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PIONEER DESCENDANTS GATHER FOR HISTORIC REUNION

***"GOD'S ACRE"* MYSTERIES UNFURL**

Reynolds, North Dakota: It was a picture-perfect picnic party. Welcome early morning rain gave way to a beautiful, warm ~~a~~fternoon at Reynolds Park this summer when about 75 Berthold family descendants of early pioneer settlers gathered to see relatives not seen in decades, visit with old familiar faces, meet some they'd never met and be introduced to the next generation.[1] Drawn from near and far (Arizona, Florida, Minnesota, Texas, Wyoming), they brought old photographs, family recipes, stories and delicious food to share (think *homemade* German sausage, potato salad, beans, sloppy joes, coleslaw, mouth-watering desserts. *Yum!*).

And did we mention stories? Ahh, the lifeblood of any family get-together.

Descendants were welcomed by Bavarian and German flags and a banner acknowledged those unable to attend. The registration packet delineated the Berthold line back to the early Renaissance of the late Middle Ages and supplied family group and pedigree sheets for those interested in continuing a family history journey.

Champagne from Bavaria's Upper Middle Rhine River Valley, their ancestors' homeland, was on every table and everyone got a piece of North Dakota in the form of a mini, state-shaped chocolate wafer. They toasted their heritage, ate mountains of fabulous food, regaled stories with flair and fervor and caught up with one another's lives. They traded recipes, old photos and learned about Bavarian ancestors.

This was the Berthold Family Reunion, the name itself represents its Germanic and French origin in the embattled Alsace Loraine border region of Europe fought over for centuries. Those attending descended from one patriarchal pioneer family: Mikael (Mik or Michael) (1839-1908) and Helena *[*née *Schotthoefer]* Berthold (1838-1922), specifically their eldest son and his family: Georg (1863-1935) and Elisabetha [née *Koch]* Berthold (1869-1941). Most of their progeny still live in the Red River Valley, contributing to the economy and its rich culture over the last 141+ years. The families of their middle son, Ferdinand, left the valley after his death in 1929. Descendants of their five children were unable to attend this event nor were the families of

Joseph, the youngest, who speculated on land in Montana as land opened up there in the early 1900s. He ultimately homesteaded in Canada, living out his life in Saskatchewan with his wife and eleven children.

Mik and Helena were among 250,000 (per Statista.com) land-starved, oppressed German peasants, craftsmen and tradesmen in an up-and-coming middle class who came to the U.S. in 1882 seeking freedoms – of choice and from religious persecution under Chancellor Bismarck's *Kulturkampf.* Rumors of an opportunity to own land without the constraints of Germany's inheritance laws was also beckoning. Leaving country, family and friends behind, however, is a big decision. They planned for years with trepidation at the risks they would be undertaking mixed with the excitement at the opportunity to live their lives freely as they gathered documents (proof of no debts, completion or release from compulsory military service, visas, appropriate permissions, etc.) and saved money to emigrate.

Relatives and friends had already come to America and written home about their experience. Mik's nephew emigrated to Pennsylvania decades earlier and fought for freedoms Mik and Helena now sought; he was disabled in the Civil War. One of Helena's sisters and her family had emigrated to Cleveland in the early 1870s; yet another went to New Rockford with her family. A nephew, Jacob Adams came to the valley in 1881 to farm. Another nephew, Josef Ackermann came in 1881 and settled in the valley after a short stint in St. Paul where he plied his carpentry skills and earned money for land. A cousin's family had come to Comstock (e.g., Hill City/Hillsboro) and set up shop as a makeshift boarding house and saloon, a general goods sampling room and later a general store on Main Street. Letters from America were posted in town center for all to see and read. News of America's freedoms, free land and railroad/steamship promotions brought a wave of immigrants to America in the mid-to-late 19th century. Helena's other sister and her family, Maria Johanna *(Schotthoefer)* and Johannes Adam and his brothers and their families came from Otterstadt and settled two months after Mik and Helena; their son, Jacob, was already here.

Helena's other sister and her family (Mathias and Maria Franziska (*Schotthoefer-Ackermann* Flory) came with them, huddled together with 520 other steerage passengers in the cramped, over-crowded hold of the steamship, *"SS Belgenland,"*[2] enduring a two-week journey like no other as they crossed the wild Atlantic from Antwerp in horrific, unsafe, unsanitary conditions before some of those same conditions were banned later that year by the Immigration Act of 1882.

They entered Castle Garden's Golden Door at the tip of Manhattan in what is now Battery Park in New York Harbor just before the 1882 Ides of March, four years before the Statue of Liberty welcomed other European immigrants. With hard-earned cash in hand with which to buy farmland, they made their way through the hodgepodge throngs of people beckoning them in multiple directions. It was near the railhead for trains heading west, so despite speaking only High German, a dialect difficult to understand even by fellow Germans and not being able to read signs, they somehow managed to get on the right one heading west, change trains in Chicago and then change again to get to St. Paul. Until recently, it was not known if indeed the Reynolds or Buxton area was their actual ultimate destination or if they just somehow got there and stayed. Helena's relatives were already somewhere near Hill City; the Red River Valley was their destination. Interestingly, enough, Josef Ackermann's ticket to Hill City sent him to the southern Dakota city of that name when he purchased his ticket the year before. He had to go back to Chicago and then up to St. Paul to get re-routed to northern Dakota's Hill City. Platted in 1880 as Comstock, it took the name "Hill City" to honor James J. Hill, when he brought the railroad there in 1881. The name changed to Hillsboro in 1883 upon discovery that another town in southern Dakota was also called Hill City. How/why they ended up there is a question for another time, but it's definitely related to the Great Dakota Boom. Following that lead, that's why the Bertholds headed there. Did they stop and visit in St. Paul once they got there? Most likely. They would have wanted to catch up, get the lay of the land and rest up after weeks of travel across 4,000 miles, days on hard benches in railroad boxcars and a horrific, white-knuckled journey across the turbulent north Atlantic Ocean.

