

THE STORY OF
TWO FAMILIES
AND THEIR
TIMES



CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE BECKVILLE / LITCHFIELD YEARS

The Settlement of the Prairie

By the time John and Hattie Chilstrom decided to go west in 1879 they were part of a huge movement of settlers to the prairies of Minnesota. In spite of the trauma of the Sioux Uprising and the questions they had about the fertility of the land, the tide of immigration could not be stopped. Little Crow was right -- it was futile for the Indians to try to fight the invasion of the White man. The military suppressed the Indians while the entrepreneurs pressed for more and more of their land.

In his history of Minnesota, Folwell gives a somewhat inflated picture of life on the prairie, describing how alluring the Minnesota landscape was for these newcomers:

Settlers who arrived at their claims early in the season often planted a crop of sod corn and potatoes by dropping the seed into clefts with an ax. Of self-sown pasturage there was no lack and there was plenty of good forage for animals in the tall grasses of the bottoms or in the shorter growths of the uplands to be had for the cutting. Before the snows should fly the farmer had good time to run up a 'stack' or, what was far more comfortable, a sod house and a similar shelter for his animals. Happy months and sometimes years even were passed in those primitive dwellings in which one might have seen the latest magazines, good books, and violins and pianos. In from three to five years the settler would have his farm as completely subdued and improved as that of the farmer in the timber after twenty years of exhausting labor.

It was not necessary for the thrifty prairie farmer to live long in his shack or sod house. The managers of sash and blind factories in the principal river towns early developed a plan for furnishing all the timber, boards, shingles, and finishings for houses, as well as the doors and windows and their frames, and shipping them out in carload lots. On a ready foundation the balloon frame of light timbers, nailed together without mortise or tenon, was soon run up, and the roofboards and shingles were nailed on. The right sheathing of the walls next went on, often reinforced by a layer of heavy tarred paper. Outside of these was put the siding which had been planed smooth at the factory. The frames for doors and windows

were next put into their places and the moldings were run around the openings. When the floors were laid, the stairs built, and the doors and windows adjusted, the house was habitable for summer weather. Plastering followed at convenience or, if materials were not at hand, linings of building paper were used instead. With air-tight wood stoves or base-burning coal stoves the family was comfortable even when the fiercest of cold waves swept over the prairie.

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Settlers also discovered that the land was generous with natural fruits and native berries: high bush cranberry, wild strawberry, huckleberry, blueberry and red and black raspberry.

The lure of cheap or free acreage overcame any reservations some may have had. Between 1860 and 1870 the population of Minnesota nearly doubled -- from 265,000 to nearly 440,000. A key factor was the building of railroads. Rail lines extended to what had been the "back counties" of the state and brought with them an explosion of population growth. Folwell comments about the 1870 census:

The commissioner of statistics congratulated the state on these accessions of 'the best blood of Europe': the Scandinavians, honest and laborious, with sympathy for popular institutions; the Germans, 'with an intellectual organism in which the massive properties and the tough Saxon fiber needed for laborious research are mingled with the finer qualities of the musician and the prophetic spirit of the poet'; and the Irish, with their 'muscular power and gifts of a warm and impassioned nature.'

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Wheat became the principal crop as farmers began to settle in and were able to raise more food than they needed for themselves. That, in turn, spurred the development of something that still marks the Minnesota landscape -- grain elevators. The first of them were built with flat timbers, piled one on top of another and spiked together. These structures were called "elevators" because of the apparatus that lifted the grain from the ground to the top of the building, and then dumped it out to pile up in huge quantities inside the "elevator." The site for an "elevator" was determined by railroad officials. That, in turn, determined where a town would grow up. In many cases -- as with my home town of "Litchfield" -- the communities were named after a railroad official. In the case of "Litchfield", it was an Englishman who invested in the railroad but never actually visited the city named after him. His wife, however, sent a generous donation to help start the local Episcopal (Anglican) congregation.



them
inside
grow
new

With the Sioux Uprising and the Civil War behind them, the people of Minnesota entered a period of several decades when they experienced peace and prosperity, the exception being the grasshopper plagues from 1873 to 1876. The Nelsons and Chilstroms were fortunate to be in the southeastern part of the State during those years. That corner of Minnesota was spared the worst onslaught of the grasshopper plagues. As a young child I recall conversations among the adults

who described how the grasshoppers devastated the land, eating everything in their path, including clothing and the handles of tools. No doubt these were stories the Chilstroms heard from earlier settlers in the south central part of Minnesota -- stories that lingered for generations.

