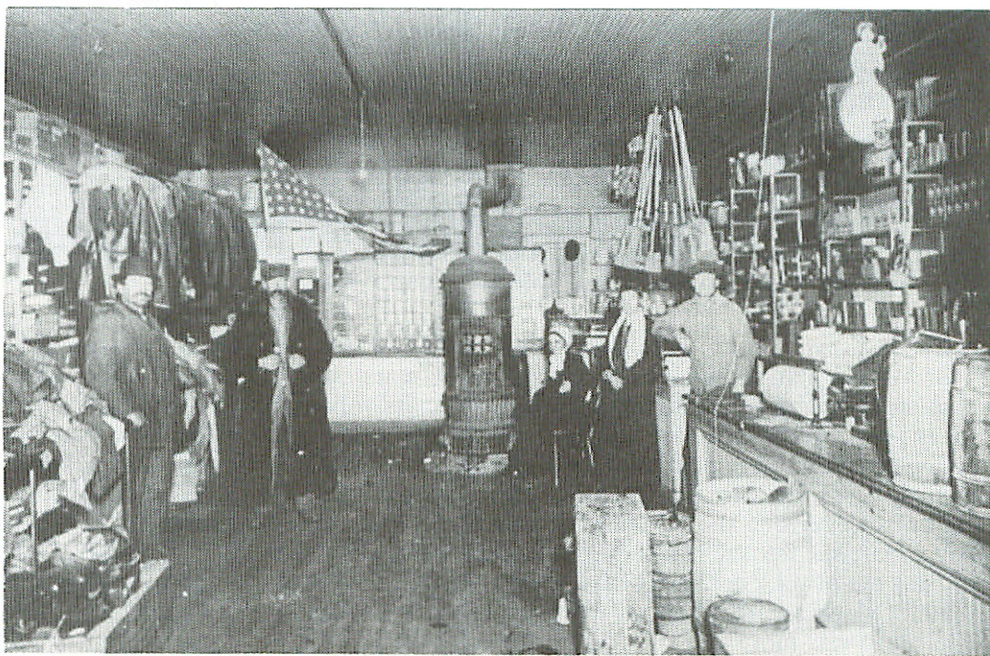
# The Country Store

*The little village store supplied the early settlers with much of their needs, even though there was a limited variety of items to choose from. They always carried the most important items — sugar, coffee, flour, salt, and spices. The customer's grocery list was short, but it usually included tobacco and kerosene, too.*



Andrew Knutson Store in Almont — 1908.

Grocery shopping has changed greatly, even during my life time. I can still remember the mixture of smells in those old stores — food in open containers, freshly ground coffee, tobacco, sweeping compound on the wood floors, pickled herring, coal and ashes. The stores I remember best were the O.C. Ellingson and C.E. Kelsven stores in Almont. Both stores were long and narrow with shelves hung on the walls behind the counters and glass showcases. The shelves were filled with the items for sale, and no one was allowed behind the counters except the clerks and store owners who filled the orders. The clerks would bring the articles asked for, put them on the counter, list the articles and price on the sales slip, figure up the bill (by hand) and ring up the total on the cash register. I remember handing my mother's errand slip to a clerk, and while she filled the order, I browsed around the store to see if there was some candy I could afford to buy — licorice sticks, lemon drops or a Babe Ruth bar of candy, which was 5¢ (usually too much for my pocketbook). If my mother didn't send money with me for the groceries, the merchant allowed charging. Many farmers were not able to pay their grocery bills until after the harvest.

The pot-bellied heating stove usually occupied the middle of the store where the customers congregated to smoke, exchange news of the day and talk about the weather. There was always a spittoon handy, next to the stove, for the convenience of the tobacco chewing customers. Coffee, sugar, prunes, cookies, peanuts and many other items came in bulk, packed in boxes, barrels or sacks. These containers would usually be placed in the middle aisle of the store, where the clerks had easy access to them. The items would be weighed and sacked; some clerks were very accurate in weighing and would break a cookie in half to get the correct weight. The kerosene can would be filled from a barrel in the back room. Which reminds me of an incident of long ago, in Sims. My dad went to one of the local stores to buy some kerosene and was told, "we don't have kerosene, but we have tapioca!" The store's inventory must have been very low that day.

