



Gone Are The Days

by Sig Peterson

*Facts and
Hearsay
SIMS - ALMONT*

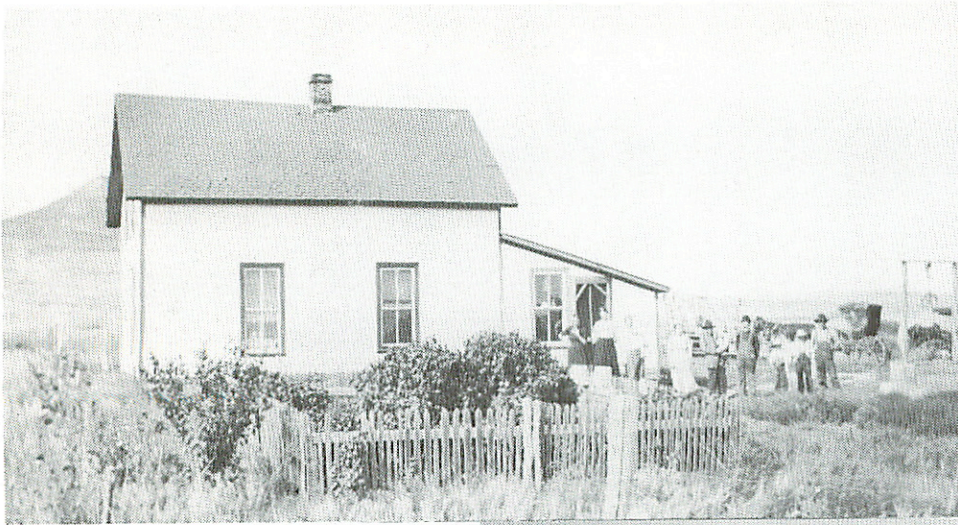


O-Bar-O Ranch. Grandpa's homestead in background.

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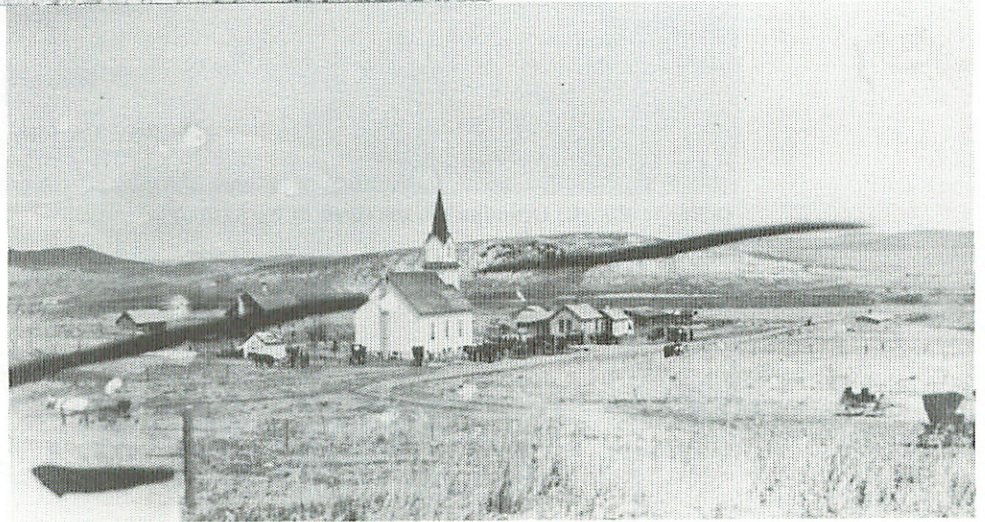
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Gabriel & Olene Peterson's house on their homestead.

Sims 1900 — Our home until I was 9 years of age was across the road from Sims Church.



- Dedication —

In memory of my parents and grandparents who came to Sims before the turn of the century and brought with them the Norwegian culture which is still a part of this community.