John and Hattie Chilstrom Move to Beckville/Litchfield

In 1879 John and Hattie Chilstrom left Goodhue County and moved to Meeker County and the Beckville community a few miles southwest of Litchfield. It appears almost certain that Hattie's sister Mathilda and her husband Gustav Coleman traveled with them since the Chilstroms and Colemans staked a common claim to 320 acres of land. Sisters Hattie and Mathilda must have taken great comfort in knowing that they would be living on adjacent farms. In 1886 they separated their land into two 160 acre farms. The farm homes, however, were separated by less than a half mile.

Why Beckville and Litchfield? It's possible that Hans Mattson, the man who led the first Swedes to settle at Vasa in Goodhue County, played a part. Mattson went on to become a State official and a key figure in encouraging Swedes to settle in Minnesota. Not only did he appeal to those in Sweden to come; he also urged settlers in Goodhue County who had no land claim to move to the communities along the new rail lines that were stretching across Minnesota.

*An 1870 plat map
the Chilstroms and
Colemans owned
acres of land
together*



*shows
320*

All along the route from
Minneapolis and west --

Cokato, Stockholm, Dassel, Litchfield, Grove City, Atwater, Willmar, Pennock, Benson, and other villages -- Swedes claimed land near these rail centers, knowing they would have a means of getting their products to market. Many of the settlements were located on abandoned sites of "squatter" claims that predated the Sioux Uprising. I've wondered, given the number of settlers coming to Minnesota and the somewhat late date that they moved to Beckville/Litchfield, how my grandfather could get homesteaded property. This may be the answer.

We can try to picture the Chilstrom family as they arrive at Litchfield, probably by train. As they

disembark and go to their new “home” on the prairie, John is 35, Hattie is 32. As for the children, Mina (Minnie) is about 9, Edward is 7, Anton is 5, and Malvina is 2.

Although it was “free land” that required only a \$14.00 filing fee, that was only the beginning of their expenses. It has been estimated that it cost the average homestead farmer about \$1,000 to acquire certain minimal items needed to get started: a plow and a harrow, an ax, a spade, a pitchfork, and a scythe or a grain cradle -- a tool that both cut and gathered grain at the same time. This was no small amount of money in those days and surely meant having a mortgage that would take years to pay off. An ox and a wagon were also needed. Though very slow, an ox had the power to help turn the heavy sod. They would also eat most any kind of hay.

It’s hard to imagine that the family would have brought all these items with them if they came by train. I have to assume they either purchased them after they arrived or borrowed them from neighbors. Given the fact that the Coleman farm was only a short distance away, I assume that the two families cooperated in many of their early farming ventures, possibly buying implements together, or agreeing to buy different implements with the understanding that the other family could use them.

It’s possible, of course, that they had access to a McCormick reaper. Sometimes neighboring farmers purchased one together. Cyrus McCormick from Virginia invented his first reaper in 1831 and began mass producing it in a Chicago factory in 1847. Whether there was one available, or whether the Chilstroms and Colemans could afford one at that time, we will never know.



Did John and Hattie have all these essentials? Was the homestead site completely barren of trees? What was their first home like? Was it a sod hut? Or did some kind of shelter already stand on the land? Unfortunately, we will probably never know the answer to all these questions.

Sod houses were built by piling blocks of sod on top of one another. The tough roots acted as a shield against rain and snow. By this time the source for heat was usually an iron stove rather than a fireplace. Kerosene lamps were available for light.

Water, of course, was a problem. Thus, the first task was usually to dig a well. The Chilstroms lived on the north side of Swan Lake. As I recall, the farm was separated from the lake by a large, swampy area. The only way to get clean water for human consumption was to dig a well. Fortunately, the water table not far from the lake would have been high enough to dig what was called a “shallow well,” finding potable water 15 to 30 feet below ground.

What about fencing in whatever cattle they may have had? The most common practice was to fence only the fields of grain and the vegetable garden. The livestock roamed freely. A summertime chore for children was to follow the cattle and make certain they were kept in range.