How they managed the leg of the journey from St. Paul is not clear. The family story, told in gest, was: "they got off the boat, headed west and stopped when they hit rocks and settled there as that reminded them of their homeland." But tracking that down was a little harder to do. After a severe winter with heavy snow, the mighty Red overflowed its banks by 20 feet and ravaged the valley on both sides in April of that troublesome spring in what was a historic flood. Fisher's Landing is ruled out. Depending on exactly when they got there, the river that year was still frozen, or was in break-up so taking a ferry across to Frog Point Landing or Caledonia would not have been possible. The other river possibility is they could have boarded the *Selkirk* at Moorhead after taking the train from St. Paul to Fargo/Moorhead. That steamboat did manage to make the trip north from Moorhead in April, somehow barely making it through the dangerous, ice and "debris-infested

waters" to Pembina on April 21 after being grounded in Grand Forks for several days due to the flood. Dakota Datebook notes massive flooding that spring with water that “lapped at the doors of businesses on Main Street,” “wiped out” Shanty Town in Grand Forks and “set afloat” over 100 houses downstream in Fargo. “Much the same” occurred on the east (Minnesota) side of the river. “Few towns along the river … escaped its wrath.” A trip up the Red River that spring would be beyond treacherous.

Flooding that spring even caused seasoned stagecoaches to turn back that April, so that option is discounted as well. So, while other options were indeed possible, we think the most likely is the railroad. The branch line of the St. Paul, Minneapolis & Manitoba Railway was completed 0.4 miles west of Reynolds in late 1880 for grain transport; from there, it went south to Comstock/Hill City (later Hillsboro) and north to just west of Grand Forks enroute to Winnipeg. It came from the east into Grand Forks in 1880 and the Northern Pacific came into Grand Forks from the south in 1881. So, the train was the most likely possibility – either up from Fargo after leaving St. Paul or via Duluth, then west to Crookston and Grand Forks and south to the platform at Reynolds. Still a circuitous journey.

Howsoever they managed it, got there they did, and when they managed to get to the embryo village, barely platted just a year and a half earlier, imagine what they saw: Tall 3-4’ high prairie grass peeking through ugly drifts of snow punctuated with dust and mud and heavy black dirt for as far as the eye could see. Not a single tree blocked the fifteen plus mile flat horizon. Not one. Just an open sea of dirty snow and tall grass.

There was only one house in the budding little railroad hamlet, a makeshift boarding house owned by baker/hotelier Joseph Hillenbrand, a relative of the Schotthoefer sisters. He had come to Dakota Territory in 1881 when the rail line was barely completed along with other speculators to make money in the Great Dakota Boom. The boarding house was for railroad workers and the flood of northern European immigrants pushing the frontier into former Yankton Sioux/Cherokee Nation territory, now staked and surveyed (as of 1878) and open for business. The official photographer for the St. Paul/Minneapolis/Manitoba Railroad (later the Great Northern Railway) Jacob Skrivseth, lived there documenting progress from 1881-1882; it was widely projected to be an economic boom area.

Elsewhere in Dakota, frontier news was abuzz with the arrest of the famed Sioux leader, Sitting Bull a month later when he and his starving followers surrendered after their five-year exile in Canada following the

historic Battle of Little Bighorn. He was imprisoned for two years, then held under house arrest. His actions were always of keen interest to settlers.

Other topical news of the day: In December 1882, 10 million acres were set aside for the Chippewa as the Turtle Mountain Reservation in Rolette County along the Dakota/Canadian border; much of it confiscated two years later. White settlement on Indian land was permitted by the War Department, despite Laramie Treaty prohibitions, precipitating unrest and an uprising on the plains and in the Black Hills, where the gold rush in southern Dakota brought more treaty violations and the infamous Battle of Little Bighorn just six years earlier. Prior treaty violations in the prior decade led to the Dakota War (1862) when starving, displaced Dakota attacked white settlements along the Minnesota River Valley, killing hundreds of settlers and leading to the largest mass execution in U.S. history. Dozens of Dakota in the corrupt Indian system's forgotten past he inherited were hung by order of President Abraham Lincoln from a specially designed scaffold enabling approximately 4,000 people to watch the mass hanging. It culminated in the Dakota being removed to reservations or exiled west to Dakota Territory or north to Canada and the U.S. confiscating their remaining lands. About 1,700 were forcibly marched over 100 miles to prison in Fort Snelling where about one-third starved, died of exposure, disease, and brutal living conditions over the next year. Minnesota voided treaties with the Dakota altogether in 1863 (ref: 1863 Dakota Expulsion Act), sending Plains Indians further into exile to western Dakota and elsewhere with military in hot pursuit. The surprise attack at White Stone Hill in Western Dakota (1863) killed about 300 and resulted in the confiscation of all their Dakota Territory lands as well.

These lands then became public domain lands, were available for railroad land grants and settlement. The Pacific Railroad Act (1862) officially terminated any rights the Plains tribes had and resulted in over 180 million acres of land being given to railroads and homesteaders (98%/2%) by the federal government and states over the next dozen years or so to encourage transcontinental railroad lines and settlement along rail corridors. The government also loaned over $64 million at 6% interest and gave the railroads up to twenty sections of land for every mile of track laid, given in a checkerboard fashion along a 40-mile corridor on either side of the proposed right of way. Forty-four million acres went to the Northern Pacific Railroad. Under the management guile of Jay Cooke, offices were set up in London to leverage those lands, attract European investors and sell bonds for construction. By 1886, it had an office in Germany. In the meantime, mounting costs and over-

extended cash outlays resulted in Cooke's and the Northern Pacific's bankruptcies, setting off the economic panic of 1873, halting construction. Over the next two years, the 7th Cavalry under Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer led protective expeditions guarding construction and survey crews and equipment.