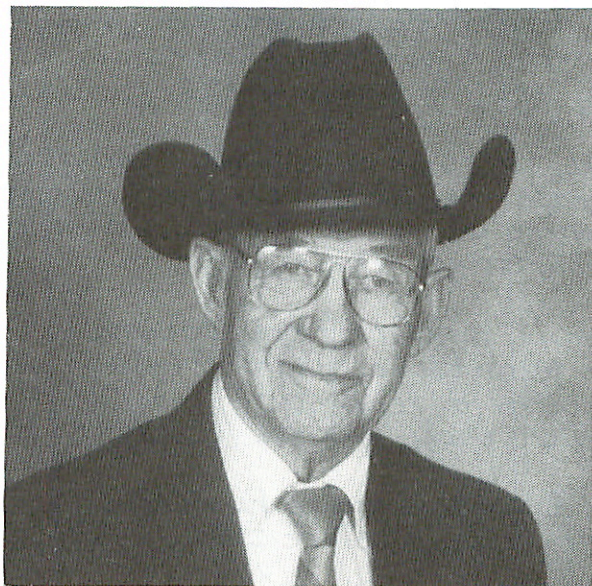
Parents: Pete and Thora Peterson

Grandparents: Gabriel and Olene Peterson



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❧ Foreword ❧



My grandfather, Gabriel Peterson, came from Norway and settled in the thriving town of Sims in 1882, my dad, P.R. Peterson, arrived in 1888 and my mother, Thora, in 1898. It is here that I, the youngest of six children, was born 83 years ago, and it is here in this community that I have lived my entire life. These personal ties to this area are what have probably influenced me more than anything to put this book together, but beyond that I am almost driven by the need to pass on to current and future generations the rich folklore that abounds in stories about people and events in this area. My intent in writing and assembling these facts and tales is to preserve in print at least some of the early history of the Sims-Almont area. Most of the people I mention on the following pages are long gone, and those of us who are old enough to remember them personally, are rapidly fading from the scene. I have included many of my own experiences in farming, ranching and various other happenings; I feel that my experiences were pretty much typical of others of my generation. After acquiring additional acreage for our ranch several years ago, which included the town site of Sims, I became even more interested in the history of this area. Although I have had this project in mind for many years, and could take as many more years to enlarge upon it, it is now time for me to get on with it.

Although the community of Sims never had a local newspaper, I have relied greatly on the *New Salem Journal*,

Mandan Pioneer and *Bismarck Tribune* for stories of local interest. Beyond that I have researched encyclopedias, North Dakota history books, North Dakota Historical Society, North Dakota Horizons, U.S. Postal Department, Burlington Northern Railway records, and the files of the North Dakota Highway Department. My thanks to all of them for their help and cooperation. In addition to the above mentioned sources, some of my information has just been passed down by word of mouth, and as such, may have been slightly colored or altered in the telling. I have not intentionally altered any facts or information, but I recognize that errors can creep into any story or collection of historical data.

I owe debts of gratitude to many people for helping with this project, first and foremost of whom is my wife, Margie. She has been my typist, proofreader, editor, source of ideas and inspiration. True, I have gathered information for years but I only wrote it up in a rough draft; Margie has made it more correct and readable. Without her this book would still be an idea floating around in my mind. I also want to thank Margie's brother, J. Burton Nelson, who added encouragement and helped us out by writing a few chapters from my rough draft; and to Dick Hinton, our neighbor, who transcribed some of the data to computer discs. To each and every one of the countless others who provided information, gave me ideas, or just encouraged me to go ahead, I give you my heartfelt THANKS.

— Sigurd Peterson



of course, were Norse!

It's sometimes mighty easy,
to tire of those blokes,
Who seem to get their "jollies"
by telling ethnic jokes.

There's just no way to stop those guys
whose mouths are running loose,
And there will always be some people
who suffer their abuse.

Montana picks on North Dakota; ...
in Minnesota it's the "Poles" —
They seem to reap such pleasure,
when they pick on hapless souls!

Now, don't call me a hypocrite,
I'll explain before I'm done ...
Why I like to pick on "Norskies"
and think it's so much fun!

See, Norwegians love those ethnic jokes,
but they put their meanness on the shelf,
'cause there just can be no malice,
if the joke is on yourself!

Scandinavians don't feel threatened,
they know they're number one,
and you'll find no sinner people,
anywhere beneath the sun!

So, we pick on our own bloodlines,
not some other race ...
'cause you can't say "I'm Norwegian!"
unless PRIDE shows on your face!

And just to show we're thoughtful,
we'll give those NON-Scandinavian folks a hand,
by keeping Norskies real simple,
so THEY can understand!

Yes, we enjoy that "Norski" humor,
and snipe through all that chatter ...
'cause if you're not Scandinavian,
it is no laughing matter!!

written by Rodney Nelson, Almont, No. Dak.
especially for the Norsk Høstfest
October 1989.

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❧ Introduction ❧

This northwest area was first claimed by France; it had been explored by LaSalle in 1682. It was given to Spain through a treaty with France, but was ceded back to France in 1880.