Pickled herring came in wooden pails, but in the winter, fish would come in frozen, and stored in wooden barrels outside the store, and sold frozen. Lutefisk also came that way — which reminds me of the Lutefisk Song that I sing — the words in that song were pretty true!

There was very little fresh fruit, except apples and oranges. In the summer months crates of peaches, pears and plums were available for canning. The crates were made of wood and were used for many things, including shelves and cupboards. Fresh vegetables were almost unheard of during off-season months. During the winter of 1927, Marge's dad was on a strict diet for his health and ordered to eat head lettuce and grapefruit. The local store had never stocked either product so special ordered them for him. The grocer continued to carry these items after that. During the summer everyone had a large garden that produced enough for canning and storing in root cellars.

There were very few trade names in the early days; they came later with the packaging of food. One of the first trade marked foods I remember was Quaker Oats; the breakfast cereal came in oblong boxes which sometimes held a prize (a colored glass dish or small plate). Marge remembers having to eat cooked oatmeal every morning she stayed with her grandparents — she hated it, and hasn't eaten any since, even

**C.L. Timmerman in his store at Sims. Calendar shows 1901.**

if it is healthy.

Bread was not available in stores of early years. If a household ran out of bread, baking powder biscuits or pancakes were a good substitute. When "store bought" bread became available, I remember what a treat it was — it was so much lighter than homemade. Most women felt guilty buying bread (everyone should bake their own), so if she did buy a loaf, she felt she had to have a good excuse, such as running out of yeast or flour. Many housewives used "starter yeast," which assured them of never being without yeast. The bread was more like sour dough bread as we know it now.

Milk could not be bought in the stores, as there was no call for it. Almost every family in town had a cow, and those who didn't, were able to buy milk from a neighbor who did. Every farm had milk cows.

There was a butcher shop in every little town. The butcher would buy the cattle and hogs from local farmers, and do the butchering on the farm. The carcasses would be hung in the ice-cooled cooler in his shop, and the butcher would cut off pieces as they were ordered from a customer. Nothing was cut ahead of time — no pre-packaging. There was the old cliche about the butcher weighing his hand when selling meat — maybe it was true. I remember an incident which took place in a butcher stop in Almont. A customer complained that the butcher was including too much bone with the cut he had ordered — it was weighing too much. The butcher replied, "It would be a funny looking cow, if it didn't have bones." The customer bought the meat, bones and all. Some of the local butchers I remember were Polette, Gundvaldson, Wilson, Carl Hill and Alvin Olson. Butchers who worked for C.E. Kelsven were Al Shaurer and Rudolph Feland. Kelsven was the last merchant to have a meat department in his general store.

Although flour could be bought at the store, it was cheaper to buy at the flour mills, so many farmers would "lay in" a supply in the fall, after harvest. There were roller mills at Glen Ullin, Hebron, Carson, Mandan, and New Salem (in early years). One could take wheat to the mills and bring home flour. Four bushels of wheat could be traded for a 100 pound sack of flour, plus 15¢. When we were first married, I took a wagon load (horsedrawn) to Carson in exchange for several 100 pound sacks of flour — we baked a lot of bread in those days! Marge said that the freshly rolled flour did not make good bread — a month or so of aging improved it.

Almost all the merchants carried "dry goods" besides groceries — overalls, shoes, over shoes, rubbers, yard goods and many other items were available. Oil cloth was a popular item and sold by the yard. Every kitchen table was covered with oil cloth, and your neighbor was likely to have the same kind as there weren't too many patterns to choose from. If the store didn't have the item in stock that you wanted, they would order it. I ordered Marge's engagement and wedding rings from Halvorson's Store, and my wedding suit was ordered through Kelsven's Store for about $25. Why shop in Bismarck?

