

John Meyer journeyed half way across America to establish a new home in Minnesota Territory. The exact location, be it in the city, on the prairie, near the woods, or in the valley depended upon a son, an uncle, a brother, cousin, or a neighbor who had gone before him.

When John Meyer stepped off the boat in the harbor of New York on May 29, 1853, he felt like a stranger; but when he disembarked from the Minnesota River Steamer at New Ulm, Minnesota and heard his friend say "Velkommen" he felt like and an American.

On August 20, 1857 he truly became one. On that day he walked into the courthouse at New Ulm to read and signed the paper of intention to become a citizen of the United States of America and renounce allegiance and fidelity to the King of Wurttemberg.

Shortly after that John knocked on the door of the Zitzlaff home. This had not been the first time he had done so. Ever since John Zitzlaff, a middle-aged widower from Nackel Province, Posen Preuszen, Germany had come in on the Minnesota River Steamer bringing with him three beautiful young daughters, every eligible bachelor in New Ulm knew about this family; but John knew that there were just two unattached young ladies, the sparkling 15 year old Wilhelmina and the attractive brunette Caroline with whom he had fallen in love. The third daughter, Anna, had been married to Johann Sieg in Germany and they together with their three daughters were making their home for the time being with her father. A son, Micheal, had been detained in the Old Country because he fell within the age group of the standing army. Plans were made for John and Caroline to wed as soon as Michael arrived in Minnesota. On September 18, Michael arrived and Caroline became a bride the next day.

The future was bright for the new immigrants; children were born, Wilhelmemina met and fell in love with William lenenfeldt, as did Michael with Mary Juni. Every day was exciting and then suddenly the great news flashed from person to person that the Sioux Indians had just sold the northern half of their reservation to the United States Government meaning that a ten mile strip of land on the other side of the Minnesota River would be open for settlement.

Men started to cross the river; the lucky ones took the first "claims" they saw, land near Fort Ridgely. The Benedict Juni family left New Ulm in time to claim land near Beaver Creek in Renville County. Of course, the Zitzlaffs wanted to establish claims too but because of the many personalities involved a departure date needed to be agreed upon. Naturally, Michael wished to follow the Juni family; Wilhelmina engaged to William lenenfeldt, could not invite him along with her folks since her father insisted that age 15 was too young for her to marry; she did not want to leave without him. A family conference including William was held producing a solution: the two Zitzlaffs, Sieg, and Meyer agreed to stake claims on 4 quarter sections of land and to do their best to save one adjoining one for lenenfeldt. The family caravan arrived in Renville County only to discover that all the land had been settled along the creeks flowing into the Minnesota River as far as Beaver Creek. They immediately drove on toward the northwest; after traveling three miles they found plenty of land still available. There at their feet lay five empty quarter sections of land, all choice locations and adjacent to one another. Right then and there they decided to build their homes; their barnyards on the bluffs of the Minnesota River amidst the hills of virgin timber with a view of the beautiful valley below and the virgin prairie for their fields behind them, For five happy years the families thrived; Michael and Mary were married as were William and Wilhelmina who shortly became parents of Bertha born April 13, 1862.

August 18, 1862 was the day Wilhelmina Zitzlaff lenenfeldt was to take her turn to do the family trading. She and her brother Michael were to collect the produce from all the families then be on their way to the trading post located at the Lower Sioux Agency. The Indians were on the warpath before she and Michael ever crossed the river. She mounted Michael's wagon, with her baby in one arm and a basket of eggs in the other, just a few minutes ago she had said good-by to her husband. Michael hastily stuffed his watch, which showed 7 A.M. into his pocket and carefully set the basket of eggs on the floor of the wagon-box. With one foot on the ground and the other on the hub of the wheel he

grasped the back of the spring seat and bounced up beside her. His pretty young wife standing there beamed up when she saw the look in his eye and answered in a happy scolding voice, "Michael, you know can't ride anywhere in my condition." They proceeded to the Sieg's then on to the Meyer's and finally to the Juni's where Mr. Robinson, an Indian half-breed living near the ferry, suddenly darted out ahead of them signaling them to stop, gesturing in the direction of the reservation where they saw flames enveloping the entire agency. Shots rang out; Mr. Robinson tried to be calm but excitedly said that the white men's cows were being shot because the Indians were hungry; he told them to go home, that the Indians would come to their home but give them the cattle and they would be left alone. Michael turned the wagon around and headed northwest. When he spied Indians in the direction of Henderson's they were not chasing cattle; they were riding Mr. Henderson's white horse and seemed to be going somewhere in a dreadful hurry (Mrs. Henderson and the children had just been killed). They decided to warn all of their neighbors and relatives and have them gather as fast as possible at a central location, Michael's house, and flee 19 miles to Fort Ridgely.