Railroad land was now up for sale. And there was lots of it at bargain prices. Investors traded depressed stock for premium Red River Valley land; speculators bought it for pennies on the dollar; investors created mega corporations and bought land for commercialized farming. That, along with a new milling process in Minneapolis upped the price of spring wheat and that, in turn, heralded in the wheat-is-king era. One such commercial mega farm owned river frontage just south of Caledonia in Traill County and had its own steamboats to ship grain downriver. The German Grandin Brothers from Pennsylvania got the first telephone lines in Dakota to facilitate communication on their large 60,000+ acre bonanza farm.

Out west in the Badlands, New York's Theodore Roosevelt returned to Dakota in 1883 to hunt buffalo. He had been goose and duck hunting in the southern Red River Valley three years prior and came back for bison, which he got. He stayed, bought two ranches there, fell in love with the rugged lifestyle and "perfect freedoms" and learned the ways of the West.

By 1884, there were 100 people in Reynolds, a school, a church, a postmaster, a general store and four elevators in the now booming little railroad village. Neighboring Buxton had a postmaster, an elevator, two churches and eight (one-room) school houses in the township.

In 1885, news of the famed Sioux leader was still making headlines. Sitting Bull toured that season with Wild Bill Cody's Wild West Show.

Theodore Roosevelt lost most of his cattle during the particularly harsh 1886-87 winter when tens of thousands of cattle were lost or frozen to death all across Dakota. He went back east to politics, became vice president on William McKinley's ticket and ascended to the presidency upon that political assassination in 1901, returning often to his beloved West, where he said, "the romance of my life began." While president, he created several conservation sites in North Dakota, including a national park near Devils Lake in 1904 on the Spirit Lake Reservation, later becoming a National Game Preserve (1931). "Sully's Hill Park," was ironically named after Brig. Gen. Alfred Sully, the commander of the Whitestone Hill massacre in 1863 that divested the Sioux of their last remaining lands four decades earlier. In his visit to Fargo in 1910, Roosevelt credited his

experience in Dakota to his ascension to the presidency of the United States, saying "I can never begin to say what I owe to Dakota. It is not only that I never would have been president if it had not been for my experiences here" but his most valuable lessons in life were the insights he gained from those he lived and worked beside here. He last visited in 1918 shortly before his death the next year. North Dakota views him as its adopted native son. The national landmark was renamed White Horse Hill by Congress in 2019 at the tribe's request.

These pioneers bore witness to these and other historic events and scores of monumental change. County boundaries were in flux, the territorial capital moved from Yankton to Bismarck on the main line of the Northern Pacific Railway (NPRR), the power of outside interests in the economy of this frontier hinterland on full display. Somebody's political interest was always at play – and it rarely benefited the small farmer. Just a decade earlier, the little supply outpost of Edwinton on the Missouri River underwent a name change designed to attract German investors in the railway scheme of Wall Street's Jay Cooke. Thus, Bismarck was born, the only U.S. capital to be after a foreign statesman. The Northern Pacific's financial difficulties in the 1870s led to the bonanza farm era. Its comeback a decade later brought the completion of the fifth transcontinental railroad linking Chicago with the Pacific Coast.

In 1883, women were in Dakota got the right to vote in school board elections. Full suffrage was opposed by the foreign born, mostly Germans. Five years after the Bertholds arrived, voters agreed to split the territory and in 1889, thanks to mass immigration to the northern plains, the north had 150,000 people. Having met the requisite population (60,000) for statehood, the territory was split into two states, North Dakota entering the Union as a dry state. Prohibition was written into the state's constitution, thanks to Scandinavian influences and the temperance movement. The saloon on Main Street in Hillsboro became a general store. Most saloons closed. Thirsty North Dakotans crossed state lines. Border towns flourished.

Politics caused wrangling for the Traill County seat, which ultimately moved from Caledonia to Hillsboro in 1890. Transportation entrepreneur, James J. Hill reorganized his St. Paul, Minneapolis & Manitoba Railway and holdings from other transportation endeavors (Red River ox carts, steamboats and stock in Northern Pacific), creating the Great Northern Railway. He had his company lay tracks through Hillsboro, not Caledonia due to a riff he had with a hotelier there years earlier when he was denied a room there as he passed

through by dogsled. The “Empire Builder” completed the northernmost transcontinental railroad to the Pacific a decade later.

A month after statehood, Sitting Bull was killed while being arrested for supporting the Ghost Dance movement, which prophesied the return of the buffalo. Two weeks later, the massacre at Wounded Knee ended the Indian Wars. In 1890, the western frontier officially closed. The reservation system, boarding schools and “Americanization” programs were fully in place.

Dramatic change was everywhere. Steamboats replaced ox carts; railroads ended the era of steamboats on the Red and steam engines changed life on the family farm as innovations in agriculture replaced horse and oxen with steam and traction implements. Negative impacts of industrialized agriculture were felt by small farmers in excessive shipping prices and a growing flour milling monopoly. A “what is left for the farmer” sentiment began edging out the colonial hinterland mentality of the 1880s. The political landscape on the plains began changing. Locals wanted more control and less outside influence over the fruits of their agricultural labor.

The Great Dakota Boom was on and Mik and Helena and family were smack dab in the middle of it.

The promise of land in Dakota Territory in the 1880s was quickly fulfilled. Within three months of coming to America, Mik had purchased 160 acres of land for back taxes. He parlayed his holdings into additional quarters by the turn of the century.