The general merchandise stores carried a good supply of bib overalls and blue chambray shirts, which the men (not women) used for work. Bibless overalls became available later on but did not look like the western style jeans of today — and they were not called jeans. Overalls were usually the Osh Kosh (b'gosh) brand. Men's dress shirts were usually available too and were always white - never colored. When they showed wear and turned a dirty grey, they were worn for work.

Mail order catalogues from Montgomery Ward, Sears Roebuck and M.W. Savage were used a lot to order items that weren't available in local stores. Some farmers would "send for" huge amounts of merchandise in the fall (after harvest). The orders, which would also include foods, would come packed in barrels, boxes and sacks, and shipped out by freight.

On the rare occasions we got to Bismarck, our favorite store was Woolworth's Five and Ten. It's surprising what we could buy for a nickle or a dime.

We look back to the good old days — when we could buy almost anything we needed in our home town — and compare them with today. Good roads, good cars, shopping malls with big stores and cut-rate prices has lured us to the bigger cities to do our shopping, causing our local stores to close. It's sad.

# Telephones

*It wasn't until the 1880's that the telephone was invented. It became a reality in this area when Northwestern Bell Telephone Company built a line from New Salem, across the hills to Sims — perhaps in the 1890's — and installed a telephone in the Sims depot.*

From Sims, the line followed the railroad to the Almont sidetrack, and a telephone booth was set up there. The Lutheran Colonization Co. built a line from Almont directly south to the Heart River Hotel, which was situated on the south side of the Heart River.

The first telephone installed in Almont was in the Farmers State Bank; it was the only telephone in Almont and served as a central point for calls until 1926 when a switchboard was installed in the home of Mrs. Anna Nyquist, who served as operator. A few more phones were installed at this time, mostly in business places. Both incoming and out-going calls had to go through the operator. Until this time telegrams were used as a means of fast and urgent communication, and were delivered in person by the telegraph operator.

The first rural telephone line was built in 1926, southwest of Almont and ran as far as the Theodore Ramsland farm. Tinius Ramsland was instrumental in getting the line built; the Almont Commercial Club built the first five miles out of town.

In 1930, we ran a private line from our home place to my grandparents farm, which was only a mile distance. We used the top strand of the barbed wire fence as a conductor; the fence served quite satisfactorily, however the splices had to be wrapped. Wall phones were available at that time for $5. It was a convenient way for us to communicate and check on our grandparents (both in their late 80's), even though they were a little hesitant about using the "newfangled" contraption.

In 1939, after we moved to Marge's grandparents farm, which was eight miles south of Almont, we realized we needed a better and faster means of communication than the U.S. Mail. (Marge and her mother wrote a card to each other every mail day, which was three times a week.) We checked into the possibility of running a telephone line into Almont and then called a meeting of our neighbors to see if they were interested. We showed them that a line could be built for about $30.00 per farm, which also included the telephone. Everyone would have to help build the line and furnish their own poles, which would probably be creek poles they could cut themselves. Money was very hard to come by in those days — $30 sounded like a lot! I remember Joe Pederson saying, "If I can sell a cow and realize enough money for telephone service, I am willing." Others felt about the same way, so the South Line Telephone Co. was organized that evening at our home. Work was started immediately and by Christmas the line was completed. Wire, insulators and bolts were purchased at Hyde Lumber Co., and Fred Ramsland installed most of the phones. The total cost came to $28 per farm.

The South Line branched off in several directions to include a total 22 phones. We were connected to the Almont Central Exchange, which gave us access to long distant calling and also to other rural lines and phones in Almont. The switchboard service was only $5 a year. This was 24 hour service but we were asked not to call after 9 p.m. unless it was an emergency.