They made their plans as they drove; time was of the essence; Wilhelmina would fetch William as Caroline, who was caring for Bertha, was not expecting her return until later in the day; Michael would privately tell his father to unhitch the oxen and yoke them to the other wagon then quickly load supplies on to the hayrack; talk to the three girls and caution them to be brave then talk to his wife, Mary, trying not to frighten her as she was close becoming a mother. Knowing that Michael would be stopping at both the Sieg's and the Meyer's, Wilhelmina asked him to bring Bertha back to her as she knew Caroline would have enough to do as John was not home. William agreed as they entered his yard; immediately he stopped the wagon and told Wilhelmina to jump down and take the short cut through the woods she would arrive home sooner. In retrospect she wondered if he had seen Indians hiding. She dashed wildly down the path in the woods; feelings of uneasiness turned to alarm; anticipating the worst; the terrible thought that William was dead rushed into her mind. Suddenly she was home; in the turn of the road she stood dead still reading the tragic message which was being fluttered out by the hundreds and hundreds of feathers flying in the air around about the body of William lying dead on the doorstep. There she stood, transfixed, frozen in horror, studying the part of the world that had been hers; the array of flattened feather beds emptied of their fluffiness; the pieces of beautifully hand-carved furniture split and splintered then strewn in every direction; the cackling of chickens disturbed, running hither and yon all about the barnyard; the quickly disappearing barn being burned down as the flames leaped from the haymow on fire. As she turned to leave for the last time, she thought she could never forget the sights she had seen yet knew she must not remember this about William. She started then stopped to look once more then in the wild agony of grief turned and fled to her brother's house. Panting, she arrived and told her shocking story.

None of her family said a word, Caroline knew what to do; she handed Bertha to Wilhelmina who in the moment of grief would not accept her. Caroline looked shocked and simply said "SHE IS!" Because Bertha had not seen her mother since the early morning she went into a rapturous act of happiness which calmed Wilhelmina. That feeling lasted for just a moment for just as Michael signaled the oxen to move Mr. Hauf, a neighbor appeared calling, "Wait, my wife has just been killed!" When he broke the news the Zitzlaff party panicked. One death report following another was more than anyone could stand. Lamentations were voiced by almost everyone. Only one in the party, Johann Sieg, could think clearly enough to offer a solution; the Indians seemed to be to the southeast near the Henderson's; to the southwest near Ienenfeldt's and Mr. Hauf maintained they were in a northwesterly direction; they chose to go north up the hill then drive east on the Prairie Road to Fort Ridgely. Twenty rods away the Prairie Road led past a field of standing corn, corn too short for a grown man to hide in, but that's where twenty warriors and some squaws were crouching. As soon as the wagon approached the spot where they were hiding, twenty savages jumped up; as one stopped the oxen, amidst ear-splitting noise they attacked. Pandemonium broke loose as there wicked, piercing yells frightened the children; the close-knit family, never before closer, clung to each other horrified. Immediately a shot was fired; Michael crumpled to the ground, dead. The elder Zitzlaff shouted that they should dash for safety; everyone ran in the direction of the trees and hills. (The Indians believed it was unmanly to shoot women and children

unless they were about to escape.) The enemy swept down the hillside and saw that no one escaped. The fastest runners were the first to be killed.

The events of the forenoon had taken their toll on Wilhelmina, she was tired after having run so much and fell down into the grass wanting to close her eyes which seemed hypnotically held open in hysteria. It was not only that she had to listen to the infernal racket but also had to watch the violently fierce savages, crouched, crawled, skulked, ran, and fired upon one after another of her relatives. Although it was just minutes it seemed like hours that she lay there; finally gathering the courage to get to her feet with her baby in her arms she tried desperately to catch up with the others until realizing there were no others, all had been killed but Mary who was half running, half walking toward her. Suddenly Wilhelmina realized she was about to be killed. She recognized that Indian: he was the industrious hunter who had come across the ice last March, when suddenly the valley floor flooded he found himself stranded on the white man's side of the river and accepted the hospitality of the Ilenfeldt's. His prolonged stay at their house provided a double measure of good luck for Wilhelmina; undoubtedly conscience stricken that warrior behaved badly with his gun...saving her life. He leveled his gun then with a wild fierceness pulled the trigger. The cap snapped, but the weapon didn't go off -- once, twice, three times it did this. That was the end. He lowered his gun and said, "Wash ta" which meant "good" in their language. (The Sioux believed if a shot didn't hit the mark after three tries the one being fired upon was protected by the "Great Spirit". Her knowledge of the Sioux language received from him proved profitable in captivity).

