized a large relief program. Carloads of “relief” in the form of food for the people, and feed for the cattle was shipped by rail to every municipality in the West. Many a family can remember receiving a box of apples or a box of salted cod from eastern Canada. The unsung heroes of those trying times would have to be the wives and mothers who had to muster all their cooking and sewing skills to keep their families nourished and clothed, in spite of the lack of money. But the farmers persevered and by 1938, crops began to improve. The onset of World War II led to improved prices for wheat as the economy turned around. The good harvests of the 1940’s heralded the beginning of fifty years of fairly good times for the Western farmer, and for Canada over-all. Beginning with the gradual transition from horse-farming to tractor-farming during the Forties, the face of prairie agriculture would change dramatically.

Over the years, Conrad occasionally worked as a carpenter, working on schools, elevators and barns. He could also build furniture and he apparently enjoyed this kind of work. We had in our home a large armoire or free-standing clothes closet he built for Mom and Dad, and sadly we left this in the house when the farm was sold. Uncle Frank helped Conrad build a large barn near Acadia Valley. When this work took him away from home, Brigetta and the sons had to look after the farmwork. In the earlier years, the Hoffart and Weiss families worked together at harvest, with Mr. Willebald Hoffart providing comic relief for the stressed-out Conrad, this according to Aunt Ann. She thinks they might have known each other in Russia, and this is possible because the Hoffart name was common in Selz, Kandel and Mannheim. But by 1947, with all the Weiss children building lives of their own, Conrad and Brigetta gave up the farming to Rem and Rose who moved back from Vancouver Island. They moved into a small home in Fox Valley. Conrad died of cancer in the hospital in Maple Creek the following year on 02 December, 1948, just days before his sixty-sixth birthday. At the time of his death, son Joseph was living in Port Arthur, Ontario, working as a trucker; Frank and Betty Weiss were living on the Glaser farm west of Fox Valley; Rem and Rose were on the Weiss farm; Eugenia was married to Sy Stach and living on the Stach farm north of Linacre. Rosemarie was married to Kasper Wetsch and living on their farm west of Schuler, Alberta; Dan Weiss was living and working in Brooks; Ann had left her job in Calgary to be at home when Conrad went into the hospital.

Although Conrad had lost his pre-emption quarter in 1927 to back taxes and non-repayment of seed grain loans, he never gave up his original homestead. After Conrad’s death, son Frank farmed the land for many years. After Grandmother died, the original Weiss homestead quarter was willed to the youngest son, Dan. Dan subsequently sold it to Simon Koch.

I never got to meet Conrad. The only cousin who can clearly remember grandfather is Ron Weiss who would have been nine years old when Conrad died. Ron occasionally lived with his grandparents during his younger years. From photographs, we can see that Conrad was a short, slightly-built man. Grandmother certainly looked his equal in physical stature. He walked a lot. He would rather walk than ride a horse, and he often walked the seven miles to Fox Valley. He was very agile, and “quick as lightning”, according to Aunt Anne. He had no control of his temperament, and if things were not going well, it seemed to him as if the whole world was coming to an end. Yet, Aunt Ann said he was very kind-hearted and generous. She remembers Grandmother scolding him for giving away their last full sack of flour. When I pointed out that many of these characteristics are very similar to those of my Dad, Aunt Ann agreed totally that if I wanted to know what Grandfather Conrad was like, then all I had to do was think of my Dad. Conrad taught himself to read and write in English by using his children’s school books, and he spoke several languages: German obviously, but also Russian, Ukrainian, and even some Japanese.

Brigetta re-married to Ralph Steinkey in 1953, but Mr. Steinkey died in November of 1954. They lived

in a house on a corner lot east of the church. I can remember visiting Grandmother there after church, and Ken and I even lived with Granmother for a short while in the winter of 1955/56. Brigetta lived in Fox Valley until the fall of 1956 and then moved into Medicine Hat. Loretta remembers visiting Grandmother in a rented suite near St. Patrick's church. Advanced Diabetes lead to the loss of Brigetta's left leg in 1960 and then her right leg in 1962. Through it all, one of her greatest joys was playing cards with her grandchildren – a game called durakel. Grandma always spoke German, but we had to be careful about what we said in English, because she understood every word! She died in the Riverside Nursing Home in Medicine Hat on 09 December, 1966 a month short of her seventy-ninth birthday. Conrad and Brigetta are buried side by side in the Fox Valley Cemetery.

What stories Conrad and Brigetta would have had to tell had I the opportunity to ask the right questions. They would have remembered their young lives in Selz, Russia. Brigetta would have talked about the fruits she enjoyed from their orchards in Selz. They would have recalled their ordeal immigrating to Canada. They could have tried to explain what it was like to leave their families behind, to start all over again in a new world, without any money, miles from any towns, coping with unaccustomed vicious winters, not speaking English, trying to break up the prairie sod with a crude home-made single ploughshare. Brigetta would have talked about a mother's grief for six children who pre-deceased her. Their stories would have been very similar to thousands of other pioneers of south-western Saskatchewan.

The first Kutschurganers to North America settled in South Dakota in 1885. But the largest numbers arrived in the years 1898 to 1905, settling in North Dakota, and after 1905 began spilling over the border into Saskatchewan. Kutschurgan immigrants kept arriving right up until 1914, establishing a north-south "Kutschurgan alley" (Mary Lynn Axtman's term). The pioneer families of this "alley" represent almost all of the Kutschurgan colony surnames. Growing up in this "alley", these family names were as familiar to me as going to church, to school, or going to Fox Valley for groceries on a Saturday night. Germans from the Black Sea colonies made up the single largest group of North Dakota settlers. Black Sea Catholics and their descendants make up the largest single group of Catholics in Saskatchewan.