People who have never lived on a party line, don't realize how much they have missed. 'Rubbering' was a popular pastime, especially during the winter months when there was little else to do. For those who do not know what is meant by 'rubbering' — it is listening on the phone to conversations of others. Each phone had a different ring, but all rings were heard on every phone on the line. Our ring was three shorts and a long. When a person wanted to call someone on their line, they cranked out that ring on their phone — and it was heard on all the other phones. By lifting the receiver, a person could 'rubber in' and hear the latest news or gossip. Rubbering was expected, so it was best not to reveal any secrets. As each receiver was taken off the hook, a click could be heard; some people complained that the reception was weaker as more people came on the line. In some cases, when it was a long distance call, it did seem to be weaker and the person making or receiving the call would ask the others to "hang up!" — the 'rubber necks' hated to do so as the call was usually some important news. To call long distance, or to someone on an another line, a person had to ring one long for Central, and she would "hook them up"

The rural telephone line was a unique but handy way of making public announcements. One extra long ring indicated an S.O.S. — such as a prairie fire, etc., and everyone came on the line to find out about the emergency, and what they could do to help. A number of short rings meant there would be an announcement of some kind, such as a program, party, funeral, snow shoveling "bee," etc. When everyone got on the line, the announcement was made. There were many story-telling parties during snow storms — and even some music once in awhile. We had a close, fun-loving neighborhood on the South Line.

After the South Line was built, my folks extended their one-mile private line in to Almont, hooking up with the exchange, and making it possible for us to communicate. My brother, Barney, and I were partners in farming and ranching at the time, so appreciated being able to discuss our operations by phone. Shortly after this line was built, the Sims rural line was organized and my folks were on that line. The line extended as far north as the Johnson farm and south to Chas. Hoeger's. The Sims Line later purchased the old

abandoned Bell Telephone line that ran from Sims to New Salem; the entire line was then rebuilt, using the better posts, wire and insulators.

In about 1940, the Curlew Telephone Line was built to serve everyone in that vicinity. This was the last rural line to be built out of Almont; just about everyone in the rural area now had telephone service.

Mrs. Nyquist retired as switchboard operator in 1943, after having faithfully served the community for 17 years. The equipment was moved to the Ben Ringham home, where Mrs. Ringham was the operator until 1955. When she retired, Pearl Tavis accepted the responsibility, in addition to attending to her business as the owner and operator of Tavis Cafe.

In 1967, a drastic change took place in the telephone service in our area. Bell Telephone took over the system and installed underground lines which accommodated Almont and the rural area. The switchboard was no longer needed — we were hooked up to Bismarck and could dial the number we wanted to call — what an improvement! BUT — we missed the old party line, which had its good points, too — but no more rubbering! Our yearly dues had only been $15 (the price had gone up from $5 a year) — the new system was a different story. Direct dialing made calling a lot more convenient — but a lot more expensive, too.

The Almont Exchange was serving five rural lines and the city of Almont when the new system was initiated. Bell Telephone gave the Almont switchboard to Bonanzaville at West Fargo. We have tried to acquire it for our museum, but they do not wish to part with it as it is being used for communication between the various buildings on the museum grounds at Bonanzaville.

## RAMSLAND TELEPHONE LINE
### - built in 1926

1. Anderson, Charles ——— — — —
2. Bachler, John ——— — —
3. Bethke, Wm. — — —
4. Hellman, John — ——— ———
5. Hoovestol, Axel ——— ——— ———
6. Knutson, Cornelius — — ——— ———
7. Knutson, Ed ——— ——— — —
8. Larson, Thorvald — —
9. Ramsland, Ben ——— ——— ———
10. Ramsland, Ole — — ———
11. Ramsland, T.A. — ——— —
12. Thiel, Peter — ———
13. Thiel, Sam — — — ———
14. Thor, Clarence ——— ———
15. Schwemmer, Reinhardt ——— —