In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson, thinking it better to purchase territory, rather than by war efforts, sent a delegation to France to buy this northwest area, which became known as the Louisiana Purchase. The delegates were allowed to go as high as ten million dollars for the purchase; however, the price they had to pay was fifteen million.

The Louisiana Purchase, named after Louis XIV of France, included most of the area between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountain Range — and from New Orleans north to the Canadian border. This area later became the greater portion of an additional thirteen states of the Union.

In 1804, President Jefferson appropriated \$2,500 (note the small amount) to explore the recent purchase. Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, with 14 soldiers, nine Kentucky frontiersmen, two French boatmen and Clark's servant York, started out on the mission in May 1804. They sailed up the Missouri River with one 55 foot keelboat and two smaller crafts. They reached the campsite of the Mandan Indians (Fort Clark area) in late October. They spent the winter with the Mandans, and became well acquainted with a French trader named Charbonneau, and his Indian wife, Sakakawea. The couple was hired to serve as guides; Sakakawea was acquainted in this western area and could serve as an interpreter.

Dakota Territory was established in 1861; it included what is now Montana, North and South Dakota and parts of neighboring states. Idaho Territory was created in 1863 and included all of Montana. In 1863, Wyoming Territory was established which also took in some of the Dakota Territory boundaries and reduced this area to what is now North and South Dakota. In 1887, the area was divided, and on November 2, 1889 North Dakota was admitted to the Union as the 39th state, and South Dakota became a state on the same day. Dakota means "friends or allies" in the Indian language.

In 1863, General Sibley's army pushed the Indians west of the Missouri. In 1875 the Indian Homestead Act was passed, allowing the Indians land if they would give up their tribal way of life. Very few made use of it.

Dennis Hannafin, an Irish speculator, and four men came to the Missouri River in advance of railroad construction. They each squatted on 80 acres of land next to the river; expecting that the land would be the likely site for a city. When the capitalists arrived, they decided to start a city about one mile east of the river. Hannafin and his men then found it difficult to sell their land.

In September 1873, Hannafin, John Warn, Jack Hale and Jesse McCoy crossed the Missouri River and headed west to prospect the western route of the Northern Pacific Railroad, which had been surveyed in 1871. They were again looking

for a likely spot for a townsite. They were warned not to venture out alone because of the Indians, but they paid no heed to the warning. They went as far west as Green River (Dickinson area) and came back to a place about 40 miles west of the Missouri River. Here they found an outcropping of coal, and opened a mine. Dennis Hannafin has been credited by many as the first to discover coal in North Dakota.

The Sioux Indians created quite a problem to the Hannafin crew, and encircled the mine and dug-out for two weeks. The place became known as Fort Hannafin, as they had been issued arms by General Custer. Hannafin had been a lieutenant in the Illinois 75th Infantry, so his military experience proved valuable. They dug trenches and fortified with sod, and were able to resist the Indians, who gave up after two weeks. According to *The Record*, a Fargo publication, Hannafin and his men abandoned the mine later that fall, and walked back to Edwinton (Bismarck). Railroad train service had been discontinued to Fargo for the winter so Dennis walked to Fargo. He was a great walker; it was stated in the article that he walked from Fargo to St. Paul and various other long distances.

Some reports show that there was no activity at Fort Hannafin until 1879, but other accounts state that John Warn made the sod-walled fortification his home and stayed there for seven years.

