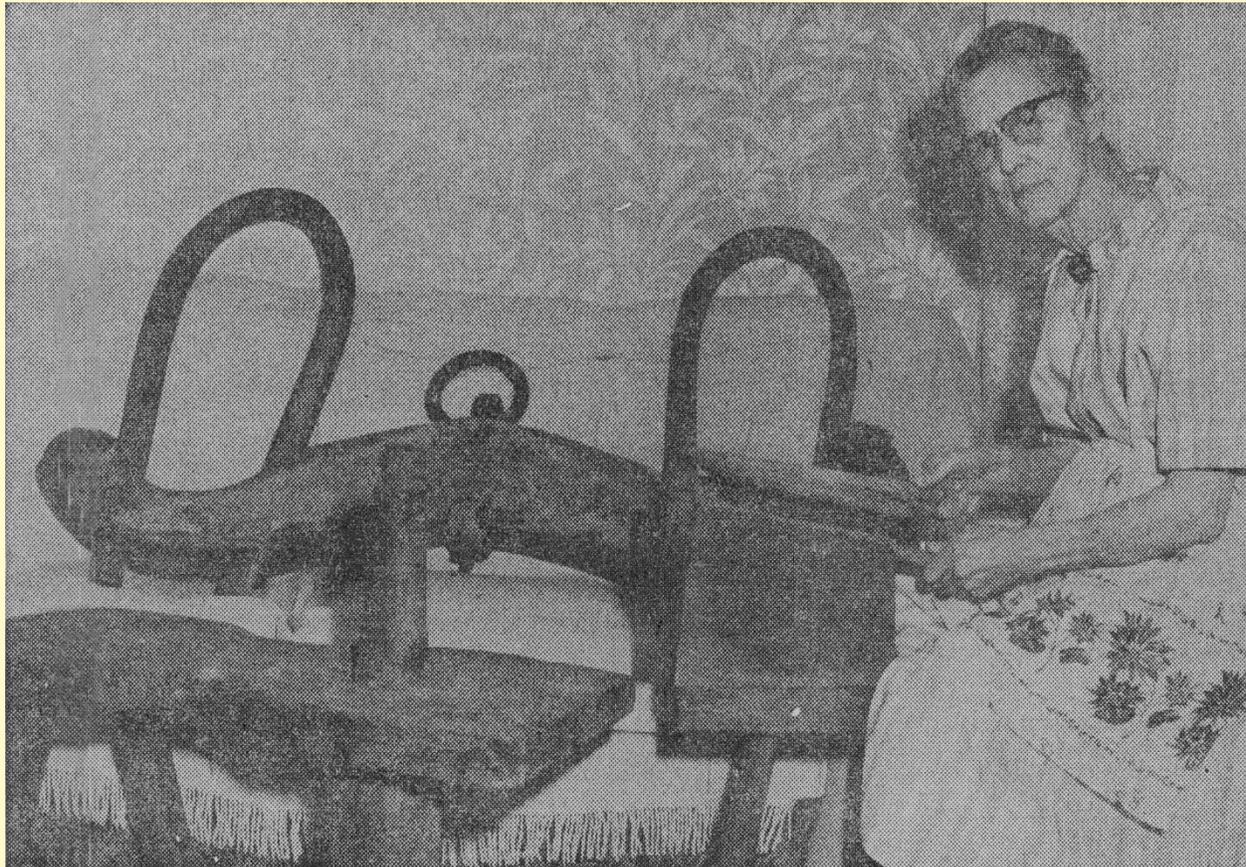


But Sturdy Residents Are Unmoved

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The Face of Dakota Valley Changes



CARDING WOOL ... Mrs. George Zenke holds tools for carding wool. To the left is an anvil for making horseshoe nails, and in the background, an ox yoke used by Nathan Brown, who named Dakota. All implements are over a century old. (Sunday News Photo).

By RUTH ROGERS
Sunday News Area Editor

DAKOTA, Minn. — Mr. and Mrs. George Zenke still live in the shadow of “Grandpa’s Mountains,” as their grandson calls them, but those mountains aren’t natural anymore - mostly

they’re machine made, with men at the controls.

While once a road ran past their place to the top of the bluff to the west, now the Winona County 16 sign, three miles down the road, reads ‘Dead End.’ They’re at the dead end of Dakota

Valley with the eastbound lanes of Interstate 90 rising 150 feet upward from their backyard. To get to their place you drive under a bridge that will carry the westbound traffic when the highway is completed. The

grading's done — only the surfacing remains.