The Indian protection of Wilhelmina and her baby immediately went into action; she was given three bodyguards. One squaw grasped her left arm another her right arm and a third pushing from behind. She couldn't see Mary so called out to her not to leave her; just then a shot rang out; she was now alone with her baby. Her husband William Ilenfeldt was dead; her father John Zitzlaff was dead her only brother Michael and his wife Mary; her sister Anna and husband Johann Sieg and their four children Louisa, Emmy, Amelia, and Freddy; and her other sister Caroline Meyer her son Johnny and two daughters Sarah and Lydia were all dead. Wilhelmina wanted to die too, but her begging them to do so was ignored; they merely proceeded onward. That terrible feeling of anxiety for the nearness of danger, listing for the rustle in the bushes and the snapping of the twigs was gone. The sadness of seeing her loved ones die in anguish now possessed her and filled her with such grief that she felt weak and dizzy and as she would swoon. The hot sun evaporated her strength, however under the pressure of a tap on the shoulder, a squeeze on the arm, and a hard push or a long pull depending upon the mood of her captors, she kept going all the while wishing she had the bonnet she had lost somewhere in her haste to escape.

Renville County settlers traveled on roads, which ran east and west only with the exception of the dead-end road at the place where the Redwood Ferry carried passengers across to the reservation side of the river. Before 1857 Sioux hunters roamed freely over a twenty-mile wide area on either side of the river. In their former wanderings they had carved paths through the woods leading to the water.

Wilhelmina's captors led her down one of the Indian paths taking a by-pass only when a deserted cabin beckoned. When they stopped at the Reynolds Inn, after crossing the river in a dugout canoe, they found a large looking-glass hanging on the wall; they removed it but found it was too heavy to carry.

After taking turns looking into it they left it against a fence.

A great feeling of weariness both mental and physical came over Wilhelmina as they entered the village of Chief Shakopee's village; feeling that she could not walk into the home of those who had destroyed hers; sensing her reluctance her captives pushed her into the tepee. She was told she was to have a room in the tepee but couldn't see it; all she could see was a fire in the center, which was all that was needed to explain privacy without benefit of walls or curtains. She was told to come in on the right and go out the same way; never passing around the fire, to do so would be entering someone else's space. Wilhelmina sat down feeling more dejected, sitting there in one place and seeing nothing but the flickering flames. She fed Bertha and tucked the quilt in around her too tired to sing the cradlesong; she

closed her eyes and gave thanks to God for the tepee bed for her baby. Although she was told she would have a room, her privacy was invaded immediately upon retiring. She settled, fully dressed, upon a buffalo robe covering a bunk when two squaws spreading out her wide skirt laid don upon it; one on the right the other on the left and went to sleep yet awakened each time Wilhelmina moved. After many sleepless hours mourning her dead family, long after midnight, she heard a voice softly say "Please Don't"; it was Mrs. Wakefield, wife of the doctor at the Upper Agency, addressing her; she had just been brought in as a captive.

The next morning she looked up at the prairie sky so still and beautiful and tried to cast off the "pioneer panic" she had been experiencing. Those were dreadfully anxious days, those 39 days of captivity, but with God's help she never panicked again.

Wilhelmina was at liberty to go to the river to fetch water each morning but was unaware that the oldest squaw in the tepee noting the time it took running the errand, followed. She had just finished hanging the freshly washed baby clothes on a nearby bush; not knowing the squaw was near by until she heard the baby cry and saw the Indian woman carry her at arms length and throw her into the water. Rescuing Bertha, realizing they both could have drowned, hearing her cry and being so happy to have been able to have saved her, she too began to cry.

After three attempts at murder failed, Bertha became popular with the boys. They might have called her a crybaby and left her to die at the hands of the Indians who would not tolerate any tears, let alone those of a baby who cried too loudly, too long, too often. Discovering that Bertha was slowly being starved to death, three neighborhood boys, August Busse, Ludwig Kitzman, and August Gluth came to her rescue. Their general assignment as prisoners in the camp was to care for the oxen taken in plunder. Each day as they drove past the tepee they stopped, dug into their pockets for food they had saved or begged from other captives and gave it to Wilhelmina, enabling her to continue to nurse.

Two younger, kinder squaws from the same tepee, seeing that Bertha acted very much alive decided that she too must be under the protection of the "Great Spirit" and from that day on she was under their special care. Little Gustav Kitzman aged 3, a captive living in Wilhelmina's tepee, lived for the moments when his brother Ludwig stopped by to play and give him hazelnuts. Ludwig had gone back to his tepee; Gustav's mother wasn't there to teach him to share; that afternoon when the Indian children tried to take some hazelnuts Gustav pinched them and pulled their hair. That evening when he cried and anted to go out to find his brother the Indians killed him. When Ludwig came in again, he and Wilhelmina had a conference and decided that Indians killed for many reasons and that the last of the Zitzlaffs and the last of the Kitzmans must escape. At midnight, knowing that he was waiting outside she tried in vain to free her skirt held in place by her to body guards.