Turning over more sod and clearing any brush or trees was always waiting to be done when a farmer had finished other tasks. Repair of tools and buildings was an ongoing chore. Caring for livestock, arranging for animals to be bred, putting up hay for the winter, taking day-long trips to town for supplies -- there was never a day when a farmer wondered what to do.

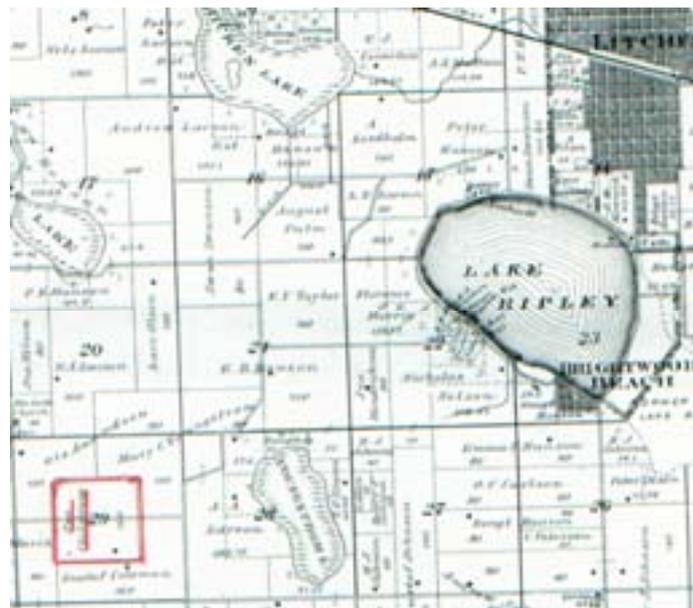
Besides cooking, cleaning, washing, and caring for the youngest children, there was soap making, sewing and mending clothing, canning and storing fruits and vegetables for the winter – these were the farm wife’s responsibility. If they had a cow -- which I assume they did -- there was milking and butter and cheese making. Chickens were usually the responsibility of the wife.

Often overlooked is the role women played in giving stability to economic life on the farm. When crops failed or prices were depressed it was the income pioneer women produced from milking cows and caring for poultry that saw the family through lean times. When butter and eggs could be produced in quantity sufficient not only for the family but for cash income, this proved a lifeline for these families.

When it came time for harvesting the grain, the custom was for neighboring men to get together and cooperate with each other. Then the farm wife, with the help of her neighbors, would have the challenge of feeding all of these hungry workers. Not only would there be the main meal at noon; it was also expected that an ample lunch of sandwiches, fruit and cake would be brought to the field both morning and afternoon. When there was illness, she was the first line of defense, often relying on remedies handed down from her mother. Sometimes a “doctor book” helped her to identify a case of chicken pox or mumps or even more serious illnesses. It was also an age when a plethora of “patent medicines” were advertised as cure-alls for most any malady. For the wife, the saying that “a woman’s work is never done” rang true.

I can easily envision all these things as the Chilstroms were getting settled on their homestead.

As they moved to their new surroundings, more children were born. Sigfred arrived the next spring -- in March of 1880. Then Agnes Victoria and finally Walfred in 1888.



1897 plat map showing the Chilstrom farm separated Coleman farm. It was done

from the in 1886.

Beckville Lutheran Church:

It would be impossible to overestimate the importance of the churches in pioneer settings. Barbara Handy-Marchello puts it well:

In worship services and social events, settlers spoke the language of their homelands, which in America became 'the language of the heart.' Seeking a certain cultural heritage in their younger members, most immigrant churches provided at least three months of parochial school for religious education, at the same time offering students an opportunity to practice the language they were beginning to forget as they progressed through public schools.

"Women of the Northern Plains" p. 102

The church was the center of social life in the community. Here is where the pioneer families, often separated the rest of the week, would come to worship, learn, catch up on the latest news from the community and the world, eat, play, find a mate -- name it, and the church was often the place where it happened. Summer school, where the children concentrated on Luther's Catechism and church history, usually lasted for several weeks. Very often a college student with intentions to study for the ministry was employed to teach during this time. In those days, before any of the means of communication we take for granted were available, such as the telephone, the church was everything to the community.



The first Beckville Church.

