

A Tale of Cities...

...Well, Not Quite!



**Small Town Genealogy Research in Western Canada
and the Western USA**

presented by John H. Althouse

SEMINAR NOTES

As farmers came West in both the United States and Canada to take up the abundant land, merchants and service people followed setting up shops to cater to the needs of the new arrivals. These collections of shops became the embryos of the towns of the North American West with their distinctive character and history.

“Our Families Saw the Best of Times; They Saw the Worst of Times.” As you have probably noticed, I have borrowed rather liberally from the lines of Charles Dickens. Each of the new settlements would become a home for many, and like all homes, it would face both joyous and sorrowful times which would shape the lives of those who lived there.

Most towns in the American and Canadian West are what are referred to as “rural service centres”. Such towns were developed to provide for the needs of the farmers in a surrounding area. They would have merchants who would provide the goods that the farmers could not economically produce themselves. They would also have mechanics to make and repair machinery and tools necessary in farming operations. They would have the facilities necessary to purchase and ship the crops which the farmer produced. Finally, it would serve as a gathering place for the farmers and their families.

Each new settlement began with great hope; a promise for a better future; and along with it hopes for economic well-being and even prosperity. Everywhere on the frontier were chances through which one could advance and achieve, at least economically, a better way of life than his family in many cases ever known.

The Railways as you will see played a pivotal role in the development of Western towns. Towns here tended to cling tenaciously to the rail lines as these offered a door for new settlers entering an area and a tie to the outside world. Buildings were moved from other sites previously and randomly established in the area to the land around the station site once it was surveyed.

Even the pattern of many towns in Canada followed a plan advanced by the railway with a street often called “Railway Avenue” running parallel to the tracks, and the major street of the town which went by a variety of names including “Main Street” ran perpendicular to it, with the railway station poised strategically at the business end of it.

Tonight, we will look at two such towns – one in the USA and the other in Canada. We will examine Kranzburg, Codington County, South Dakota, and then Canora, Saskatchewan. Both of these were central to the history of my “Althaus/Althouse” Family in North America. However, the examination will provide certain connections which may relate to most western towns, although exceptions will exist.

A noted US Historian, Frederick Turner developed a paper known as “The Frontier Thesis” which stated that the frontier had been paramount in shaping the American character. He was referring exclusively to the USA, but the frontier was also instrumental in shaping many aspects of our Canadian character as well. He further stated that the frontier in the USA had ended in 1892 as most of the inexpensive land suitable for agriculture had been purchased and settled by that time. This was not the case in Canada as you will see later.

Beginning in 1896 under Clifford Sifton Minister of the Interior major efforts to attract immigrants to the Western Canadian lands were directed towards Europeans including those from Eastern Europe, “the Men in Sheepskin Coats.” However, when Frank Oliver replaced Sifton as Minister, there was a distinct shift in the groups that received preference. Under Oliver, the Department of the Interior focused on people with North American farming experience as the preferred group, that is people from the USA.

The last big land sale occurred in the USA in 1892 when acres of “Indian Land” was sold off. This sale included the lands of the Wahpeton – Sisseton Indian Reservation in South Dakota. This reservation was a rather unusual triangular shape and stretched into Codington County as you can see from the map on the left. With the sale of these land, there were no further reserves of land suitable for farming in the state.

It is shortly after this that the first of my family members, my great grandfather Johannes Althaus arrives in Kranzburg SD. By 1901, his entire family is there except his second son Wilhelm who will be delayed in his arrival in North America until 1907. The more that I study my family; the more I am beginning to believe that we as a group are cursed when it comes to our timing. This is just one of many such examples.

When Minnesota achieved statehood, the Western part of their area was removed from the state and given the status of a territory “Dakota Territory”. This territory included all of what is now North Dakota and South Dakota. In 1889, the territory was cleaved in two to form the states of North Dakota and South Dakota. It is interesting to note that these are the final two of four states stacked one on top of the other. Each of these states covers three degrees of latitude from south to north.

So, now there were two new states. There was a lively competition between the cities in South Dakota to become the capital city of the new state. Over zealous businessmen in Watertown SD, less than ten miles west of Watertown even built a capital building for that purpose. However, the State decided that Pierre would be a better site, and the capital building in Watertown never was used as its business community intended.