Seeing that Wilhelmina could sew, she was kept busy with the needle working on cloth taken in plunder. The outer and inner folds of the women's skirts fascinated her and she gladly consented to wear one. The long skirt was a comfortable protection while sitting on the damp ground and was made shorter by doubling the folds under the sash before walking through the high prairie grass.

The Indian women, however, vied for finer clothes, those of diverse colors, decorated with silk ribbons, glass beads and bands of embroidery. Her captor, discovering a heavily and tastefully decorated blanket in possession of her neighbor despite the fact she knew it had been stolen from the warehouse, offered her \$50.00 for it. She didn't have money but she had been expecting some ever since the first of July. The stagecoach coming from St. Paul turned off the Henderson Road at noon on Tuesday August 19th and entered the grounds at Fort Ridgely carrying the Indian annuity \$70,000 in gold. Washington D.C. had been twenty-four hours too late!

While upon occasion the Indians vied for finer apparel the women were far too busy working to be clothes conscious; they never knew what it was like to be able to choose what to wear. Whenever orders

were given to move they put everything on their body; twined beads around their neck, dismantled their homes and readied the travois while the camp crier, on horseback, called "Oh...oh...he...yi...yi...ye...ho...ye. Together with all of the thousands of Indians, Wilhelmina trembled when she heard that voice echo up and down the rows of tepees shaking every home from its foundation. She knew full well that the break-up of camp would again leave Wilhelmina Ienenfeldt address unknown.

Suddenly at noon on Friday, September 26th, Sioux on an Indian pony, Colonel H.H. Sibley took formal possession of the Indian camp and demanded the release of all prisoners. The site upon which this took place has been preserved and is known as Camp Release, Montevideo, Minnesota. Chiefs Shakopee, Red Middle Voice, Medicine Bottle, and Little Crow were not there to see or hear that surrender. They were somewhere out on the prairie fleeing toward the setting sun. The prisoners heard the officer say that they would be sent down to Fort Ridgely that very day with as many comforts as could possibly be furnished. Wilhelmina did not know that a "special soldier" would come to speak to her introducing himself as Fredrick Grose age 21 of the First Regiment of Mounted Rangers, Company L Cavalry asking if he could accompany her; she accepted and began to weep. She hadn't wept since losing her family, but when she heard his kind voice she thought that she had no one to go to flashed across her mind and she continued to weep. As she leaned heavily on Fredrick's arm that afternoon she became unsteady on her feet as he assisted her down the hillside and onto the waiting wagon. At sundown when the chill fall air of the open prairie blew over she and the baby, Frederick lifted the folded blanket from the spring-seat on which they sat and laid it over them. Others riding with them in one of the six wagons were seven children ranging in age from 5 to 13, who obediently followed the rules for riding: they could kneel, sit, squat, but could not stand up while the wagon was moving.

That evening when the procession stopped each of the six groups of refugees gathered around separate campfires and ate a supper of pancakes and coffee prepared by a soldier escort. Being the only adult in the group, Wilhelmina waited until the exuberant children had been served then she and Frederick ate together.

Sunday, September 23, 1862, the birthday anniversary she didn't celebrate would be the one longest remembered; she had left her teens behind; was now twenty years old and a whole new world was opening up for two people. Fredrick did not mention "Happy Birthday", but took her hand in his and said that he loved her and asked if she thought she could leave the tragedy behind her. Soberly, he added that he had known the definition of a courageous woman ever since he was 9 years old. His widowed mother had set sail from Brandenburg, Germany with two children. She reached America with only one; his little sister had taken sick on the ship, died, and was buried at sea. Wilhelmina gasped; she knew his mother who lived in the Sacred Heart Creek settlement and went to the Middle Creek Church.

The first battle of the Civil War was fought on June 10, 1861. On April 13, 1862, when the news of the surrender of Fort Sumter was flashed all over Washington, Honorable Alexander Ramsey, Governor of Minnesota, visiting in the nation's capitol, telegraphed to St. Paul requesting and immediate call for troops. The First Minnesota Infantry answered that call to go south to fight.

It was providential that the First Minnesota Cavalry "Company L" answered the call of its own North Star Stateprovidential for Wilhelmina Zitzlaff Ienenfeldt as one year later she became the bride of Frederick Grose in LeSeuer, Minnesota. This union was blessed with 3 sons and 7 daughters.