This was surely true of Beckville Lutheran Church. Its origin can be traced to a meeting in a home. Fifty-one Swedes gathered at the farm of John Sampson on November 15, 1869 to organize "Svenska Evangeliskt Lutherska

Beckville-Forsamlingen." The name was chosen to honor the pastor who organized the congregation -- The Rev. Peter Beckman. As you recall, Beckman had also been pastor at Cannon River Lutheran Church where John and Hattie had belonged before they moved to Beckville.



Pastor Peter Beckman

The congregation continued to meet at the Sampson home until its first building was erected in 1873. In that year the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad donated a piece of land to the congregation. The present church building was constructed in 1891.

A reproductive model of Beckville Lutheran Church is displayed at the Meeker County Historical Museum at Litchfield, MN. It was built by Knute Carlson, my mother's cousin. A plaque on the model includes these words:

On November 15, 1889, fifty-one people gathered at the tiny home of John M. Sampson in Greenleaf Township to organize a Lutheran congregation under the guidance of Rev. Peter Beckman, who had been visiting them several times previously. The name Beckville was chosen to commemorate Pastor Beckman's missionary activities. He conducted services every fourth Sunday, traveling from Kandiyohi county. In 1871 the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad Company donated a site for the church building and cemetery, and the congregation built a simple structure in 1873.

The Chilstroms at Beckville Church

When John and Hattie Chilstrom arrived in 1879 Beckville Church was only a decade old, but already a strong congregation, its life enhanced by the huge influx of Swedish settlers. It's apparent from church records that John and Hattie were energetically involved in the life of the congregation. By 1883, just four years after they arrived, John was elected as a trustee of the congregation, He was reelected in 1886, 1889 and 1892, the year he died. He also served on the building committee for the new church and on the committee that raised funds for a new organ.



Over the years Hattie and the children would also be involved: Hattie, Minnie and Malvina were active in the Women's Missionary Society; Malvina, Victoria and Minnie were members of the Dorcas Society. The role of these organizations, as well as the "Ladies Aid" was more than religious. Here they would share the latest news – who was pregnant, who had a new item for her kitchen, who had received a letter from relatives in Sweden, and, yes, even some tips on birth control.

The Chilstrom family in about 1891. Standing, right: Sigfred, Edward, Malvina, Victoria. Front: John, Walfred,



family 1891. left to Anton, Front: Hattie

One of the women's organizations c.1920. Hattie (Nelson) Chilstrom is first second left. First Mathilda (Nelson) Coleman.



row, left is



The Dorcas Society, dedicated to doing good works for the Lord. Victoria (Chilstrom) Quist is first row, third from right.

All of the Chilstrom sons were active in the life of Beckville

Church. Sigfred and Walfred were part of the Young People's Society; Anton was secretary of the congregation from 1904-1909. Like his father before him, Sigfred was elected to the Church Council in 1918 and served as a deacon for many years. Walfred and Sigfred were members of

“The Lutheran Brotherhood” at the time of World War I. The organization’s purpose was to “*instill in the minds of young and old the highest type of patriotism*” and to “*assist in furthering the religious, moral and social well-being of the soldiers of the United States at the different camps... as well as the battlefields.*”

The Death of Mina (Minnie)

John and Hattie Chilstrom must have been pleased when their oldest daughter Minnie married into the prominent Nygren family. And even more pleased when their first grandchild, Lillie, was born to Minnie and Charles. Charles was successful enough so that they could apparently afford a trip to St. Paul for the 1890 Winter Carnival. Their pleasure, however, turned into tragedy when Minnie came down with a severe cold and died in a short time, undoubtedly from the complications of pneumonia.

John had known the grief of losing his older sisters -- Anna and Louisa in their early 20s. Now he and Hattie’s dear daughter also dies at age 23, just when she and her husband are in their first years of marriage.



John
two
-- in
at age

1890s.

St. Paul Ice Palace in the

An Unbelievable Tragedy and the End of a Dream

In spite of this loss, I have every reason to believe that their early years on their homestead five miles southwest of Litchfield were good ones for John and Hattie. We can imagine the hard work involved in conquering the prairie and turning it into a productive farm. There was always new sod to turn, animals to buy and breed, a barn and other buildings (outhouse, pigshed, chicken house, granary, milk house, root cellar, machine shed, repair shop) to be erected, crops and gardens to plant, brush to clear, trees to plant, equipment to repair, crops to harvest, and on and on. The family photograph above, taken when John is about 47 and Hattie is about 44, shows the couple looking old beyond their years.