The State of South Dakota is divided into counties. Kranzburg is on the east side of Codington County. Each county is divided into townships which are named. Kranzburg is in naturally Kranzburg Township. Most townships contain 36 sections just as in Canada. Strangely, both Kranzburg Township and Waverly Township divide a third township between them so both actually have more than the customary 36 sections.

Perhaps at this point, it is a good idea to examine the survey systems of both Canada and the United States. Both use townships with Canada adhering more rigidly to 36 sections per township. Meridians are used as a point from which to number and measure the area. In Canada, these meridians run largely uninterrupted from south to north in the West. In the USA, the meridians tend to be less regular in part I suspect due to the more irregular topography. The sections in each township in both countries are numbered in order from 1 to 36. However, while in Canada, these numbers begin in the SE corner of the township; in the USA, the numbers for the sections begin in the NE corner. In both countries, the range numbers increase numerically from south to north. The other interesting feature that can be observed on maps of the rural area is that allotments of land can be less than one-quarter section which is not the case in Canada.

The other interesting feature that can be observed on maps of the rural area is that allotments of land can be less than one-quarter section which is not the case in Canada ... but they do differ in these important ways. In Western Canada, Townships are numbered from south to north, Townships are given numbers, Sections are numbered starting in the southeast section of a township, and Townships consist of 36 sections. In the Western USA, Townships are numbered from north to south, Townships are numbered and named, Sections are numbered starting in the northeast corner of a township, and Some townships consisted of more than 36 sections, e.g. Kranzburg Township.

USA Example: Kranzburg, South Dakota

So, let's begin with an examination of Kranzburg SD, the first home of my family after their arrival in North America. This is the town as it would have appeared in 1914, but its beginnings go back three and a half decades before 1914, and a decade and a half before the first member of my family arrived there.

It appears that my family intended to farm there and was likely attracted by ads in both the Europe and the USA. To my knowledge at this point, there was no family or acquaintance in Kranzburg when Johannes arrived there. So, why they settled there is a bit of a puzzle. A bigger puzzle is why the family went farming in the first place in the first place as they had little farming experience then.

The railway did play a part. In the initial settlement and development of Codington County. Rail lines did reach Watertown when Johannes arrived as did a rather irregular service to Kranzburg which would later be improved. When the initial settlers arrived in the late 1870s, the rail line from MN went only to Gary SD.

To understand any place, it is necessary to know its past, its history. So, lets take a leisurely stroll through the important events of Kranzburg's past.

1878 12 settlers arrive from Dakota CO, MN

1878 October, Kranzburg established

1879 first Holy Rosary RC Church built

Railway arrives

1887 Has hotel, stores, school, station, PO, telegraph also

1898 brick church built

1912 multi-purpose racetrack east of town

1912-20 several businesses destroyed by a number of fires.

1925 new lumber yard

1929 Great Depression: Farmer's State Bank only bank in county not to close or merge

1935 Spanish Villa Night Club

1955 the rail line through Kranzburg closed

1958 rails removed

The people who originally came to Kranzburg were from Germany and Luxembourg via Minnesota. The township was predominately Roman Catholic. About 5 miles east down the road, you come to Goodwin, Duell County, SD which has been predominately Protestant which in the past I am told could lead to some rather tense situations

The settlement of Kranzburg developed quite quickly after the arrival of the first settlers who came in search of rich and plentiful farmland. One of the structures to rise in the town site shortly after the arrival of the first settlers was the Holy Rosary Catholic church. The first church a wooden frame structure was built in 1879. A new and larger brick church replaced it in 1898. This building is still in use today and is the heart of the community.

The population grew rapidly at first, but never exceeded 800 people. By 2000, it was down to less than 500 people.

1878 = 12 men

1884 = 100 Catholic families (in the area)

1900 = 578

1910 = 682

1900-13 = greatest population growth in Kranzburg

1920 = 726*

1930 = 717

2000 = 354 people

2010 = 172 people

2013 = 181 people

2016 = 172 people

The Althaus Family were relative late-comers arriving between 1892 and 1901. When they arrived, they found a strong unified largely German community but no cheap land. By the time of the taking of the US Census of 1900, there were a number of factors that suggested that Kranzburg would have a positive future. It was located on a major rail line. The community had a common past and identity. The church served as a focal point for the community. A catholic school was in operation in the town. There were a number of businesses to serve the needs of the farming population. The lands of the area produced abundant crops.