Change was everywhere. That same June (1882) when Mik bought his first piece of land, hundreds of Yankton Sioux gathered in western Dakota for what would later become the first in a series of hunts known as the Last Great Hunt. Buffalo were rapidly approaching extinction. Once over 30 million in number on the Great Plains, they were reduced to just a few hundred thousand – and that number was in fast decline. Two thousand Lakota Sioux traveled over 100 miles for the traditional ritual, thinning the herd of about 50,000 by 3,000 in just three days, saving the rest to conserve the herd. In October the following year, Sitting Bull led a hunting team of 1,200 in what was regarded as the last of the buffalo hunts. The hunters did not realize that the end of the hunting season of 1882-83 was the end of the buffalo, an economic and cultural shock from which the Lakota and other Plains tribes would not recover. By 1889, there were less than 1,100 buffalo on the Great Plains.

The end of the buffalo gave rise to another entrepreneurial enterprise for the new settlers. Bison bones were gathered up from the prairie, stacked in piles along railroad tracks for shipment back east for manufacture

into glue, fertilizer, bone-china, buttons, umbrella handles and more. One of the largest in eastern Dakota was in Jamestown on the Northern Pacific's west line to Fargo. In 1885, the going rate was $10/ton.

Closer to home, about half of downtown Grand Forks was destroyed by fire in 1882, a not-so-rare occurrence in frontier towns. It had incorporated only one year earlier and was the hub of river commerce between Winnipeg and St. Paul, quickly becoming the commercial hub of the valley. Early French explorers, called it *"Les Grandes Fourches,"* the Grand Forks (where the Red and Red Lake Rivers come together to flow north into Hudson's Bay). It was not a railroad town as were most towns on the prairie. It was established as a critical rendezvous point for Indians, French explorers, trappers and traders in the height of the fur trade following the Louisiana Purchase. The North West Company of Montreal had a camp there in 1808 and by the 1820s, so did the Hudson's Bay Company and John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company. It was a transportation juncture for ox cart commerce between St. Paul and the Scottish Selkirk settlers and the Métis at the remote Red River Colony near Fort Garry and later for steamboat traffic on the Red. A post office in 1870 anglicized *"Le Grandes Fourches"* to Grand Forks. The (St. Paul, Minneapolis & Manitoba) Railway reached there in 1880, it incorporated as a city in 1881; and in 1882, it had its first brick hotel next to the depot.

But this was still a frontier, with its many paradoxes. The James Young gang had been thwarted in their bank-robbery attempt in Minnesota six years earlier, resulting in the Youngers being captured, several gang members killed, and Jesse James assassinated in early April 1882. In October, in Grand Forks, with dramatic flair, righteous indignation and Wild West exuberance, a black man was accused of "ravishing a little Norwegian" servant girl west of Buxton not far from the Berthold farm and threatening the wife of the railway agent. A jeering, angry mob pulled the prisoner out of his jail cell the day after his arrest, before trial, marched him up onto the high railroad bridge that spanned the Red River between Grand Forks and East Grand Forks, slung a noose around his neck, tied the other end of the rope to the bridge and shoved him off, leaving him to die dangling above the river. No one was ever arrested for the murder. A marker on the Greenway on the banks of the river below the bridge commemorates the lynching. During the next four decades, ten others would die of vigilante violence, not counting the 50+ violent end horse thieves met in Dakota in 1883-84.

The 1896-1898 Gazetteer lists a bank, two hotels, five elevators a flourmill, three churches, a newspaper and a population of 600 in Reynolds. By 1910, it had a baseball team. By statehood (1889), Grand Forks had

grown by leaps and bounds, weighing in at 9,000 residents. By the dawn of the new century, it had a public library and was the hub for commercial, transportation, education and cultural center of the entire region, boasting of amenities usually found in large cities back east. The University of North Dakota was established there as a research and liberal arts school six years before statehood, accessible to everyone and connected to downtown in 1904 by a trolley system, which encouraged and changed its development trajectory.

By 1890, Buxton had three churches, a graded school building, a state bank, a hotel, six general stores, three elevators, three blacksmith shops, a lumberyard, drug store, two agricultural implement firms, one physician, a livery barn, harness shop, barber shop, the town hall, an Odd Fellows lodge and free reading rooms to support study clubs and a reading habits culture. According to the Illustrated Historical Atlas of Traill County, "Reynolds is well equipped with all kinds of mercantile firms, a full quota of professional gentlemen and the steam flouring mill in the northern part of the village is one of the best in the State. A fine new hotel building is being erected" as are "many beautiful private residences."

In 1891, the abused Pre-emption and Timber Culture Acts, designed to increase tree cover on the plains were repealed. Speculators, through the sale of relinquishments and land holding techniques, dominated and abused timber culture entry. Newcomers after this were speculators, not farmers. Locals wanted farmers, even forming a commercial club to promote the area's rich, fertile farmland to help build community and economy.

For Mik, coming from where there was not only no freedom of choice (of profession, or mate outside your class or even where you lived), to now being an integral part of a budding, thriving community and owning several acres of some of the best farmland in America, ***think how that must have felt!*** An affection for and loyalty to his new country swelled in him. Coming from centuries of landless peasants and a stifled, slow-growing middle class – to now owning, ***actually owning – in his own name,*** fertile, tillable land in this new America and having an opportunity to help build and shape a whole new community. Deeply grateful and committed to this new land and his place in it, he filed first papers for naturalization four months after arrival.

Tough, tall prairie grass with strong 18"-several feet deep roots in heavy, black, alluvial soil makes tilling unturned sod with horses, oxen and plows in the early days before plow shares were refined enough for the heavy Red River Valley soil made for very hard farming. Plow shares had to be sharpened daily. Blacksmiths were busy. Everyone pitched in. They worked together, overcoming unimaginable hardships.

