

St. Cloud State University

The Repository at St. Cloud State

WPA Biographic Summaries

University Archives

1939

Kraemer, Mr. and Mrs. George (1852 -)

Anna Robischon

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/wpabio>

Recommended Citation

Robischon, Anna, "Kraemer, Mr. and Mrs. George (1852 -)" (1939). *WPA Biographic Summaries*. 703.
<https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/wpabio/703>

This Interview is brought to you for free and open access by the University Archives at The Repository at St. Cloud State. It has been accepted for inclusion in WPA Biographic Summaries by an authorized administrator of The Repository at St. Cloud State. For more information, please contact tdsteman@stcloudstate.edu.

The Story of My Grandparents in Minnesota
(Mr. and Mrs. George Kraemer)

In June of the year 1868 my grandmother, then a girl of sixteen, came to America, her only escort being a brother a few years her senior. At the New York station she caught a "mixed" train to Milwaukee (a "mixed" train is a passenger and freight train combined); from here she boarded another as far as Hastings, Minnesota, and took a small steamer up the Mississippi River to St. Paul. Another mixed train brought her to St. Cloud where an uncle of hers resided and with whom she took up her lodging. This uncle owned a hotel known as the St. Cloud house. It was an available and desirable place for her to begin earning the livelihood she was forced to make; and so this was where she started to work--inevitably enjoying a home-like atmosphere.

On evenings in the winter when the winds howled about the house and swept over the prairie all around, the inmates of this particular hotel sat around the fire and told stories--stories absolutely true, but that seem fictitious and romantic to us now. Nevertheless, they clearly show the wild, fantastic, and even humorous spirit of the time.

One of the incidents that made a popular story happened the very first time Grandma's uncle drove a mule-train of provisions up to Winnepeg by way of Fort Ripley. He and his three companions arrived safely, relieved themselves of their load, and started back. They had not gone far when they were attacked by a band of Indians. Whipping up his mules, Grandma's uncle drove at a breakneck speed until the strained silence surrounding gave evidence that the Indians had departed, having done the evil they intended to do. He turned around. On the very seat beside him, a companion had fallen back dead. Another lay lifeless in the wagon box. The third of the group had been captured together with his team and vehicle. Judging from the spectacle he saw, one can-

not doubt the absolute truth of the statement that his hair had turned snow white during the few minutes of this eventful ride.

Another story Grandma tells which she often heard from the lips of the old lady herself was when this same lady came across to St. Cloud in 1851. As the foot-bridge over the Mississippi river was built but a year before Grandma came, she had to take the ferry across the river. There were only a few houses and a ridiculously small store in sight so she asked the first man she met where St. Cloud was. He courteously informed her that she was standing on the Main street of it!

There were a lot of incidents which Grandma tells of which excite interest and attention, especially one--the first time the train came across the Mississippi to St. Cloud which was in 1875. Everybody went down to see it, and I think the only reason Grandma remembers so well is because she became engaged on that very day! Following this appearance of the railroad into St. Cloud, the coming few years saw it extended first up to Melrose and then on to Sauk Centre.

It was in May that the railroad came across to St. Cloud, and in June of 1875 Grandma was married. Before Grandpa's marriage, in 1870 he and some friends took a train of provisions to Fort Abercrombie. Evidently there had been a great flood in the vicinity of Alexandria for the trail was completely obliterated. Grandpa and his companions were in a quandary. How were they to get across? Fortunately for them, there happened to be an Indian camp on the other side of the lake; and with much gesturing on the part of the white men, they finally conveyed to them their plight. A few of the Indians came across the lake and with assurance and safety led the train of covered wagons along the trail which the over-flood of the lake had concealed. The

Instinct of the Indian!

Grandma's brother was along on this trip, and as he had been a soldier over in Germany he evinced a great show of bravery. Taking advantage of this his friends gave him the position of sentry the first evening, and then retired. Now there was a need of water in camp, and Jim was obliged to go down to the river to get it. The appearance of an Indian was startling and alarming. Jim's bravery deserted him, and he never evacuated from a place as quickly as he did that night. Of course, his comrades rolled with smothered laughter--not so Jim.

"Bys," he gasped, "there's one there!"

The next morning when Grandpa came down to the river for water he met an Indian also, but his courage didn't go back on him as did Jim's. He only said, "Bon Jour, Nitchi." The Indian answered him, "Bon Jour, Shaw-mauk-a-ma." The basis of friendliness was established, and the corral of covered wagons sheltered peace and relief--especially the latter according to Jim.

After his marriage, Grandpa went into the cattle business made profitable in 1877 by the advent of the grasshoppers. These creatures were so devastating--even to the curtains in the windows of private homes--that cattle were impossible to retain. Grandpa bought up many of these and made his last trip up north in 1877. These grasshoppers were so thorough in their plunder in a certain particular stretch on this side of the Mississippi and extending from the middle to the southern part of Minnesota, that the only grain left was rye and buckwheat. That winter wheat flour went up as high as \$6.00--a fabulous price at that time.

5 It seemed that this growing community had to have all sorts of mishaps. The grasshopper "panic" was safely over when in 1886 came the dreadful cyclone which plunged it again into terror and tears!

It came in the afternoon between 3:30 and 4:00 on a very sultry day in April. Starting in the south-west end of St. Cloud, and staying on the north side of Lake George it went through the railroad yards, and across the Mississippi. Gathering more power, it whirled through the middle of Sauk Rapids and then on to Rice where it disappeared into a field beyond. Following this terrible disaster, there were twenty-one funerals on one day and ever so many dying later on from fright and injuries. Mother says she'd never forget that day, and Grandma declares she doesn't want to live to see another.

Three years after they saw this cyclone, in 1889, my Grandparents left St. Cloud and went to Fergus Falls. After a sojourn of two years there without anything "exciting" going on, they moved to Brandon, Minnesota. Here on the fourth of May, 1892, they experienced the very unusual occurrence of a heavy snowstorm, piling the snow from three to four feet high. No one could get around for a day or so, for it delayed everything. Grandpa owned a meat-market, and he delivered meat to the inland towns not accessible to the railroads, twice a week. Evidently they had to do without this useful commodity until the snow disappeared which of course it did very quickly. Unsatisfied with the obstacles connected with his business in Brandon, they moved to Sauk Centre where Grandpa died a few years later, leaving Grandma a widow with one daughter with whom she has lived ever since.

This concludes the story of my Grandparents' life in Minnesota.

--Anna Robischon.

FROM THE RECORDS IN THE STEARNS COUNTY COURT HOUSE

FOR THE MR. & MRS. GEORGE KRAEMER BIOGRAPHY

NO LEGAL RECORDS IN THE STEARNS COUNTY COURT HOUSE