THE DYNAMITING, too, is over; it shattered windows in their home and shook the floors. "Bomber" always let us know when they were going to dynamite," Mrs. Zenke says. They didn't know his name, so they called him "Bomber." "I'll go tell Grandpa", she'd say, until finally one day one of the men asked, "Is he really your grandpa?" No, George is 81 and Emella, his wife, is 80.

The new interstate took 30 acres of their farm, a machine shed, hog house and two chicken coops, leaving only the granary for storage and their home. The sign, "Jesus Saves," which Mr. Zenke built of 8- by 4-foot slabs of concrete back in 1938, has dis-appeared into the slope of the highway. It became a landmark not only for people coming up the valley but for pilots as well; some of them, after seeing it from the air, traveled up the valley by car to get a look from the ground.

The Zenkes rather enjoyed having a ringside seat at this most expensive stretch of any section of Interstate-90 from coast to coast. The 4%-mile stretch from I-90 at

Dakota to the termination of grading at CSAH 12 near Nodine costs in excess of \$1 million per mile.

THE TWO LANES are about half a mile apart near the Zenke place and farther apart down the valley. About half a mile west of their place the Janes draw closer together and converge about 1% miles north- westerly from their place into what will be a cloverleaf when the road is open.

The Zenkes are wondering where the water will go that comes tumbling down the deep drop-off at the head of the valley, and indeed down the steep slope in back of their house, although it already is seeded and they have been told the drainage problem has been adequately handled. A short distance down the valley from their home a culvert — high enough to walk through — runs through the base of the eastbound lanes made of both hills and fills, so that Zenke had no choice but to sell his farmland on the south side. Louis Unnasch, who has a farm on the other side, bought it.

ALTHOUGH THE Zenkes' views have been cut to the south, motorists on this stretch will have spectacular

views in all directions — just so the east- bound drivers won't be so enthralled that they'll come tumbling down the embankment into Zenke's yard and hit a flint millstone 4 feet 8 inch- es in diameter that he has mounted there. It was the netherstone from the set, imported from France, that ground flour and grain at Money Creek for Houston and Winona County pioneers.

George has been a collector ever since he started picking up Indian arrowheads on Rose Hill, now called Nodine, New Hartford Township. Incidentally, his father, Rudolph Zenke, encountered surveyors up on Rose Hill, too, just as surveyors invaded Dakota Valley when Interstate 90 was being planned. But these early surveyors, platting land for Ira Beach, who owned the hilltop, couldn't find a place to eat or a store to buy food, so they called the area "Nodine." That's the story of how Nodine got its name, By the time George was a young man — he was born in 1886 at Nodine — he went courting Emella Winter of Dakota Valley on a Morgan horse called Pat. By the time he returned from the Philippine Insurrection in

1910 to marry Emella, the Wright Brothers had their first airplane on exhibition. He saw it.

HE HAS LIVED to see three highways built up the Mississippi River from La Crescent past Dakota. In his collection of antiques, mostly of handmade farm tools, he has an anvil mounted on a bench that was used by George Boynton who came to La Crescent when it was a sandbar. On this anvil he made nails for shoes for horses and oxen.



George Zenke

“Sometimes he worked all night when the roads were icy,” George said. “He had to — the animals couldn’t pull without shoes.” Zenke’s father, Rudolph Zenke, and his first wife were born in the hinterland of Pomerania, the northeastern province of Germany that borders the

Baltic Sea. They came from Stettin to U.S, and settled in La Crosse, where he was a car repairman in the Milwaukee railroad shops. He saved his money and bought a farm near Nodine. The first house there was a log cabin with a dirt floor. After the death of his first wife, Rudolph married Pauline Radsek, who was George’s mother. “My father was so honest he wouldn’t throw a stone onto another man’s farm,” George says.

HE ATTENDED Dick School, which still stands on the hill. On the farm he acquired his love for horses, particularly after a traveling man gave him a mare with foal. He called her Kit. She gave birth out in the pasture, and two days later George found her dead under a white oak tree that had been struck by lightning. White oaks are most susceptible to lightning, George says. The colt was alive, but her source of nourishment was gone, George solved that by taking her milk in a pie tin. Soon she was lapping it up. As he was readying to go to the Philippines, he tried to sell the colt for a dollar. There were no takers.

Albinus Lilly, who started the first bank at La Crescent, loved horses. When he came

to the hill to bargain for her George told him, “You don’t want that horse,” but Mr. Lilly did, and gave him \$150 for the colt. That was in 1906. When George got back from the Pacific, Lilly told him he would have paid \$1,000 for the colt if he had asked.