They survived droughts, prairie fires, dust storms, severe weather, terrible floods, the horrific tornado of June 1887, the awful January surprise that was the Children's Blizzard in 1888, the economic panic and wheat prices crash in 1893, the disruption of rail traffic by the Pullman strike of 1893-94, which disrupted grain shipments on the Great Northern Railway. The economic downturn brought deep wage cuts to workers on a 100-hour work week, triggering the strike. They survived the typhoid epidemic of 1893, but more pioneering hardships came with another extremely harsh winter and major flood in 1896-97.

And did I mention the whirling dervish day-to-day rigors of farming itself?

Things turned around at the turn of the century. The last corners of the state got settled, homesteaders seeking land had to go farther west but life for the small farmer in the valley was good. North Dakota was fully integrated into the nation's economy and had a completely developed railroad transportation system. Farming was profitable again. For a while.

Mik died in 1908 just as what historians later dubbed the Golden Age of Agriculture and the Second Great Boom for North Dakota took hold in the Republican stronghold that was the new state of North Dakota.

Mik and Helena's eldest son, Georg, came over as a teenager with his parents and two brothers: thirteen-year-old Ferdinand and Joseph, aged two. He filed naturalization papers and a homestead claim as soon as he was old enough, married Elisabetha Koch in 1887 and built a house on his claim, which is still in the family today. They cultivated the land and proved it up by 1892 before wheat prices began to fall.

By the turn of the century, Georg had added more quarter sections to his land holdings as had Mik, Ferdinand, the Florys, Adams, Ackermanns, Neubauers, Shotthoefers and other relatives and friends who came from in and around Otterstadt. Chain migration populated the valley, working together for everyone's success.

Craftsmen and tradesman from the old country brought their skills to the community, which had blossomed into a bustling city of over 600. America's promise delivered. Times were good in the Golden Age of Agriculture. Demand for food was high; prices were good. For a while. Congress created federal land banks in (1916) providing farmers with opportunities to expand their land to take advantage of the economic boom that drove up prices for farm commodities due to the war in Europe. Farmers took advantage of this and other loan opportunities by banks to invest in land, tractors and other labor-saving farm implements to produce more.

Relatives farmed and worked the land together as they had for centuries, drilling artesian wells for water for one another and embracing new agricultural technologies, like the steam engine in the first decade of the 20th century and the harvesting improvements like the Oliver Red River Special they were among the first in the valley to get when the stainless-steel thresher was introduced in 1915.[3] Small gasoline engines, tractors and trucks gradually replaced horses and oxen and automobiles replaced horses on 90% of North Dakota farms in the twenties.

They fully left their messy world behind in Germany and were emotionally, physically and financially invested in building a community of family and friendship with the rich spirit, strong work ethic, self-reliance and deep values that survived the hard times and now thrive in the Red River Valley today.

Politics was always a lively issue in early North Dakota along with the weather. Their livelihood depended on both. In the 1890s, the cooperative movement crept from Minnesota into North Dakota in the form of the Grange, a fraternal organization of farmers as growing costs increased but prices for their products did not. Members started exploring collaborative organizing and established cooperative elevators which they networked together and worked to reduce railroad shipping costs. In the 19-teens, the 17th Amendment was ratified, giving citizens the right to directly elect their senators to Congress in 1913. The Farmer's Co-op networks created a strong sense of community on the northern plains and began to wield power in North Dakota politics. In 1916, the Nonpartisan League (NPL) overtook the Republican stronghold, putting women's suffrage on its platform and catapulted to power with the election of Lynn Frasier to governor in 1916, '18 and '20 and the creation of a state bank and state mill and elevator supporting farmers and wielding competition to the Minneapolis milling monopoly. Recalled in 1921, Frasier became the first governor in the country to see that fate but rebounded to be elected U.S. senator the following year. In national news, the charismatic leader of the Pullman union strike a decade earlier, Eugene Debs, was convicted of sedition in 1918 for his speeches against President Wilson while running for president on a similar third-party ticket. He appealed all the way to the Supreme Court, represented by none other than Clarence Darrow, who later earned fame for his defense in the Scopes trial. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote the majority opinion affirming his conviction. Debs ran for president from prison in 1921, receiving nearly a million votes.

Meanwhile, a major drought in the late teens hurt the wheat crop; even grass didn't grow so hay was scarce. Farmers had increased wheat production in response to the Great War in Europe, but the Government lowered the price, so they did not receive a fair price for their wheat. Other businesses profited from materials produced for the war effort; North Dakota farmers did not. Farming has always been a difficult and uncertain profession, but this was harder than ever. Many had borrowed against their land to buy more land to produce more grain when the Government encouraged more production and prices were good; but when prices dropped, many could not repay their loans. North Dakota's own state-run bank and mill brought an element of fairer prices to the farmer, but post-war America saw the end of the Golden Age of Agriculture and the profession saw the effects of an increasing economic downturn that would culminate with the stock market crash a decade later. Rainfall was below average. High costs, low prices and heavy debt caused many to lose what they had worked so hard for in prior years.

Congress passed the women's right to vote in 1919. Ratified in 1920, women in North Dakota finally had the full right to vote.

That same year the temperance movement achieved another major success: National Prohibition became the law of the land. This antagonized large segments of North Dakota's population, most specifically the state's large German immigrant population – the handful of Germans in the northeastern Red River Valley and the vast number of Germans from Russia in central and southern North Dakota. They saw it as an attack on their culture and strongly and vociferously resented it, notwithstanding the irony that North Dakota had been dry for 30 years.