This map shows the town as it would have appeared in 1914. It contained a number of houses and a sizeable business district as well. It even had a cheese factory and a race track used for both horse and auto races to the east of the town. There was a good deal of land for future expansion of the town. But what lay ahead, the people of 1900 had little idea. Certain factors along with the changes wrought by time would play important parts in shaping the town.

There were certain factors which slowed the growth of the town. As everywhere in North America, the Great Depression of the 1930s drew people from the area. There were periodic fires which decimated several of the important businesses there. Young people began to leave the farms and seek employment in other fields and elsewhere. The rail way line was closed and the tracks torn up in the late 1950s. The scale of farming changed, resulting in bigger farms and fewer farmers. Improvements in transportation made it easier to drive the short distance (less than 10 miles) to the city of Watertown where a rich array of stores and services were located taking business away from the merchants of Kranzburg.

Codington County was known for extremes in weather. Both my great grandfather and grandfather worked as section hands on the railway for a time. As a young boy, I recall my grandfather having a photo of a snow-bound train similar to the one in the upper right of this slide which he would show me often. Strangely when learning about the area a year ago, I found several occasions when a similar picture appeared. Watertown suffered major damage when a cyclone ripped through the city in June of 1914. Cyclones are a still a constant concern in the area. Drought also occurred regularly in the area.

By the end of World War I, Kranzburg had a railway line and depot, a vibrant business district, a large church, and a Catholic school to serve the needs of its largely farming population. In 1978, Kranzburg celebrated its 100th Anniversary of settlement. To celebrate the occasion, a history book was published. However, it was not a history of the town as such but rather of Holy Rosary Parish.

Today, a paved highway links Watertown to Kranzburg. Large trees indicate the site of Kranzburg as one approaches. There are still a number of houses occupied in the town site, but the business district is a mere shadow of its glory days. The church is still central to life of the town. The church building which is in use and beautifully restored is on the National Registry of Historic Buildings. A short way from the church is a large well-kept cemetery. A large church hall is just off the main business street and serve for social events within the community. A Catholic elementary school remains in active use across the street from the church. If it were not for the school and church, I believe Kranzburg would have vanished long ago.

There are a number of unique genealogical resources for Kranzburg. These include:

Territory Census 1885.

State Census available online to 1945.

Church records.

“Codington County, South Dakota

SDGenWeb Genealogy & History” @ <http://sdgenweb.com/codington/>

“Watertown Public Library” Genealogy and Cemeteries @ <http://www.watertownsd.us/index.aspx?NID=308>

The “South Dakota Naturalization Records” were helpful to me, but unfortunately they are not indexed on the website and in “browse only” form on family search.org. There are over 124, 000 images here. There indexes on another site that can help you narrow your search down by providing the date and place for the papers. The images are arranged by place and then chronologically. Use these listings to find the “place.” Search records for that place. Narrow the search until you find the date. The indexes that can aid in doing this can be found at “South Dakota Naturalization Records Index: First Papers” @ <http://history.sd.gov/Archives/Data/Naturalization/FirstPapersSearch.aspx> “South Dakota Naturalization Records Index: Second Papers” @ <http://history.sd.gov/Archives/Data/Naturalization/SecondPapersSearch.aspx>

Archived newspapers can be helpful in gathering details about a place and family members there. One great and free site is “Chronicling America,” digital newspapers to 1924 @ <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/> Here, I found a newspaper for the seat of Codington County, Watertown SD, just 8 miles from Kranzburg today. This newspaper was a great resource on the family and related families between 1908 and 1920. This collection also contains several foreign language newspapers printed in the USA. Don’t despair if the specific community you seek does not have its own newspaper. Searched by surname: Althaus, Althouse, Ruhr, Lenzmeier, Lenartz, Brockmeyer, and Schulte, etc. Searched by place name which is particularly effective for smaller places, e.g. Kranzburg, Grover, Henry, etc. Searched by topic, in my case, “German” and “enemy alien” for the period of WW I. Don’t pass over anything no matter how seemingly insignificant, e.g. notices of tax arrears. Notices of tax arrears provided locations in the village where the Althaus and Ruhr families owned land and perhaps had their homes and businesses. Small news items not only provided interesting details but provided further details of who was where when. Using a chart maker function or a spreadsheet format is one method that you can use to keep track of these stories. The spreadsheet offers you the extra advantage of being able to order these articles in a number of ways.