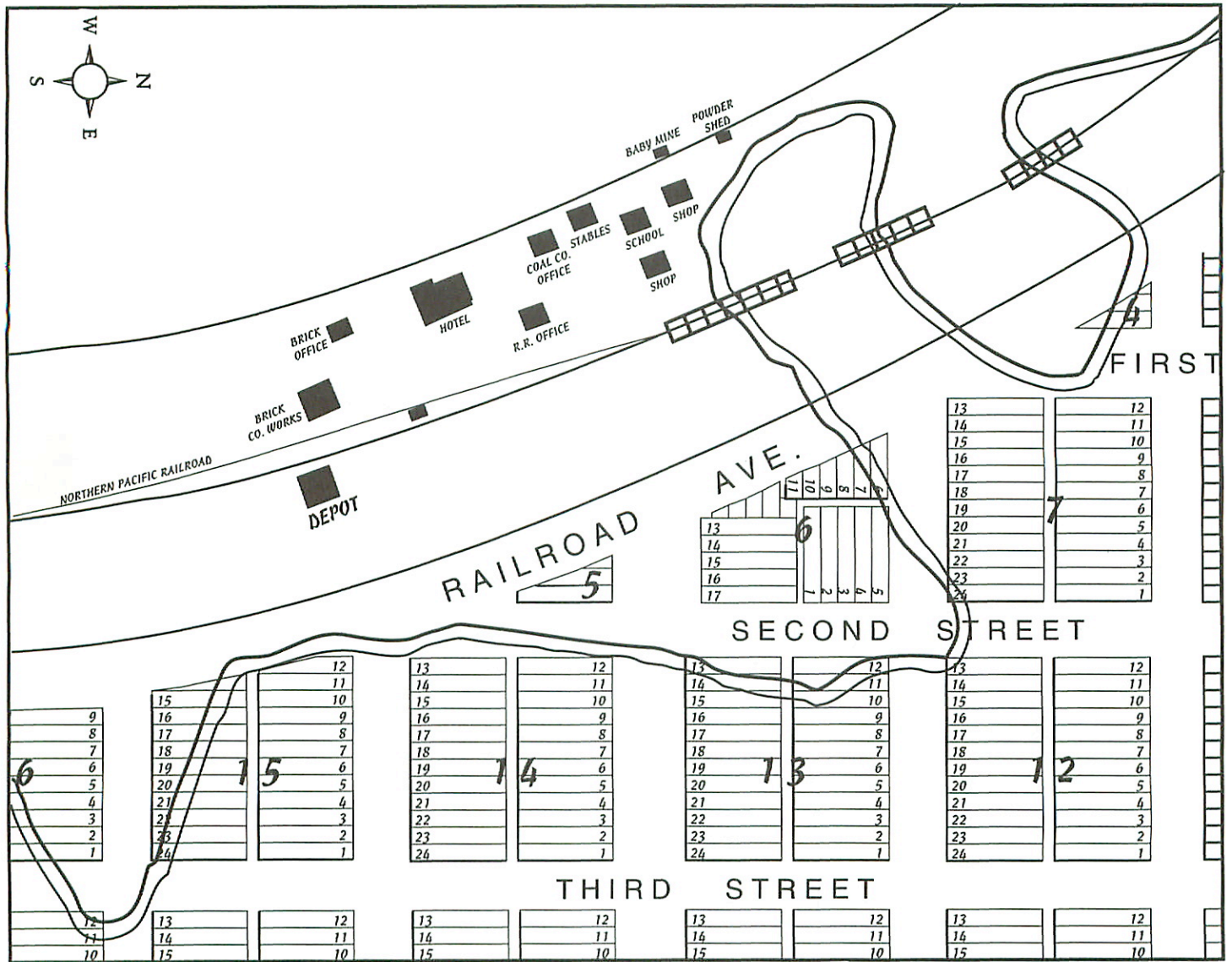
On July 5, 1879, Charles W. Thompson opened a coal mine at Fort Hannafin for the Northern Pacific Coal Company, a separate entity of the railroad company. The place then became known as Baby Mine. (Reason for this name unknown.) In 1879, the railroad tracks reached this point and immediately a town sprung up, as there was coal, an abundance of water and also clay for possible brick manufacturing.

Buildings were dug into the hillside west of the tracks; all were erected on the 200 ft. railroad right-of-way. A 1883 map of Baby Mine (later called Sims) obtained from the Morton County Register of Deeds, shows 10 buildings or dug-outs, namely: Brick Company Works, Brick Company Office Hotel, Railroad Office, Coal Company Office, Stable, School, Baby Mine, Shop and Powder Shed. The dug-out remains of these buildings are still visible.

In February 1880, Col. Eber W Bly, a surveyor who had helped lay out the city of Edwinton (Bismarck) in 1872, bought all of section 11, township 138-range 86 from the

Northern Pacific Railroad Co. (Section 11 being an odd numbered section of land was railroad property.) The place then became known as Bly's Mine and was the first town

established west of Mandan. Three years later, in 1883, the settlement was surveyed and named SIMS.



1883 map of Baby Mine (later called Sims). All buildings were west of the railroad tracks.

HISTORICAL FACT

Morton County, Dakota Territory was organized in 1878. It was named Morton in honor of Oliver P. Morton, who was Governor of Indiana during the Civil War. Morton was originally a very large county — it extended from the Missouri River due west almost to the state line. It also included what later became Grant and Sioux counties.

HISTORICAL FACT

William Cunningham got the contract on April 28, 1881 to build the first public building in Morton County. The consideration was \$275 to build a county jail in Mandan.