## SOUTH TELEPHONE LINE
### - built in 1939

1. Anderson, Wallace — — ——— ———
2. Bond, W.E. ——— — ———
3. Bredvold, Julius
4. Barstad, Thorvald — ——— —
5. Dahners, Greg ——— ——— ———
6. Feland, Carl
7. Feland, Olaf ——— ——— —
8. Feland, O.G. ——— —
9. Feland, Otto ——— — ——— —
10. Feland, Richard — ——— ——— —
11. Hansen, Norman — — —
12. Johansen, Erling ——— ———
13. Kary, Val ——— — — —
14. Miller, Everett ——— ——— —
15. Olson, Iner ——— — — ———
16. Pederson, Jonathan — ——— ———
17. Peterson, John — — — —
18. Peterson, Sig — — — ———
19. Peterson, Cuno — ———
20. Rickett, Warren — —
21. Skjolsvik ——— — —
22. Stiler, Theo. — — ——— —

## CURLEW TELEPHONE LINE
### - built in 1940

1. Anderson, Albert ——— ——— —
2. Christianson, Ed — —
3. Christianson, Floyd — — —
4. Christianson, Olaus — — ———
5. Christianson, Tollef ——— ——— —
6. Jacobson, Oscar — — ——— —
7. Keisel, Pete ——— — —
8. Kilen, Andrew ——— — —
9. Monson, Oscar ——— ———
10. Olson, Marvin ——— — — —
11. Olson, Melvin ——— —
12. Olson, Reynold — — ———
13. Olson, Tom ——— — — ———
14. Renner, Lawrence ——— — — ———
15. Seim, Nels — ——— —
16. Thorson, Eugene — — —
17. Thorson, Harvey — — — ———
18. Thorson, Pete — ——— ———
19. Wanstrom, George — — — —

Central ————————

## SIMS TELEPHONE LINE
### - built in 1940

1. Bakken, Walter — ———
2. Feland Farm — — ———
3. Hoeger, Chas. — — ——— —
4. Jacobson, Clarence — —
5. Jacobson, James ——— — ——— —
6. Johnson, Joseph — — ——— —
7. Johnson, Tillie — — — ———
8. Johnson Store ——— ———
9. Knudson, Carl ——— ——— ——— ———
10. Knudson, Clifford ——— — —
11. Larson, Amandus — ——— —
12. Olin, Alf ——— ——— ———
13. Olin, Art ——— — ———
14. Peterson, Alvin ——— — — —
15. Peterson, P.R. ——— —
16. Peterson, Theo. ——— ——— — —
17. Willman Bros. — ——— — ———
18. Willman, Martin — — — —

# "How Dry I Am"

*There has always been a desire and demand for alcoholic beverages. Saloons sprung up in Sims in the early days and their supplies came by rail.*

I was told that the liquor was shipped in barrels or kegs, and kept in the freight room at the depot until the saloonkeeper called for it. A story is told of a "thirsty" young man who took note of where the barrel or keg was stored in the freight room, which was 1½ feet off the ground. That night he sneaked back to the depot, crawled under the freight room, and drilled a hole up through the floor and through the bottom of the barrel. He got a good supply of whiskey, but much of it was spilled. He most likely had help from friends, who were happy to have a share in his "find."

The North Dakota Constitution of 1889 had a prohibition clause outlawing the selling of liquor. In spite of this law, saloons continued to operate, but they managed to evade the law by doing business through the back door, and the saloons took on a new name — "Blind Pig." There was a lot of home brew (beer) and wine made during this time; the brewers were called "Moonshiners." There were stills in the country and home brew was easily available, even within the city limits of Sims. Someone I knew (we'll call him Jack), went to a moon shiner south of Carson to buy a gallon of whiskey but was refused. The seller said, "I can't give you any more because your check of last week was no good." The buyer answered, "Let me see that check. No wonder! I wrote it on the wrong bank. Get me another gallon of whiskey and I'll write you a good check to cover both purchases." When the man went to get the booze, Jack turned to the friend he had with him, pulled four checkbooks out of his pocket and said, "On which bank should I write this check?" He had no money in any bank.