I met this lady at my grandparents’ place in Saskatchewan in 1955. I knew that she was related to us but I wasn’t sure how. I later discovered that she had been adopted my one of my grandfather’s sister when she was brought to South Dakota on one of the orphan trains. In the 1960s, she was one of two ladies who initially formed the Minnesota Society of Orphan Train Riders. What a story I might have had if I was interested then. We do have interesting family members even though we sometimes don’t know it!

If you are look into family in South Dakota, there are numerous and varied online sites that can be helpful. On the next few slides is a sampling of the sites that I have found for Kranzburg, Watertown, Codington County, and South Dakota, South Dakota Health Department “Birth Index” (over 100 years) at <http://apps.sd.gov/PH14Over100BirthRec/index.aspx>

South Dakota Birth, Marriage, and Death Indexes \$ <ancestry.com>

Codington County Genweb at <http://sdgenweb.com/codington/>

Watertown (SD) Public Library includes “Local Cemeteries” (click on), newspaper obit index back to 2004, and so much more at <http://www.watertownsd.us/index.aspx?NID=307>

South Dakota Historic Newspapers online “Chronicling America” (to 1924, free) at <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>

South Dakota Select Historic Newspapers on <newspapers.com> and <newspaperarchives.com> both \$ sites.

Codington County SDGENWEB Archives at <http://www.usgwarchives.net/sd/codington/codington.html>

South Dakota Archives (Pierre) Codington County Resource Index at <https://history.sd.gov/Archives/forms/governmentguides/codington.pdf>

Other Resources at SD Archives for Codington at <https://history.sd.gov/Archives/forms/governmentguides/codington.pdf>

Fire Underwriter Maps held at SD Archives at <http://history.sd.gov/Archives/Data/Firemaps/underwritersdm.aspx>

INDIVIDUAL BURIALS AND ABANDONED CEMETERIES at <http://www.watertownsd.us/DocumentCenter/View/50>

Codington County: World War II Enlistments of County Residents at http://genealogytrails.com/sdak/codington/WWIIEnlistments_A.html

Codington County South Dakota Genealogy Trails at <http://genealogytrails.com/sdak/codington/>

Codington County Heritage Museum at <http://cchsmuseum.org/>

Map of Codington County (1898) with names of landowners at <https://www.loc.gov/item/2012593004/>

Not all that is helpful is online. There are still books that provide information that online sources do not. Here are a few sources related to Kranzburg that are available at various sites but not online.

The first 100 years in Codington County, South Dakota, 1879-1979. 1979 by Codington County History Book Committee.

Watertown and Codington County South Dakota (SD). 2002 by Tim Hoheisel and Lisa Hanson.

Grover at a glance: A history of Grover, South Dakota. 2001 by Tom Cypher.

Holy Rosary Parish, Kranzburg, South Dakota, 1879-1979. (A history of the Catholic Church Parish).

Listing of books available on Codington County at the South Dakota Historical Society at [http://sdsa.booksys.net/opac/sdsa/#search:ExpertSearch?](http://sdsa.booksys.net/opac/sdsa/#search:ExpertSearch?ST0=S&SortDescend=0&SF0=codington×tamp=1494340775224)

ST0=S&SortDescend=0&SF0=codington×tamp=1494340775224

When you visit a place in the USA where your family once lived, there are a number of places that you need to visit to develop impressions, gather information, and take photographs. These include: The church of family's denomination, Cemeteries (guides for cemeteries outside Watertown on Watertown Public Library site and Watertown cemetery listings online), County Court House, Watertown Public Library (Watertown newspaper microfilms and much more), The Codington County Museum, Former family homes or farms in the area, Any relatives still living within the area, and take a walk down main street in both Kranzburg and nearby Watertown.

The first chapter for my direct ancestors at Kranzburg appeared to end after just one decade. The two Althaus daughters (of my great grandparents) married the Ruhr Brothers and remained in South Dakota. Johannes (John) and Margaretha Althaus (my great grandparents) and their sons Nick, Henry, John, and Carl headed north to Western Canada with Anton and Cacilia Brockmeyer (Cacilia was Margaretha's daughter from a prior marriage). The Althaus couples second son Wilhelm would join the others in Canada in 1908 after he completed a five year stint in the French Foreign Legion.