A new industry was born, and Fargo/Moorhead became a major east/west connection point for it. Liquor smuggling during Prohibition earned North Dakota a notorious reputation during that era. It's central location, small population, long, mostly empty Canadian border, where Seagram & Sons set up a series of liquor export houses for Canadian whiskey for easy distribution down to Fargo and west to the coast. Despite the risks (a 1913 North Dakota law punished bootleggers with penitentiary sentences if caught), the Mob Museum says the golden years of rum running were the early 1920s – before Prohibition agents knew what bootleggers were up to – and they were up to a lot. The kingpin of rum-running was a German immigrant from Iowa who ran a criminal family enterprise out of Fargo/Moorhead, becoming one of the largest syndicates in the country for

trafficking liquor from Canada. It was only brought down in 1932 when it branched out into the bank-robbing business. A little closer to home, J. Edgar Hoover's "G-Men" conducted a raid in the waning days of Prohibition, uncovering a massive still near Jamestown, on property owned by a prominent California lawyer. It took years to dismantle what turned out to be the largest illegal still in the country. Prohibition lasted until 1933 on the national stage when it was repealed by Congress. It was not until 1936, however, that a statewide referendum actually legalized liquor sales in North Dakota, trumping the 1889 state constitution prohibiting it.

The twenties were interesting times to be sure. And through it all there was music, dances, baseball, checkers and playing cards. They actively participated in all for entertainment and community conviviality.

There were sanitation improvements on the Red River, which gradually decreased the risk of deadly diseases like the Spanish flu, which killed 1,400 North Dakotans and shut down the University; tuberculosis, typhoid and diphtheria, which took their granddaughter, Tillie, in 1922.

Helena died later that same year. Sister Rita (daughter of Joseph Berthold) wrote of her grandmother in her memoir that "she died of heart failure, sitting in a chair with her rosary in her hand."

Georg had an eye for figures and was active in the community, overseeing school board land sales and serving as treasurer of Buxton Common School District in the twenties along with his son, George J. (Jr.). He and his brother, Ferdinand, who now, in addition to farming, owned a construction company in Reynolds, again donated their labor, skill and funds when the church needed remodeling and famed architect, Theodore B. Wells, was hired for the project in the twenties. The stained-glass window they donated then – the iconic image of St. George slaying the dragon, is in the back of the church today – a testament to their commitment. Georg and Ferdinand lived out their lives in Reynolds. They built, contributed to and served church and community there for decades.

Wheat prices fell again in 1923 as the economy spiraled downward. Banks started to fail, foretelling turbulent times and the Great Depression a decade later when, according to the Federal Reserve Bank in Minneapolis, nearly 900 North Dakota failed banks left depositors on the hook for fifty million dollars. A decade of drought, depressed farm prices, poor crops, incessant wind and a grasshopper infestation brought crop failures, mass erosion, the Dust Bowl and economic hardship to the plains.

They managed to keep the farm and were one of the few in their area to own a radio set. They gathered with friends and neighbors to listen to President Roosevelt lay out his plan for recovery from the banking crisis in the first of his many Fireside Chats. It was a time of hope and reflection. The banks re-opened the next day, 51 years to the day after they arrived on American soil and greeted their new world. The U.S. Government and its New Deal policies along with the North Dakota State Bank under NPL's Governor "Wild Bill" Langer's leadership became major creditors, saving many farmers from total ruin. They ushered in another "golden age," that of the radio. Everyone who could, got one after the president's speech and listened to news, fireside chats and an increasing number of entertainment programs over the next few years.

World War II brought better economic times but at the terrible cost of another world war.

They lived some history, these pioneers. Experiencing some of the most colorful and consequential moments in our world's history. They not only personally bore witness to the gradual modernization, industrialization, expansionism and militarization of their native fatherland that led to two world wars – wars in which their sons and grandsons fought for their new country, they were a part of and witness to an incredibly new America. They lived on the doorstep of America's western frontier and saw it officially close at the end of the historic 19th century along with the end of the Indian Wars. They lived in what Harvard Business Review called America's "Golden Age of Invention." Their newly adopted country became a world power and a preeminent industrial nation with communication inventions like telephone, electricity, motion pictures, radio; agricultural improvements like steam traction engines, tractors and generators, not to mention monumental transportation innovations that brought trains and planes and automobiles to the northern plains. They endured the anti-German sentiment of the early 19-teens and the anti-Catholic demonstrations of the Grand Forks Ku Klux Klan in the early twenties. They truly lived in interesting and chaotic times.

Georg died in 1935, just a week after his son, George J. (Jr.) returned from a trip to Saskatchewan visiting Joseph (Georg Sr.'s brother) and his family there. Elisabetha survived him by six years, keeping the farm running with the help of their son, Louie, and grandson, Verdeen, against all odds during the final years of the Great Depression when many farmers went bankrupt through no fault of their own. They prevailed through hard times, dust storms, the historic drought of 1936 and finally – ***finally*** – saw good times return to the valley in the early forties.

Elisabetha died in 1941 and is buried next to Georg. She did not live to see the valley prosper with good rains, great prices and bumper crops in the post-war years. They had eight children along the way:

