

Dennis Schmitz Family

Dennis Schmitz was born in Coblenz, Germany, April 29, 1827. His father was a farmer who lived in a village having a strip of land to work, to which he had to travel like most other farmers of that day. Dennis, at the age of eighteen years, entered the German army in which he served until 1850. In 1852 he decided to come to America, which he did, settling in Michigan. While there he lumbered and worked in the saw mills. After three years he came to Minnesota and settled in Plymouth Township when Minnesota was still a Territory. A land boom was on in 1855, when the most settlers arrived at that period than at any other time in history of Plymouth Township. As on all preempted land, it was necessary to live on the chosen plat and to show good intentions of becoming an American citizen. His choice was Section 19, East 1/2 of South East ^{1/2 of N.E. 1/4 Sec 30,} 1/4, 160 acres which was entirely wooded. As wood was so carefully used by natives of Germany, due to either scarcity or forest conservation, where they were only permitted to pick up twigs and branches in designated areas, so it is presumed that an unlimited amount of timber was considered a great asset. It was on November 22, 1860 that Dennis Schmitz purchased his land, walking perhaps to Forest City, Minn., near Litchfield where the Government office was situated. Other men of Plymouth Township who made purchases the same day were James H White, Sec. 1, Francis Day, Sec. 15, Henry Smith Sec. 20, and Jonas Howe, Sec. 22 and 27; therefore it is probable the above people went as a party to register for land. The records of the purchases are recorded in " Abstract of Lands " Hennepin County, the first book of abstracts in Hennepin County. By law they paid \$ 1.25 per acre, the amount of land not to exceed 160 acres.

The brothers and sisters of Dennis Schmitz evidently came from Germany with his parents later and on December 12. 1861 Michael Schmitz made a purchase of 160 acres in Section 20, S W 1/4 and another brother made a purchase of 40 acres in Sec. 20, S E 1/4 of N E 1/4 on Nov. 22, 1860. All purchases have certificates signed by either Presidents Buchanan or Lincoln.

The parents of Dennis Schmitz lived with him almost on the boundary of the Dennis and Michael Schmitz farms. The present owner of the Dennis Schmitz farm is his son Peter and of the Michael Schmitz farm, Charles Trittelwitz. (1953) A log house was built on a knoll on the east line and in this cabin the family lived until 1875 a period of approximately twenty years. In 1875 the present home in which Peter Schmitz lives was built. Peter Schmitz was born almost immediately after the house was built and occupied. To cut the logs for the roof boards of the log house, Peter relates how his father said it was done. A hole was dug in the ground and rollers were laid across the pit. The log to be sawed was laid on the rollers and a man in the pit and one overhead used a cross cut saw to rip the log as it was rolled over the above logs.

In 1860 Dennis married Susan Galnor of Crystal Township. She came from Prussia between 1855 and 1860. John Galnor, Susan's father was born in 1808 and died in 1884. Anna, the wife of John, was born in 1810 and died in 1874. The Galnor family settled in Crystal near the old St. Mary's Cemetery and church about 1/4 miles north of the Rockford Road and 2 miles west of Robbinsdale. Elizabeth a sister of Susan, married Peter Heinricks and another sister Mary, married Peter Schuler. Peter Heinricks was a first settler of Plymouth on the farm now belonging to Gayhart Freundt. (1953) Peter Schuler lived on the Rockford road right south of the Galnor home. The cemetery, St. Marys is still in use. Mr. Galnor was sexton and teacher in the church which was torn down after the Sacred Heart Church was built in Robbinsdale. The old Galnor home was taken apart in the year of 1884 and was moved to the Dennis Schmitz farm, reassembled and used for a grainery. It is still in use now in 1953. Dennis and Susan were married in St. Paul on the same day and place as Jos. and Archie Pouliot's father and mother.

Dennis Schmitz 's father Gehrig was buried in Mpls. and his mother at Holy Name Cemetery at Medina. The Galnor family was buried in St. Mary's on the Rockford Road.

Dennis Schmitz was quite a politician. He was very much interested in public affairs and figured in settling quite a few arguments concerning line fences etc. People came to him to iron out difficulties. As Jonas Howe's daughter states in the memoirs of her father, that the German settlers in Plymouth were good settlers who liked good roads but not on their own land.