Nevertheless, in the summer of 1892 the Chilstroms had every reason to be optimistic about the future. Their thirteen years on their own land had been good. Edward and Anton, their strapping and responsible older sons, must have been a great asset for the strenuous farm tasks. Daughters Malvina and Victoria were energetic helpers for their mother with household and other chores. Sigfred and Walfred looked like bright and promising helpers for future years. They were well-respected in church and community. How could John and Hattie be but happy and hopeful as they

looked to the future? All they had been through from childhood in Sweden until now must have seemed worth the effort. The family began the day with devotions, a practice we can assume was usual for them. The reading for that day, July 12th, was from Romans 14, including verse 8: “*If we live, we live to the Lord; if we die, we die to the Lord; whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s.*”

What happened on an ordinary July morning in 1892 could not have been more tragic. The local weekly newspaper -- *The Litchfield News Ledger* -- in its July 14, 1892 issue reports the calamity in these details:

DEATH IN A WELL: Father and Son Both Victims

Tuesday word was brought to this city that John P. Chilstrom and his son Edwin had been overcome by foul gas and were lying dead at the bottom of a fifty foot well. Mr. Hayford, as the Ledger’s special reporter, at once repaired to the scene and gathered the following facts.

The well is on Chilstrom’s farm five miles southwest of this city and was an open one, 50 feet deep and three feet in diameter. Mr. Chilstrom was in the act of changing it from an open to a drive well and having put in a rope ladder, his son started at 11:15 to go down and start the point of the drive-well pipe in the center of the well. When he was about half way down he was seen to look up, let go his hold on the rope ladder and fall to the bottom. Thinking that the boy had become giddy and lost his hold, the father sprang onto the ladder and went down nearly to the bottom when he too let go his hold and fell into the water.

The two remaining boys then realized that their father and brother had been suffocated by foul gas and that it would be suicidal to go down to their rescue. Having nothing suitable at hand, a messenger was dispatched post-haste to this city for a rope and grappling hooks and C. S. Sherwood went out to do the work. At 2:50 p.m. he succeeded in drawing the father to the surface and at 3:10 he had got the boy out.

A test of the air in the well proved that a light would invariably be extinguished at a depth of sixteen feet, and that it would be impossible for a person to live a minute at the surface of the water.

John P. Chilstrom was 46 (actually 48) years of age and had been a respected citizen of this country for a number of years. The son, Edwin (Edward), was 20 years of age and was born and brought up in this county (he was actually born in Goodhue County) and was a young man well thought of by all who knew him.

The bereaved family have the sympathy of the entire community.

The funeral will be held at Beckville church this afternoon; the service will be conducted by Rev. P. O. Wenner of Buffalo.

This sad fatality should prove a warning to all persons to test the air in old wells before going into them.

On July 28 *Augustana*, the national magazine of the Augustana Lutheran Church, published this obituary notice:

HEREBY IS MADE KNOWN

that the Most High in His all-wise providence, on the 12th day of July through a serious accident, was pleased to summon from this life my beloved husband

JOHAN PETTER CHILSTROM

at the age of 48 years, three months and five days. He was born in Toarp parish, Elfsborg county (Sweden) on April 7, 1844; and

ALGOT EDVARD

at the age of 20 years, four months, and 19 days. He was born in Cannon Falls, Minnesota on February 23, 1872.

At the time of the accident they were engaged in cleaning a well which, unknown to them, contained a gas which caused their asphyxiation.

Deeply mourned by me, five children, and an aged father, and many relatives and friends.

“If we live, we live unto the Lord; if we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s.” Romans 14:8, the chapter which we read together at morning devotions on the same day.

*Litchfield, Minnesota, July 19, 1892.
Hedda Chilstrom*

My aunt Malvina Chilstrom Nygren recalled other details. She says that a new “auger well” had been completed and was apparently free of poisonous gas at the time. A streak of this gas, however, seeped into the well some 15 feet below the surface. It was when they passed through this section that father and son were overcome and killed. She says her mother Hattie was in the garden nearby when all this happened.