1. *Helen Elisabeth (Elsie) - (1888-1944*). Elsie followed her Uncle Joseph's call to Montana, which was one of only eleven states that, in 1914, gave women full equal rights. Under the new 1909 Enlarged Homestead Act, she filed on a claim homesteading 320 acres in Big Horn County, proving it up in 1916, the same year Montana sent the first woman to the U. S. House of Representatives, joining the small club of only about 100,000 other pioneer women who homesteaded the West. She married fellow homesteader, Danish immigrant Chris Hansen (1886-1965) in 1920 and raised five children in Musselshell County: Catherine (1920-2011); George (Bud) (1922-2000); Rita (1923-1948); Mary (1925-1996) and Annabel (1931-1985).
2. *Hermann Joseph (Herman) - (1890-1964)*. Married Anna Ackermann in 1913. They lived and farmed in Morgan Township in Traill County for several years before buying property in Arvilla Township in Grand Forks County in 1946, where he served on the township Board of Supervisors for several years. They raised four children who lived out their lives in the valley: Pauline (1916-2020); Joseph (1918-1999); Francis (1920-1989) and Raymond (1925-1982), the musician, who played the accordion in dance bands throughout the upper Midwest. Ray's widow currently resides on the beautiful farmstead in the 1880s-era home on the banks of the beautiful, and forested Turtle River and farms the land with her son, Gerald. It is located along the route to the old Winship/Burke stagecoach station and is rumored to have once been an overnight option for weary travelers. Many from this family attended the historic reunion.
3. *Marie (Mary) - (1891-1959)*. Married Karl (Carl) Leddige in 1922. They lived and farmed in Stavanger Township near Belmont (Frog Point Landing). He died three plus years into their marriage of complications from appendicitis surgery. She later married John W. Renners Jr.; they lived and farmed in Buxton Township, ultimately moving into Buxton. They had no issue.
4. *George J. (Jr.) - (1893-1968*). Married Pearl Leddige in 1921. They lived in Buxton Township and farmed in Stavanger Township in the twenties where he served as president of the school board, managed farms for absentee landlords and managed the pool hall in Reynolds. Pearl

worked as a clerk in the grain business. After renting a house in town for several years, they bought a home and the building west of the Catholic Church, next to the old town hall and in 1936, he bought the historic 1890s-era Opera House, which he later demolished. He played the concertina, helped organize the Reynolds Cooperative Association (1939) and served on its board, remaining active in it for over a decade. He was a church trustee and served as an alderman on the Reynolds City Council; Pearl led social discussion and Homemaker Club meetings for several years in their home. By the fifties, George was a carpenter in the building and repair industry, helping the local barber build a new shop next to the post office when the one in the old Rockaway Hotel was demolished (1953) and he had to move his business. Pearl was one of the last three switchboard operators at the telephone exchange, later becoming Reynolds postmaster (1961). They had no issue.

5. *Mathilda (Tillie) - (1895-1922)*. Married William (Willie) Leddige in 1918. They lived and farmed west of Reynolds. She died of diphtheria in 1922, leaving a three-year old son, Verdeen (1919-1991), who was raised by his grandparents, Georg & Elisabetha, who grew up in the valley, served in World War II and returned after the war to marry Mildred Weber of Thompson and on Mik's land. They had seven children, five still live in the valley and helped plan and attended the historic reunion.
6. Catharina Marie (Katie/Kate) - (1897-1987). Married Anton (Tony) Leddige in 1923. They lived and farmed west of Reynolds on the Anton Leddige Sr. farm before buying land and a farmstead in the late twenties when they moved to Americus township in Grand Forks County, where they farmed for thirty years. They sold and moved into Reynolds when Interstate 29 came in and claimed their property. They had four children, all active in the Church: Delores (Toots) (1924-2007); Richard (Dick) (1925-1984); Jeanette (1997-1994) and Yvonne (1929-2017). Several of her descendants still live in the area and helped plan and attended the historic reunion.
7. *Theodor Joseph Jacob Aloysius (Theodore/Ted) - (1899-1957*). The only child to attend high school, much less college (Univ. of St. Thomas, St. Paul). He was drafted into the Army early in his first year during the waning days of the Great War. He then worked as a stock boy for a

grocery distribution company in Grand Forks, working his way up to delivery driver and sales. He switched to Coburn School Supply in the mid-twenties as a traveling salesman. His extensive territory throughout North Dakota based him half time in Grand Forks and half in Minot at the height of growth the economic burst Prohibition brought to that city. He married Teresa (Tress) Farrell in Minot in 1936. They moved to Bemidji in 1937 when he accepted a job with a St. Paul Company and took on a large northern Minnesota/eastern North Dakota territory. They lost their first child; three others grew to adulthood: Tom (1942-); Mary (1944-); Katherine (1946-). None of his descendants live in the valley but they were represented at the reunion.

8. *Louis Henry (Louie) - (1900-1980)*. Stayed in Buxton Township and farmed the homestead with George and Elisabetha and their grandson, Verdeen, until WWII took him into the Service, leaving Louie to continue the work of the farm. Louie married Grace Murriel Danielson in 1945. They raised five children: Michael (1950-2017); Richard (1953-); Dale (1955-) Mary (1961-); and Robert (1962-2020). Michael's grandson, John, now owns the homestead property on which Georg acquired the patent signed by President Benjamin Harrison over 130 years ago. Their descendants still live in the valley, and they were well represented at the reunion.

Descendants served their country in major conflicts over the years: the Great War, WWII, Korean War, Viet Nam and elsewhere. Many served as city council and board of supervisor members, mayor, on school boards and as church trustees. Many live in the valley; others came from far afield for the historic reunion.

At the reunion, a fun time was had by all. It was everybody's idea of a successful family get-together.

Graveyard mysteries, though, gradually unfolded.

Early German settlers called it *"God's Acre,"* an endearing term for a final resting place.[4] Located west and south of Reynolds, Calvary Cemetery sits on once-owned family land, deeded to the church for a cemetery in 1897, two years after a parish was established. The family made up a third of the residents that started a collection, moved an old schoolhouse into town from (cousin) John Neubauer's property for use as a temporary church and petitioned the diocese for a parish. It was a mission out of Grand Forks or Larimore earlier with devotional services at Mik and Helena's and the Flory's homes. Burials were a half mile east.. Family members

lent carpentry, masonry and other skills toward a new church in 1897,[5] and later donated to its remodeled in the twenties.