Canadian Example: Canora, Saskatchewan

About 1905, there was a significant yet seldom recognized change in Canadian Immigration. As well as Europe, Clifford Sifton the then Minister of the Interior saw the USA as a potential source of settlers to fill the large population void in Western Canada and began directing efforts there as well. Settlers from the USA were prized because of the experience that they had farming similar lands. This shift in policy led to a large influx of settlers to Western Canada from the USA between 1900 and 1914. Many of these were returning Canadians. I have heard many of you speak of relatives from the Eastern Canada who had moved to the states and then returned to Canada, Western Canada at that time.

So, in 1903, there was abundant land available for homesteading in Western Canada. These lands were within the area known as the North West Territories most notably in the Districts of Assiniboia, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and to a lesser extent in the District of Athabasca. Just a short distance outside of Canora four rural municipalities are located. They are:

273 RM of Sliding Hills, Office Mikado,

274 RM of Good Lake, Office Canora,

304 RM of Buchanan, Office Buchanan, and

303 RM of Keys, Office Canora.

It is in these rural areas that people who came to homestead came to farm. It is helpful to know the RM in which your family member's homestead now is situated.

Land companies were formed to locate settlers and get them to the available Western Canadian lands. One such company was the Scandinavian Canadian Land Company which was instrumental in assisting my Althaus relatives move from Kranzburg to homesteads in the NWT in 1903. In 1903 when the Althaus Family members arrived in Canada, there was no Saskatchewan and no Canora. The closest rail station was nearly forty miles away from the closest homestead land allotted to the company. Potential settlers left the train at Yorkton.

In Yorkton, the new settlers were met by a representative of the SCLC who would drive them the 40 miles or more north by buckboard so that the settlers could select their homestead. This was a two day trip! There was as I mentioned no Canora at the time. Fortunately, my family was among the earliest settlers on this land, so were able to secure their homesteads on the land closest to Yorkton. Five family members established homesteads here. My great grandfather was the first to apply for his homestead, and three of his five sons followed. The husband of my great grandmother's daughter (from her first marriage) also established a homestead near them.

SW 16 – 32 – 4 – W2: John Althaus, 1902

SE 16 – 32 – 4 – W2: Carl Althaus, 1904

NW 4 – 32 – 4 – W2: Nick Althaus, 1903

SW 2 – 32 – 4 – W2: Henry Althaus, 1905

SW 4 – 32 – 4 – W2: Anton Brockmeyer, 1903

In 1904, a Canadian Northern Railway line was extended along a grade about 30 miles north of Yorkton and 8 miles south of the Althaus homesteads. A station was established at this site. A settlement began to spring up adjacent to the station site. The settlement adopted the name Canora, which is the first two letters of three words "Canadian Northern Railway". From here, the settlement developed rapidly until 1914, and appeared to have a very promising future according to the abundant promotional literature at that time.

By 1910, Canora had two separate rail heads - the Canadian Northern on the east-west railway which arrived in 1904 and the Grand Trunk Pacific on a north-south line which arrived in 1910. At each of these sites, not only a station but all the associated services sprung up including two rather grand hotels, the Canora Hotel in 1910 just across from the CNR station and the Chamberlain Hotel in 1912 just east of GTP station. However, the rapid rate of rail building coupled with a few unforeseen tragedies including the sinking of the Titanic severely taxed these two railway companies to the point of bankruptcy. The Chamberlain Hotel fell into disuse. Its last hurrah was as a quarantine hospital during the 1918 flu pandemic. It was torn down in 1926 to serve as road fill on Railway Avenue in 1929.

The area around Canora was settled by a variety of ethnic groups. Unfortunately, for my Althaus relatives few of these people were German. In addition, there was no Roman Catholic church in the area until 1910, and no English or German Roman Catholic church in the town until 1916. These two factors were fairly significant to the family especially to its senior members and may have been factors that had most of the family members leave the area prior to the outbreak of World War I. Even today, you can view the sites developed by the different nationalities near Canora. Canora had a post office in 1904, was a village in 1908, became a town in 1910, and by 1923 was being hyped as a potential city. However, the later dreams never became realities. It never achieved the status that its promoters envisioned. It never became a city.