GEORGE TRIED to enlist in 1906 but was too young — not yet 21. Finally, his mother signed for him and by 1907 he was off to the little remembered war caused when Aguinaldo returned to take the Philippines back.

George was in Company C, 30th Infantry, and worked with the 10th Calvary, all Negroes, | the same cavalry that rescued | Teddy Roosevelt at San Juan Hill in Cuba during the Spanish-American War. “There never were better soldiers,” he said. He was urged to re-enlist, but he went back to Dakota and married Emella Winter on Aug. 31, 1910.

EMELLA WAS born July 8, 1887, in Dakota Valley to Leonard Brown, descendant of Nathan Brown, first settler in the village he named Dacotah for his friends the Indians, the name later being changed to its present spelling, His wife was the former Emma Winter. At 12

Emella and her sister Elsie, 2% years older, were sent off to Winona for the education which their father insisted they should have. They were installed in a three-room apartment in the Willis Vance house — bedroom, study room and kitchen. They traveled by lumber wagon. As Mr. Brown was a Winona County commissioner, he delivered food to them whenever he went to meetings. Emella cried bitterly — she was only 12, and homesick and frightened. But she attended the Winona Normal and became a teacher. She first substituted at the Whitlock School and by 17 she was a regular teacher in Dakota Valley, earning \$25 a month, building fire each morning in the heater, and carrying drinking water from the creek. She taught also at Dresbach, Richmond and Kellogg before she and George, both 23 at the time, were married in the Dakota Methodist Church. Although built in May 1856, it still is in use.

GEORGE had attended a Wisconsin Synod Lutheran Church on the hill, his father's church, although his mother had been brought up as a Methodist. He explained to his father that

traveling up the hill to his home church, especially through winter snows, was too difficult, so he not only became a Methodist but a lay preacher as well. When he was called to fill pulpits at Caledonia, Spring Grove, La Crescent, Winona, La Crosse and elsewhere, Emella stayed home and did the chores. They first lived in Dakota Valley, then on 90 acres in the "Banana Belt" on the edge of Dakota Village where they raised berries. I-90 also took their former farm at Dakota.

Early in manhood George became afflicted with rheumatism, perhaps an offshoot of his days in the rice paddies, so they went west in search of a better climate, visited Seattle, and settled on a ranch in Montana within 60 miles of the Canadian border. In the dry climate George's rheumatism disappeared. He worked the land with the two bachelor brothers who owned thousands of acres, and Emella did the cooking.

THE brothers wanted them to stay — would leave them all their holdings — but the folks from the Mississippi Valley couldn't bear to see everything dry up from lack of moisture, so they returned and George lived an active

life despite his miseries, When he wasn't farming, he was working for the Gideon Society placing Bibles in schools, preaching, teaching Sunday school, reading his Bible, collecting antiques and entertaining friends. Their house was always noted for its hospitality,

Today's God is dead cult, the hippies, the communists — "they have reprobate minds," said George, as Emella thumbed through a concordance almost falling apart from long use to find references to the reprobate, unbelieving and corrupt — Romans 1:28, 2nd Corinthians 13:5, and 2nd Timothy 3:8.

"Those sleigh bells hanging on the wall belonged to Dr. Frank Powell," said George." He was called White Beaver because of his Indian blood, was mayor of La Crosse and was a close friend of Buffalo Bill." Dr. Powell and his two doctor brothers practiced in La Crosse, and one of them was Emella's doctor in the early days.

Emella has preserved two for George. They have a full set of implements for turning sheep's wool into warm footwear — a carder from Ireland, Skeiner and spinning

wheel from Germany, and domestic knitting needles.

ONE OF THE people they befriend is Harold Beach, Dakota bachelor, who is



from one of the three Beach families that settled in Dakota. His father, Noah, came here from

the Ichabod Crane country of New York.

The Zenkes have one daughter, Mrs. Elmer (Georgia Jane) Karg, Melrose Park, Ill., who with her family visited them over the holidays. The children left them their pedigreed French Beach poodle, Uncle Louie, for company. They're also keeping their grandson's imported guinea pig.

The cardinals which share food in a bird feeder outside with sparrows and an occasional crow have found their way back to the Zenke yard after the rumble of heavy road machinery has died down. Only a solitary crane remains atop one of Grandpa's Mountains and a rough road leading to it are reminders that there was little quiet in Dakota Village during the last two summers.