

"Old Settlers" To Honor Veteran McKenzie Couple

The fifteenth annual Old Settler's Picnic at Alexander will honor Mr. and Mrs. John Link, pioneers of McKenzie County who were "greenhorn city people" when they moved to the West in 1906.

Alexander's celebration is set for Sept. 3.

John Link was born in Widash, February 18, 1879. Widash is now a state of Czechoslovakia since World War I, but at that time it was a small village in northeastern Bohemia which belonged to Austria.

Link was a member of a family of five—his parents, his brother and sister, and himself. He grew up and received his schooling in Hohenelbe where his family had moved after leaving Widash.

At fourteen years of age, having learned the trade of weaving after school at his brother's, Link became a weaver in a textile mill. After four years at the mill, he left Bohemia to take advantage of the opportunities a new mill in Augsburg, Bavaria, offered. There he became acquainted with Anna Mencl, his future wife.

In 1900 John Link went to Salzburg for a military physical examination and was rejected. Being free of that obligation, he, his future father-in-law, and a childless married couple made plans to go to America. Several months later they arrived in New York.

Anna Mencl soon joined him in America. They were married in New York City and lived in New Bedford, Mass., where the groom worked as a weaver for the next six years.

"Why did John Link leave his homeland?" His answer is also a question, "Why did millions of English, Scandinavian, French,

Italian, and other people leave their home country?" Because these people had enthusiasm and hope to better their condition, and he was one of them.

Both Link and his wife worked in the mill and saved what they could. Then came the decline of the textile business. Anna Link lost her work and her husband's decreased salary could not support them without using their savings. Besides, good eyes were needed for the factory work and his were not adequate. He was also tired of the work by then.

Newspaper advertisements sponsored by railroad companies who offered half fare rates for those traveling to the unsettled land urged people to go west. Anyone of legal age could obtain 160 acres of free land. Link's father-in-law and his oldest son soon left for Mandan and then journeyed to Dickinson. The land there was crowded. They continued west to Randolph township southwest of Alexander and settled there.

The Link family of four arrived in Buford in August of 1906. They crossed the Missouri River on a ferry boat and were brought to Cartwright where they were welcomed and offered shelter on the James Smetak farm. The Links were city people who knew nothing about farming, but he worked for Smetak for a year to acquire some knowledge of farming.



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—Winston Herald Photo

Links To Be Honored

Homesteads were located along the creeks. Link too found a location with plenty of water and where they could farm and raise stock. They still live on that homestead on Antelope creek in Randolph township southwest of Alexander. Their first home was a log house in Cartwright and their old tar paper shack put on the homestead is still part of their modern kitchen.

The lives of the settlers were not easy. They worked long and hard, experienced ups and downs, and learned to take the bad with the good. However, they were all "in the same boat" and made the best of any situation. Dances in the kitchen were a favorite form of recreation at the homestead.

Those hard years were also interesting years of history, Link said. There were many changes made during the time and the settlers were in the midst of them. The ranchers versus settlers feuds were part of the exciting times.

John Link broke his first acres with a walking plow. Later he was "on top of the world" when he got a sulky. Until that time he knew so little about farming the pioneer said he probably would have "hooked up the horse by its tail." Then came the gangplow, which was even better, and finally the modern machinery.

John Link is now 81 years of age and his wife Anna 78. They celebrated their 55th wedding anniversary in 1955.

The Links have six children. Five daughters are all married to farmers: Mrs. Elling Ellingson (Theresa), Mrs. John Novak (Elizabeth), Mrs. Ted Folkvord (May), Mrs. Anton Klose (Annie) and Mrs. Forest Johnson (Frances).

Their son Arthur married Grace Johnson of Cartwright. He has been a State Representative since 1947.