The community developed even more rapidly due to the favourable financial and climatic conditions during WW I. However, after the War, demand declined and the climate turned unfavourable. This had an adverse effect on many farmers who had over extended or had not prepared for less favourable conditions. Many farmers would lose their farms during the early 1920s. It was at this time that my family left the farm and moved to Yorkton (about 1923) and later returned to Canora, this time in the town in 1930.

From the stock market crash of 1929, the community held its own. The Great Depression had a profound effect on the town and the surrounding area. People learned to get by with what they had. While extras were often rare, the Althaus Family never lacked sufficient food as even after their move to town, they continued to raise most of their food needs. War also had a profound effect on the community as well as the family.

The population of Canora rose steadily, peaking in 1966 and declining by one-fifth over the years to 2006.

1903 = 5 families but no town

1906 = 169

1911 = 482

1916 = 835

1921 = 1 230

1926 = 1 121

1931 = 1 179

1936 = 1 254

1941 = 1 200

1946 = 1 205

1951 = 1 568

1961 = 2 117

1966 = 2 734*

1971 = 2 603

1981 = 2 657

1991 = 2 381

2001 = 2 200

2006 = 2 013

The area in which the family homesteaded in Canada was largely untamed parkland. Much of it would have been covered by stands of mixed and aspen forest. Much of the land had to be cleared using back-breaking labour. This, I believe, is not at all what my relatives had envisioned. They also had little luck or is it skill when it came to selecting good farming land. These coupled with their overall lack of farming experience did not auger well for their success in farming. It is indeed remarkable that one branch of the family would remain in farming and become very successful as farmers.

The location on two major railway lines seemed to offer the hope for future development especially when it was to form a part of the proposed Hudson Bay Railway extending to the port of Churchill. There also was no centre of the size of Canora to serve the needs of the farmers for 30 miles which made it successful as long as transportation was uncertain and time-consuming.

Plans for future growth of the town were abundant. However, the reality of such projects seldom matched the high expectations. For example, the map of the project shown in the previous slide shows this quite well. The project was advanced about 1910. In the 1950s, the town only existed in the area bordered by the yellow lines. Today, it has been extended to also include the area within the green lines. The area west of the former GTP rail line (the larger map to the right) simply never developed and remains farmland to this day.

The peaks and valleys created by the rise and fall of agricultural prices and land values both helped and hindered the town's development. The economy played a great role in the status of the town throughout its history. I have some concept of Canora as I was born there, lived my first ten years there, and still find people I knew and am related to there. My brother who is seven years younger than I am has none of these. Your familiarity with a place will shape how you conduct your family history research there. If you lack the local knowledge, it might be helpful to arrange a meeting with a local historian, local genealogist, or member of the local genealogy branch well in advance of your trip for the time you are there.

Canora grew rapidly in the past. It had a large business district, having six hotels at one point prior to 1920. It had a hospital which opened in 1914. It had a large school to serve the students of the town. Land was the resource that drove the economic life of the area. By 1986, the downtown area had experienced a severe decline. However, the old business section has revived and once again is quite vibrant with a series of new enterprises. This summer, Canora which came to life in 1904, celebrated its 100th Anniversary as a town. It still is home to a few thousand people. It has a hospital, a seniors' lodge, a Ukrainian museum, stores, cafes, hotels, drugstores, schools, a library, numerous churches, a rudimentary hospital, and community halls. It is a clean, well treed town in which a number of older homes stand patiently bidding their time along tree shaded avenues. Signs of the present and reminders of the past line the streets and suggest that this town will remain for years to come, but will never likely achieve the glory envisioned by some of its early promoters.

The sites here and on the next few slides are a sampling of sites that may be helpful to me in researching genealogy in and around Canora. Similar sites may be helpful to you in your research.

Saskatchewan Health “Genealogy Index Searches” (births to 1910 and deaths to 1917 and searchable by name) at http://genealogy.chealthsask.ca/vsgs_srch.aspx

“Saskatchewan Genweb” look for region at <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~cansk/Saskatchewan/>

“Saskatchewan Cemeteries Project” at <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~cansacem/>

“Saskatchewan Newspapers Online” currently 1914 to 1916 but being updated at <http://sabnewspapers.usask.ca/>

“Images of Prairie Towns” search “Saskatchewan” alphabetically by town name at <http://www.prairie-towns.com/>

“Saskatchewan Archives Board” at <http://www.saskarchives.com/>

“Saskatchewan One Room School Project” at <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~cansk/school/>