In 1933, 3.2% beer was legalized. This was a milder drink than homemade beer, which contained much more alcohol. Five beer parlors, as they were called then, sprung up in Almont and all seemed to do quite well for awhile. It was a new thing to be able to buy and drink beer legally. I think it was almost impossible to get drunk on 3.2 beer. I don't think there were as many drunks as during Prohibition.

Alcoholic beverages have never had an appeal to me. I have always been able to have a good time without an artifical boost.

**Hobein beer parlor — 1949 — Almont.**

# Charivarees

*The charivaree was a way of welcoming a local "just married" couple into the community as husband and wife.*

Often times the couple had eloped or gone to the parsonage or Justice of the Peace to be married without an announcement of the event. When news of their marriage leaked out, friends staged a Charivaree. The charivareers would set a time (unbeknown to the newlyweds) to gather, and come equipped with all kinds of noise-makers, such as shotguns, pots, pans, cowbells and anything else that would make noise. They would sneak up to the house quietly, after dark, and surprise the newlyweds who had probably retired for the night. If it was in the rural area, they would turn out

the lights of their cars so they wouldn't be noticed. The noise usually started with a dynamite blast (the dynamite was hung on the clothesline); then bedlam broke loose, including hollering, which continued until the newlyweds made their appearance and invited the charivareers in for the evening. Often times a party or dance would be scheduled at a later date, hosted by the newlyweds.

The charivaree was a way of honoring the couple and wishing them well. Rev. Norby of the Sims Lutheran Church was very much against this practice; he probably thought it was not a good way to start a marriage. I'm not so sure about his reasoning — we were charivareed (we would have been disappointed if we hadn't been), and we'll be celebrating our 56th wedding anniversary in June 1993.

# Halloween

*Halloween — a night of tricks, but no treats! It was not a night for children, but for teenagers and older.*

I don't believe it was until the 40's or later that children started to dress in costume and knock on doors and threaten to "trick or treat." People were happy to treat instead of having tricks played on them, as before that time only boys and young men were involved in the tricks and pranks played on Halloween. The targets for their fun were the little "out houses" in every back yard. Marge says she and her friend would usually go along on the escapades to insure that their family's privies weren't tipped! Even larger toilets at the country schools were occasionally found wrong side up the next morning. The only outhouse that I know of which couldn't be tipped was the one at the Feland farm, where Marge and I lived the first year of our marriage. It was a six-holder with a wall to divide the men from the women — three holes on each side. I've never seen another like it.

Even the adult men were involved in some of the escapades. One year a widow's two-holer was hauled out to Lovers Cliff and mounted on a rock. The interesting part of this story was the fact that the local constable was one of the pranksters. The next day he arranged to have the outhouse brought back. The following year the same men took the same toilet and mounted it on the flat roof of the Hyde Lumber Co. office.

Marge remembers the year the pranksters unhooked the "donger" from the school bell and hid it — she didn't say if she was involved in it or not. Chances are she was. She doesn't remember if they were reprimanded or not. School kids usually liked to play tricks on their teachers — and some weren't very nice. I remember coming to school the morning after Halloween and finding main street completely blocked with old and new machinery, barrels and anything else that could be rounded up. Younger kids never went to such extremes. Arrests were never made — it was expected on Halloween.

Some farm kids would unscrew the wheel nuts of neighbors wagons, so when the neighbor used the wagon the wheels would fall off. Another trick I heard of took place when a certain farmer was gone from home on Halloween — the pranksters somehow were able to coax and drag a steer up the stairs to the second floor of the house. When the man came home he was greatly surprised to find the steer upstairs. He was unable to get him down so butchered him right there (as the story goes).

Almont residents used to dread Halloween — they never knew how much damage would be done. One elderly man sat by his back door all night with a shotgun — he threatened, but never shot anyone. I think his outhouse was tipped anyway!

Halloweens of yesteryear — good, clean fun!

## *HISTORICAL FACT*

The increase in population of the Northwest Territory in the 1880's was unequaled in history. In 1870, the North Dakota portion of Dakota Territory had 2,405 inhabitants; 1880 - 36,909; 1890 - 190,983; 1900 - 319,146 and in 1910 - 577,056. Since 1910 to 1950, the population held quite stable.