Plymouth Grange # 355 was organized in 1874 and it was in this organization that Dennis was Financial Secretary. The Grange was active until 1878 when it was discontinued, the building being moved finally to the farm of Mr. Malmstead on Road 74 and # 7. Dennis Schmitz was road overseer many times and was active on the town board. It was in Feb. 23, 1860 that he was elected as County Commissioner. He was the first and only one since to be Commissioner from the Township of Plymouth. The following excerpt is from the County Commissioner's Journal 1858-1863, page 205. " Record of proceeding of the County Commissioner of Hennepin County. R W Cumming, H Fletcher, Dennis Smith (Schmitz) and I B Hinkley four of five elected as Commissioners of Hennepin County pursuant to an Act entitled an Act to provide for County organization and government. Approved Feb. 22, 1860 met at office of the Auditor of said County June, 4, 1860 and having taken the oath of office, organized by the election of R W Cumming as Chairman." In the same Journal Page 179, March 23, 1860, D C Schmitz and Coleman were added to the Special Committee to settle with the Register of Deeds. Signed

D C Smith (Schmitz)

John Coleman

Geo. Odell.

The following children of Dennis Schmitz and Susan were born in the old log house, Emma, Mrs. Gardner; Gertrude, Mrs. Kenyon; Kate, Mrs. M Hansman; Anna, John and Mary. Peter and Henry were the only two born in the present home on Highway 101 and 24.

The land on the farm was cleared by cutting down trees and grubbing. Work on the farm was done with the help of oxen. Peter thinks his father had a horse in about 1871 though it might have been sooner. Vegetables, potatoes and possibly a little grain was planted. The first grain was flailed in a depression in the ground. The sheaves were bound with strands of the plant and it was hard work to cut and bind the grain. It was winnowed on windy days by holding a container of grain four or five feet above the ground and pouring it while the wind blew the chaff away. It was probably taken to Burwell Mill at Minnetonka Mills to be ground into flour.

Dennis often told his children of the Indians coming from Mill ^{to see} on their way to war to Shakopee. At one time he counted 152 marching along. Only about 12 returned. The Indians begged food and wanted to sharpen their knives on the grindstone. Dennis traded guns with an Indian who insisted on doing so. The Indian loaded Dennis's gun too heavy and shot it off, crippling the Indian. Then the Indian demanded his own gun back. Dennis's mother insisted that Dennis return the gun to him as she was very frightened.

For good times, dances at homes were held on Name Days. Relatives came in wagons or sleighs whichever the weather permitted and stories were swapped, games played and a general good time had by all. Groceries were purchased by barter in St. Anthony or St. Paul, money of course being scarce. Dennis, to economize or carry out an old custom, wrapped his feet in strips of cloth similar to the manner of wrapping leg bandages, instead of using stockings. Socks were knitted and woolen cloth woven as Peter remembers a spinning wheel which ended up being made by him into a bicycle, using a wheel barrow wheel in front. The pedals were of wood. The most he could get out of it was to travel down hill.

In Mr. Jonas Howes's memoirs mention is made of a man stopping in to tell him about the news of Lincoln's assassination. In another book written by another of Howe's daughters mention was made of the same man as being Dennis Schmitz. Mail was delivered to the post office twice a month and ~~the first~~ Peter remembers of walking to Parkers Lake to Jas. Parkers home for it. Peter remembers the Farm Stock and Home magazine when he was a child and also of his mother getting a Free Press German paper. Susan Schmitz taught Peter to read the German paper and he taught her English. Gertrude Kenyon a daughter of Dennis and Susan bought and saved the New York Times which she received twice a month and saved for her mother. There was little reading matter otherwise. Dennis was on the school board and was very insistent his children attend school. The term seemed to be from Nov. to Apr. for the larger children who had to work when seasons permitted and the younger children attended a session which started after April and went on into the summer, possibly June.

Dennis Schmitz died in 1901 and was buried at Parker's Lake Cemetery. Susan died in 1914 and is buried there as is John 1946, Gertrude Kenyon 1946, Henry 1950 and Anna 1931. Kate Hansmanis buried in Moorhead, ¹⁹³⁸ Minn. and Emma Gardner in Crystal Lake Cemetery in Minneapolis. ¹⁹²⁰ In 1953 Peter and Mary Schmitz are the only survivors.

Brothers of Dennis Schmitz were Michael, buried in Mpls., Henry, buried in Holy Name, Medina, Peter, buried in St. Joseph's Cemetery in Plymouth, Eva, Mrs. Moliter buried in Sauk Center Minn., Katherine, Mrs. Ruetelstorf, buried in Mpls. and Elizabeth, Mrs Schmitz (married a man named Schmitz) buried in California.