“Saskatchewan Genealogical Society (SGS)” at <http://www.saskgenealogy.com/>

“SGS Yorkton Branch” at <https://sgsyorktonchapter.wordpress.com/>

“RM of Good Lake Local Genealogy” at <https://sgsyorktonchapter.wordpress.com/>

“Doukhobor Genealogy Website” at <http://www.doukhobor.org/index-2.html>

“Suggested List of Sources for the Study of Ukrainian Family History” pdf at <http://ukraniangenealogygroup-ncr.org/Sources.PDF>

“Scandinavian Canadian Land Company” at <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~skkamsac/map/>

“Yorkton History” at <http://www.yorkton.ca/history/>

“Suggested List of Sources for the Study of Ukrainian Family History” at <http://ukraniangenealogygroup-ncr.org/Sources.PDF>

“USPENSKA A HISTORICAL LANDMARK OF SASKATCHEWAN” at <http://uocc.ca/pdf/churches/Uspenska%20UOC%20history%20opt.pdf>

SGS “Saskatchewan Cemeteries Index” at <http://www.saskgenealogy.com/index.php/saskatchewan-cemeteries/>

There are also a number of excellent local print sources. Strangely, the two local histories published for Canora sadly contain no family histories.

A History of Canora and District J F Paul Barschel, Canora Golden Jubilee Committee, 1960. (no family histories)

History of Canora 1905 - 1990 by Canora Historic Book Committee, 1990. (no family histories).

The RM of Good Lake No. 274 a History by Dianne Stinka, 2013.

The journey, the rewards : biography of Wasyl and Annie Dutka of Canora, Saskatchewan, for the period 1863-1953 by Alex Dutka, Strategic Concepts Inc., c2000.

Norquay nostalgia : 1912-1982 (includes RM of Keys) by Norquay Nostalgia Book Committee, 1982 (on Our Roots at <http://www.ourroots.ca/toc.aspx?id=4362&qryID=f8e174d5-a79a-41c3-9541-7ed382c350a3>)

The Hands of Time : Village of Buchanan, 1907-1987, R.M. of Buchanan, 1913-1988, and District by Buchanan History Book Committee, 1988. (on Our Roots at <http://www.ourroots.ca/toc.aspx?id=3613&qryID=be1659b5-55e0-419e-af73-9e51bd1502e3>)

50 R.M. of Sliding Hills #273 ; 75 years, 1913-1988 : celebrating our heritage by Mikado, Sask. : R.M. of Sliding Hills 75th anniversary Committee, 1989.

Mamornitz revisited : one hundred years of a Ukrainian pioneer settlement in Saskatchewan, 1897-1997 including the school districts of Czernowitz, Dobronoutz and Oleksince and the community of Drobot by Dutchak-Zayachkowski, Jennie, 1997.

There are a number of places that one must visit in their Western Canadian ancestral town. For my former Saskatchewan hometown of Canora, I would visit these for genealogical assistance: Family's church.

Cemeteries of the area.

Yorkton Public Library: for microfilms of Yorkton and Canora newspapers.

Town information: Canora Town Hall.

Rural information: RM Office (current RM maps and possibly maps of original RM homesteads).

"Station House Museum" and "Ukrainian Museum" in Canora.

"Western Development Museum" Yorkton.

Former Family Homes and Farms in the Area.

Visit Relatives Who Remain There.

Local Newspaper Office "Canora Courier" (paper since 1908).

If there are connections to Yorkton, that city has a historian housed in the city hall who you can contact by mail and make an appointment.

It was the familiar trappings of their German heritage in Kranzburg SD that were likely responsible for drawing the Althaus Family there initially and later of drawing them back there from Canada. The land was composed of gently rolling hills with random groves of trees situated across the landscape. In many ways, it was reminiscent of the landscape of some of rural Germany.

The Althaus Family was drawn to the Canora area by the homestead land there. However, the experience, I suspect, is not at all what they expected. They were largely isolated without a viable German community in the area. This likely is what led to most of the members leaving the area and returning to Kranzburg. Only my grandfather Henry and his elder brother Nick would settle permanently in Canada. Why? They were the only two members of the family to marry ladies whose families also resided and would remain in Canada. Yes, it appears to have been the wives not the husbands who determined the nation in which each of the Althaus Families would settle. Women did have some power even nearly a century ago.