We can scarcely comprehend the devastation that followed. After all these years, the difficult journey across the waters of the Atlantic as children, the confusion of the bustle of Boston and New York as they disembarked, the wonder and awe to bright-eyed youngsters as they drank in the vastness of their new homeland on the long journey from the East Coast to Wisconsin, the hard years of their childhood in Waukesha, the long trip to the edge of the frontier in Minnesota, their fearful escape from death during the Sioux Uprising their early years of marriage on the Cannon River when they lived with Magnus, their arduous but hopeful years on their own land at

Litchfield, the winter blizzards they endured, the summer droughts they survived -- after all this their world collapses in a moment on a lovely July morning in their own farm yard.

I try to imagine the thoughts that went through my grandfather John's mind as he peered down into the well and saw his son Edward collapse to the bottom. Having experienced the sudden death of my son Andrew at about the same age, I know exactly what he was thinking -- "No matter the danger to me, I must save my son!" Any loving father would do the same. If there was even the remotest chance that he could rescue him, John would do it.

I try to imagine the chaos that followed for my grandmother Hattie and the others. Anton and Sigfred, 16 and 12, must have wondered in the first moments what they could do to save father and brother. Fortunately, they had the good sense to realize what was happening and that even their most heroic efforts could not save them.

I can envision the girls, Malvina and Victoria, 14 and 8, wailing and screaming as they ran to the Coleman home a half-mile away to call for help.

And then there is Walfred, my father, only a bit more than four years old at the time. What goes through the mind of a four-year-old when he sees his mother bent over in shock and disbelief, hands covering her face? When he sees his brothers crying in their helplessness? How he must have clung to his mother's legs and how tight she must have held him, hoping somehow to shield him from the horror of this unbelievable morning?

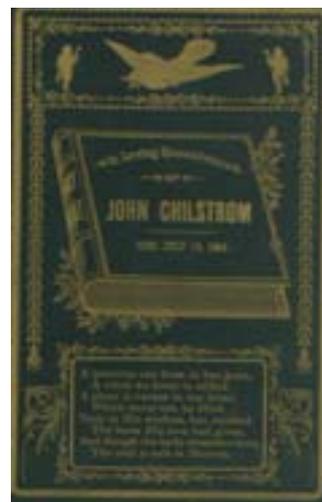
Malvina remembered vividly how little Walfred comforted his mother after the tragedy. "What will we do now without Papa and Eddie?", he asked again and again.

It was the custom in those days to bring the body of the deceased to the home for reviewal prior to the service at the church. Oscar Ness was a young lad at the time of the death of John and Edward. His parent's farm was on the road from the Chilstrom place to the church. In his old age he told me that he still had a vivid recollection of watching as the horse-drawn wagons with white caskets slowly passed by on the way to Beckville Church.

Aunt Malvina (Chilstrom) Nygren also told me that she remembered the visit of her grandfather Magnus after father and brother had died. He was now in his eighties. He paced back and forth by the well, grieving the death of his son and grandson. Over and over he asked, "Why couldn't it have been me? I can't work any more."

An obituary card that apparently was sent to friends and family. On it is a poem:

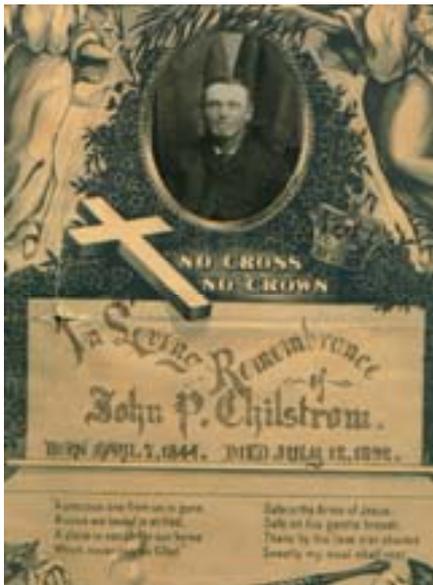
*A precious one from us has gone,
A voice we loved is stilled;
A place is vacant in our home
Which never can be filled.
God, in His wisdom, has recalled
The boon His love had given,
And though the body slumbers here,*



and

The soul is safe in heaven.

