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Burggraff, Nicholas (1853 - 1929)

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BURGGRAFF, NICHOLAS

File No. B-190

Nicholas Burggraff, one of Morrison counties early pioneers was born in Germany January first, 1853, son of John Burggraff, native German farmer and carpenter.

Nicholas had four brothers and four sisters. When Nicholas was just eighteen months old, his father moved his entire family to the United States and upon arriving, took passage on a train to the state of Michigan, where they settled on a farm. However, their stay there was limited to about one year, as they disliked the country. Their next move was to the State of Minnesota.. The journey as far as Anoka was made by train, this was as far as the railroad extended. The journey from Anoka to St. Cloud was made by team.

When the Burggraff family first arrived in St. Cloud, the main part of the town was located what was then the site of Lowertown. John Burggraff took rooms in the 'Student House', then located near the 1936 site of the Orphanage, this plot of land was at that time laid out for the St. John's College.

John did some carpenter work while staying in St. Cloud, and during his spare time he scouted around the country looking for an ideal homestead site. John, soon located an ideal homestead site near Opole Holding township Stearns county and there built a log house and barn.

Nicholas, with his brothers and sisters attended school in a small log school house, they located on Spunk brook just about one mile east of Opole.

After finishing school Nicholas obtained work in the Bridgeman and Russel saw mill, located in St. Cloud. However he soon received an offer of a job from a man named George Geissel, who was about to construct a ferry, to operate on the Mississippi river just above the

Platt river. Geissel was at one time Sheriff of Stearns County. After finishing the construction of the ferry, it was put into use, and the rates were, round trip per team 25¢ and per person 10¢. About five minutes was required to cross the river. Power was supplied by the current. A main cable was stretched across the river and two guy ropes ran on pulleys on this cable, one rope was tied to the front of the ferry and the other was tied to the rear, when crossing, the ferry always floated down current from the cable, to make a crossing the rear end of the ferry was let down stream just a little farther than the front end. This set the ferry at almost at a 45 degree angle, the current action against the side forced the barge ahead and across, the cable and guy ropes kept it from floating down stream, in the reverse trip the angle of the ferry was reversed. Of course pike poles were used to pole the ferry off bottom in shallow water.

Nicholas helped Mr. Geissel for about two years and then bought the ferry and eighty acres of land from Geissel. Nicholas continued the operation of the ferry, some times the ferry was held up for hours by logs floating down river, some of these logs were five feet in diameter.

About 1878 Nicholas married Susan Janski, who was born in 1858 in Germany and came to this country when sixteen years old, her parents lived just out of St. Cloud on the Luxemburg road.

Father Nagel performed the ceremony in a log church located in North Prairie. After the ceremony the young couple moved into a small log and slab shack, which Nicholas had built. The roof was shingled with bass-wood bark, and when it rained they were obliged to put an umbrella over their bed to keep it dry.

The ferry trade at that time was very good as there were no bridges across the Mississippi River in that vicinity.

Due to this ferry, Nicholas was soon able to buy another plot of land, this consisted of 110 acres of land located just across the river from his homestead, this 110 acres was located in Benton County.

While in the ferry business, only once did any person drown, by falling off of the barge. This unfortunate one was Martin Kiefer. It was in the spring of the year during the month of May, a heavy log was in progress and two teams were on the ferry one driven by Martin Kiefer and the other by Isidor Chirhart, nephew of Kiefer. Kiefer attempted to ward off a huge log with a pike pole, being inexperienced in the use of the pole Kiefer jabbed it into the log and the current drew it under the ferry this made a lever out of the pole which propelled Martin into the river, before shore was reached and a boat could be launched Martin had disappeared beneath the surface, the body was found six days later about ten miles below the point of drowning.

To Nicholas and Susan (Janski) Burggraff were born seventeen children: Henry, living in Cloquet; Elizabeth, living in Waseau, Wisconsin; is Mrs. Joe Weiner; John, lives near Bowlus; Mamie, lives in Warno, Ohio, is Mrs. Loyd Wagee; Mathew, died at the age of twenty-six years; Cecelia, living at Cloquet, Minnesota; is Mrs. Chas Schneider; Carl, lives in Walla Walla, Washington; Lena, living in Brainerd, Minnesota, is Mrs. Gustaf Peters; Gertrude, lives in International Falls and is Mrs. Nick Schadler; Jacob, lives in St. Cloud; Rose, living in Cloquet, is Mrs. John Treddle; Caroline, living in Cloquet is Mrs. Paul Treddle; George, lives in Cloquet, Minnesota; Laura, lives in Cloquet, is Mrs. Albert Valseck. Three children died in infancy. There are seventy-nine grandchildren and thirty-five great grandchildren.

Nicholas died December 4, 1929. Susan (Janski) Burggraff is now living at Cloquet, Minnesota.

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Interviewed: Jacob Burggraaff
Date: December 9, 1936
By: Virgil Chirhart

Publication Granted

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FOR THE NICHOLAS BURGGRAFF BIOGRAPHY

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