Today, none of the Althaus Family members live in Kranzburg, Canora, or their surrounding areas. There are a few reminders of their presence there in the form of markers in the local cemeteries. Aside from these, there is little indication that either of these settlements had ever been our family home. Changing times, changing economic conditions, changing expectations and the winds of war led family members away from these places that they once regarded as their home. They reside in numerous towns and cities across Canada and the United States. Their experience has truly been an American Odyssey.

Improvements in transportation over the past half century has done much to seal the fates of both Kranzburg and Canora. Now, it is simply too easy to drive the 8 miles to Watertown or even the thirty miles to Yorkton for one's needs. With this increased travel to both Watertown and Yorkton, these two centers experienced new growth and prosperity. However, as this practice increased, the pace of the decline of the two towns of Kranzburg and Canora accelerated. Both of these smaller centres have for the time weathered the storm and continue to exist. The church and the school continue to draw people within the area. Canora has managed to survive because in part because it is still so distant from Yorkton for all needs and has developed businesses to fill these voids. It also has served to keep alive and promote the various cultural groups who came to make their homes in the area.

Find It Almost Anywhere

Why did the Brockmeyer Family leave the Canora area and return to Germany? When? Search by place name "Canora" brought me to this article from September 16, 1908. A name search from "Brockmeyer" would not have produced the article as the name reported is incorrect, but there are details that confirm that this is the family I am looking for. Can you see those details? This story did not appear in any Saskatchewan newspaper but in the Edmonton Bulletin. There was no connect that would have led me there, nor was this story really all that significant.

So, how do these two towns or any town relate to genealogy and family history? If we are to develop a true picture of a family, we must come to understand the town in which they lived at a time and how the family fitted into that town. We must establish how they fit into the varied nationalities of the town. Were they considered insiders or outsiders in the town? We must know the actual physical location of their dwelling. Did they live on the right side or the wrong side of the tracks? Did they dwell in a rural or in an urban area? What role did they play in the community? What was the status of the family within the town?

"A place is not a place until people have been born in it, have grown up in it, lived in it, died in it - have both experienced it and shaped it as individuals, families, neighborhoods and communities ...some are born in their places, some find it, some realize after long searching that the place they left is the one they have been searching for." I believe this quote from the noted author Wallace Stegner expresses the importance of a place in our personal and family histories. It is such places that though often distant have shaped who we are. The places where each person has lived play a large role in shaping who that person becomes

Lacey: We're sorry if this town seems a little, you know... boring.

Dr. Chris Garner: Oh, it's all right. I'm quite accustomed to slower life.

Emma Leroy: It gets slower than this?

These lines are taken from an episode for "Corner Gas". They outwardly appear to reflect the traditionally held view of life in a SK town, that not much happens. But in my mind, this view is not at all accurate as western towns are vital, active organisms reacting to the alternate sways of history. They evolve and change, often reinventing themselves in light of the forces that challenge them.

As the prairie elevator has gradually vanished from the western scene, prairie towns have also declined and in many cases vanished from the maps and landscape. Only those with the strongest constitutions have remained alive and vibrant. They have shaped the stories of the families who dwelt in them. The sun may be setting in the final slide of this presentation, but it certainly is not setting on the strongest, most adaptable of our western towns. Their form has been shaped by the past, yet they exist in the present, They will remain, and in doing so have much to offer in the form of lessons and values forged through their history.

Also, remember to look at sites for South Dakota and Saskatchewan. Both have online indexes for some early vital records. There are also limited resources on ancestry.com and familysearch.org

“Towns sprang up along railway lines. Spaced every fifteen miles or so, these towns serviced the railroads with water and supplies, but proved just as important to area farmers. Homesteaders needed a place within a day’s travel where necessary business could be conducted.”

– Skeletons of the Prairies by Ried Holien, Photographs by S. Paul Tuszynski.

“Whether on the prairie or in the forest fringe, the growth of towns symbolized the rapid changes taking place in Saskatchewan.”

– Saskatchewan Settlement Experience (website)

A Tale of Cities...

...Well, Not Quite!



“A place is not a place until people have been born in it, have grown up in it, lived in it, died in it – have both experienced it and shaped it as individuals, families, neighborhoods and communities ...some are born in their place, some find it, some realize after long searching that the place they left is the one they have been searching for.”

– Wallace Stegner



**Small Town Genealogy Research in Western Canada
and the Western USA**