Visiting relatives last fall found Mik, their patriarch, in the third row, the old settlers' section in the southwest corner of the cemetery. Startled by the gravesite's state of disrepair, they could not find her grave. Mik's tall metal cross grave marker, handmade by Helena's nephew, Josef Schotthoefer, was lying in pieces on the ground. They cleaned it and did a temporary silicone repair thinking a more permanent fix would occur this spring. The fix didn't take. The top of the cross was again on the ground along with its protective wood armor.[6] Another temporary repair is underway; a new grave marker is needed. They searched again and walked through the entire cemetery but found no trace of Helena. Mik's wife of 45 years is nowhere to be found in *God's Acre*.[7]

Where is she buried? The plot map in the church basement shows her next to Mik in Plot 24, which means she *should* be at the end of that third row, on the edge of the prairie, overlooking former family-owned fields like she oversaw family operations a century ago. She died fourteen years after her plot was reserved when Mik died in 1908, the only burial that year, which is when written church records actually began, although sporadic records date to 1892. According to a 1945 church brochure, her spot was reserved but there is no marker. Is her half of the plot empty? Is she actually there? Or was she moved later in the twenties when teams, trucks and scrapers converged to level the land and remove curbing "to make it look artistic" (per the 1945 church brochure)? If so, where to? If not, was her marker stolen or run over by machinery or somehow otherwise misplaced or vandalized and tossed in the grass below the trees as were other markers? No records show what kind of a marker she had a century ago. If it was metal, like Mik's and several others in the cemetery, it matched the wrought-iron archway cemetery entrance also made by Helena's nephew, who also crafted the ornate Communion rail between the altar and the pews in the church's early days, both of which were later removed for artistic purposes.[8] Descendants are proud of their heritage and delighted and thankful for the success of the reunion, vowing to stay in touch. But questions remain. Helena's grave mystery lingers.

Enduring hardships unimaginable today, these pioneers and their Bavarian relatives and friends helped create, mold, build and sustain their adopted communities in the Promise Land that was Dakota Territory in the early 1880s. Their contributions helped shape the economy, the rich culture and organic history of this valley.

They earned the right to be found when future generations gather for another reunion or come to visit graves to pay respects or when students come to the cemetery to learn about and study local history. A survey of Calvary Cemetery is being done this summer by the church. Will they find Helena? Hopefully, that will answer that critical question. For information on or to contribute to cemetery upkeep, contact OLPH Church directly.

A collection began at the reunion for a new modest joint grave marker for pioneers Mik and Helena Berthold, one that will allow for a natural, unobstructed view over the once-owned fields their graves now border. For more information or to contribute to the new gravesite marker for Mik and Helena Berthold, please contact Mary DeMers at contractconsultants@gmail.com or **602/552-9584**.

Photos Attached:

1. Berthold Reunion Attendees 2023.
2. *SS Belgenland* and Castle Garden - 1880s-era photos.
3. Ackerman Berthold Threshing Rig, 1915.
4. Georg Berthold family, 1922
5. God's Acre 2023.
6. Calvary Cemetery Entrance (two photos showing exterior w/ wrought iron archway).
7. Michael Berthold gravesite/grave marker 2008 & 2022, exactly one century after Michael & Helena's deaths and 2022-23.
8. 1898 OLPH Church (exterior) and (interior) showing wrought iron Communion rail, 1945.

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1.

Berthold Reunion Attendees, Photo Courtesy: Nancy Andrews

2.

SS Belgenland
Photo courtesy https://wikimedia.org

Castle Garden, NY

Photo and Harpers Bazaar Illustration courtesy Library of Congress,

3.

Ackerman & Berthold Threshing Operation – 13- person crew, September, 1915
"The Golden Age of Agriculture" – North Dakota's wheat crop was its best to date that year.
Photo by Walker Studio, courtesy Jeanette Berthold from Herman Berthold collection

4.

Photo Courtesy Jeanette Berthold from Herman Berthold Collection

Georg Berthold Family
Helena's Funeral
Late October 1922

Georg, 54
Son Ted, 23
Brother Joe, 42
Wife Elisabetha, 53
Son Herman, 32
Joe's Wife Annie, 42
Son George J. (Jr.), 29
Daughter Kate, 25
Son Louie, 22
(Brother Ferdinand & daughter Mary not there; Daughter Tillie died in January that year)

5.

God's Acre, June 2023 - *This land has a story.*

Plot 24, Michael & Helena Berthold gravesite. is directly above the "e" in "God's Acre" caption to this photo. Photo Courtesy: Author

6.

Calvary Cemetery
Photo courtesy USGenWebN, 2008
Note: Metal archway, handmade by Helena's nephew Josef Schotthoefer.

Calvary Cemetery
Photo courtesy Find-a-Grave.com. 2008
Note: Michael & Helena's plot is at the end of 3rd row on far right.

7. Michael Berthold gravesite & marker

2008
Crucifix one century after burial.
Courtesy Stacie ND Find a Grave

2022
Crucifix is broken 14 years later.
Courtesy: Author

Michael Berthold gravesite & marker, 2022-23

Oct. 2022
Temporarily repaired.
Photo courtesy: Author

June 2023
Temporary fix didn't take.
Photo courtesy: Author

8.

1898 photo of OLPH Church, Reynolds, ND
Photo courtesy 1945 OLPH Church Pamphlet

Hand-made Wrought Iron Communion Rail
OLPH Interior photo courtesy 1945 OLPH Church Pamphlet

[1] See Berthold Reunion Attendees 2023 photo.
[2] See *SS Belgenland* immigration ship 1880s photo and 13 Mar 1882 manifest.
[3] See Berthold/Ackerman Operations 1915 photo.
[4] See God's Acre 2023 photo.
[5] See OLPH Church and rectory photo, courtesy 1945 church brochure.
[6] See Plot 24, Michael and Helena Berthold's gravesite photos.
[7] See Calvary Cemetery, 2008 photos.
[8] See Michael Berthold gravesite 2022 and 2023 photos..