

The Gustav and Helen Steinke Family

Gustav and Helen (Wagner) Steinke began their life together November 14, 1926. They lived with Gustav's parents, Johann and Justine, sleeping in the barn loft. Johann was easy to get along with, but Gustav and Helen wanted to provide a better life for their family than was possible in Poland.



Gustav had served as an officer in the Russian army before his marriage to Helen and was now being called to serve in the Polish army. He did not want to be conscripted to military service now that he was married. Gustav and Helen decided to immigrate to Canada and join Gustav's sister Olga.

Gustav and Helen arrived in Nisku, Alberta in May, 1928 and stayed with Albert and Olga (Steinke) Handwerker. Gustav worked for other farmers, grubbing out trees, stooking grain and doing whatever work he could find. That fall, Gustav filed on a C.P.R. quarter of land east of Leduc (Rolly View). He built a log barn right away, hauling the logs ten miles and sawing them by hand. In the spring of 1929, they moved to Helen's father's farm which adjoined their own quarter of land. They stayed with Heinrich and Wilhelmina (stepmother) Wagner for two months until their one-room board house was built. While Gustav worked for others, Helen cleared more and more bush around the house to increase the size of the yard.

The first summer they lived off the land eating wild ducks, strawberries, saskatoons and blueberries. The next year they were able to plant a garden. Later Gustav kept bees which provided a sweetener. There wasn't always a variety of foods, but they always had enough to eat, even though supper sometimes consisted of bread and milk. One day Helen was crying because Gustav had not arrived home from Edmonton and it was very

late. Frieda, their small daughter said, “Mother, why are you crying? We still have some sugar.”

Gustav cultivated some land the first year and in the fall he worked out with his horses, threshing for others and helping build roads. Wages were one dollar per day. The first winters were so very cold that many men froze their faces, hands and feet. The established farmers of the area said they (new immigrants) would never make it.

The next year, Gustav and Helen seeded crops. They made hay by hand with a scythe and sold to the livery stable in Leduc what they didn't need. They had four horses and four or five cows. They sold cream and eggs. A market hog sold for four dollars. With this income they bought staples, some machinery and paid the taxes of ten dollars a year.

There was a great community spirit in those days. Gustav and Helen attended the Lutheran Church regularly. Families exchanged invitations for dinner after church services. Helen enjoyed cooking and traded recipes eagerly with the ladies. Helen also enjoyed attending Ladies Aid. Christmas concerts at school were always attended. There was much visiting between neighbors and they helped each other with work as well as lending each other machinery.

Gustav and Helen endured hardships and worked hard to carve a comfortable home out of the wilderness for their six children. Through examples, they passed down to us their values of home, family and faith. We (children) thank God for His great love and goodness which He provided us through Gustav and Helen Steinke.

Alice and Alfred Steinke
November 2000