When I was a young boy I spent much time on the farm where Grandmother Hattie lived. I recall thinking that her bedroom was a near-sacred place where the curious eyes of a little boy must never look. But I peeked at times, just to see the huge print that hung over the head of her bed



with my Grandfather John's picture in the middle of it. Below the photograph is the same verse that appears on the obituary card above.

I have no clear idea of how life went on after the tragic death of John and Edward. Anton was old enough to do most of the farm work and Sigfred, who eventually took over the farm, was a strong young lad coming into his own. Malvina remained single for a number of years and was undoubtedly her mother's helper in the house. Walfred, my father, gradually took responsibility, especially for the garden.

The family in front of their farm home in about 1900. Left to right: Sigfred, Anton, Hattie (in chair), Malvina, Walfred (in chair), Victoria



In her last days Hattie moved to Malvina's home in Litchfield where she died just a bit more than a month short of her 93rd birthday. I have a distinct memory from that time. Our family went to visit Grandmother Hattie. She was lying on a hospital bed in the living room. I was only nine at the time, but I sensed that this was a very serious and sacred moment. I don't know if she asked for the song or if someone else suggested it. But I recall watching my four older sisters -- Adeline, Lorraine, Winnifred, and Virginia -- move to her bedside and sing:

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus blood and righteousness;
No merit of my own I claim,
But wholly lean on Jesus Name.
On Christ the Solid Rock I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.*

The last words I heard from Grandmother Hattie were: “*Yes, all other ground is sinking sand.*”

In her will and final instructions she divided her estate among her living children. She also directed that a gift of nearly \$600 be sent to Bethphage Mission in Axtell, NE. My friends who know more about currency than I do tell me that in today’s world this would be a gift of \$6,000 to \$8,000. Why Bethphage? I could write volumes about this place. Started on a shoestring by a Swedish Lutheran pastor over 100 years ago, Bethphage is a refuge for severely handicapped children. They come from all corners of the country to receive tender, compassionate care in a setting where the Christian faith is nourished. From that small beginning it has grown to include work in more than a dozen states and two foreign countries. The focus remains on the physical and spiritual needs of the severely handicapped. After I retired I had the privilege of serving on the Bethphage Board of Directors for several years.

In his letter of thanks to Hattie’s son Sigfred, Arthur Christenson, the director at Bethphage, writes: “*We have received a check... according to the desire of your departed mother, who has been a friend of Bethphage Mission for a period of time.*”

Hattie might have died a bitter woman. She had lost so much. Instead, she gives thanks to God by sharing with the neediest. We who descend from her must agree that we have in her a godly example of the kind of faith and love that each of us should exemplify in our own lives.

I thought it might be appropriate to end this chapter on the Beckville years with the story on the next page that appeared in the March, 1992 issue of The Lutheran Magazine:

In
the
the
hall



BECKVILLE Lutheran Church is seven miles southwest of Litchfield, Minn.

Bishop: Rural mission great

When John P. Chilstrom joined the building committee of Beckville Lutheran Church in 1890, he didn't know that his grandson would preach at the building's anniversary 100 years later. Or that the grandson would be Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Bishop Herbert W. Chilstrom.

Bishop Chilstrom preached at the 218-member rural parish near Litchfield, Minn., Jan. 5. The service also dedicated a newly renovated organ; Chilstrom's grandfather was on that original planning committee too.

A few months after the building's dedication in 1892, John Chilstrom died in a farm accident.

Bishop Chilstrom's parents were

members of Beckville until they moved away when he was 4.

Challenging worshipers to list the names of local families in a five-mile radius that have no church connection, Chilstrom declared, "There is no greater mission field ... today than in the town and country setting."

Noting that farmers always cared for the earth, he said, "If we poison our streams and underground water, if we allow good topsoil to run off or blow off ... if we cut a tree and do not replace it, if we take a calloused attitude toward nature, then we can be certain that the day will come when there will be long bread lines in America as well as in other places." ■

June of
2007 I
returned to
Beckville
Church
again to
preach at
dedication
service for
new parish
that the

congregation had constructed. It was designed not only to serve the needs of the congregation, but also to be a place where the surrounding community could gather for meetings and to vote in public elections. In a sense, Beckville had returned to its original ministry – a place where the community could both gather for worship and also for community organization.