# Shave and a Haircut - Six Bits!

The barber shop was a busy place on Saturdays — it was the day to get "cleaned up," and get a shave and haircut. I remember when many men shaved only once a week — on Saturday.

Sometimes it was the only day of the week the farmers took off from work to go to town. When they arrived in town, they would go directly to the barber shop to pick up a number which told them the approximate time they could get a haircut, shave or both; some appointments were as late as midnight. There was more demand for a shave than a haircut, however, 75¢ was the posted price for both. While they waited for the appointment, they took care of other business in town, and then whiled away the time visiting, shopping and playing pool and cards in the pool hall. Full beards and mustaches were common in the early days so shaving to them was not a priority.

The only shaving tool available at that time was the straight-edged razor; to maintain a sharp edge on the razor took careful stropping on a thick leather razor strop. We all used the straight-edge until the safety razor became available; Dad never changed to the new razor.

A scissors and comb were the only hair cutting tools used in those days. Dad was the barber in our family, but when he was not at home, mother took over which resulted in many "steps" — she was always in a hurry. I don't remember of her ever using a bowl on my head for a guide — maybe she should have. I've heard that many mothers did.

Frank X. Todt was Almont's first barber; when his shop burned in 1915, he moved back to his homestead south of town. Frank Walker and his son, Fred, set up a barber shop in the Sherwood Hotel in the late teens — they also had two pool tables and a card table. Casey Martin and Fred Knight barbered in that shop after the Walkers quit.

Johnny Gillis opened a barber shop in his pool hall in 1923. During my high school days, Ray and Leon Jacobson and I would rush down to the pool hall at noon to play a quick game of pool. Often times the tables were occupied by farmers who were hauling their wheat to the elevators; while their horses rested, they would play pool. The card tables were usually busy too, especially on Saturday; they played whist, smear, pinochle, penny ante, and various poker games. One of my school friends bragged that he had won over $80 playing poker — $80 was a lot of money in the 20's. The following night he lost it all — and more.

Haircuts and shaves have come a long way during my lifetime — from a straight-edge to an electric razor — and a comb and scissor haircut to the hairstyling of today. The prices have changed quite a bit, too — no more "shave and a haircut - six bits."

# Odds and Ends

The early settlers were quite self sufficient so their needs were few. They started with a milk cow, some chickens, a pig or two and a garden, which supplied them with much of their needs. Wild game was a supplement for meat.

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Saturday was the day to spend in town visiting, playing cards or pool, shopping, selling cream, visiting the barber for a hair cut and shave, etc. It made a long day for the horses who had to wait until their master decided it was time to go home. There were hitching rails for the horses in front of stores and other business places, and also in front of churches. Some of the more considerate people would put their horses in the livery barn for the day — and others put their horses in a friends's barn in town. Some towns had an ordinance that horses should be blanketed in cold weather; the Sims Church also had that ruling. Most horses were well taken care of.

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Some farmers walked to town for mail and supplies as they had no other means of transportation. Hans Rasmussen, a bachelor who lived up the Curlew Valley, about four miles west of Almont, oftentimes walked to town. During the winter, in order to keep his feet warm, he wrapped them with gunny sacks. It couldn't have been easy walking. (The rest of his outer clothing sort of matched his footwear.)

Amund Johnson told of walking from his farm on the Heart River (Rose Dale Stock Farm) to Sims — pushing a wheelbarrow to bring home needed supplies (about 18 miles). Enroute home with his loaded wheelbarrow, a neighbor homesteader caught up to him and offered him a ride in his buggy. There was no room for the wheel barrow so they hid it under a bridge — and it was still there the next time Amund went to town.

I heard of a farm wife who needed flour to make bread, and had no way of getting a sack of flour home. So she led her milk cow to Sims, and somehow managed to secure the sack of flour on the cow's back, and led the cow back home. Nothing was easy in those days!

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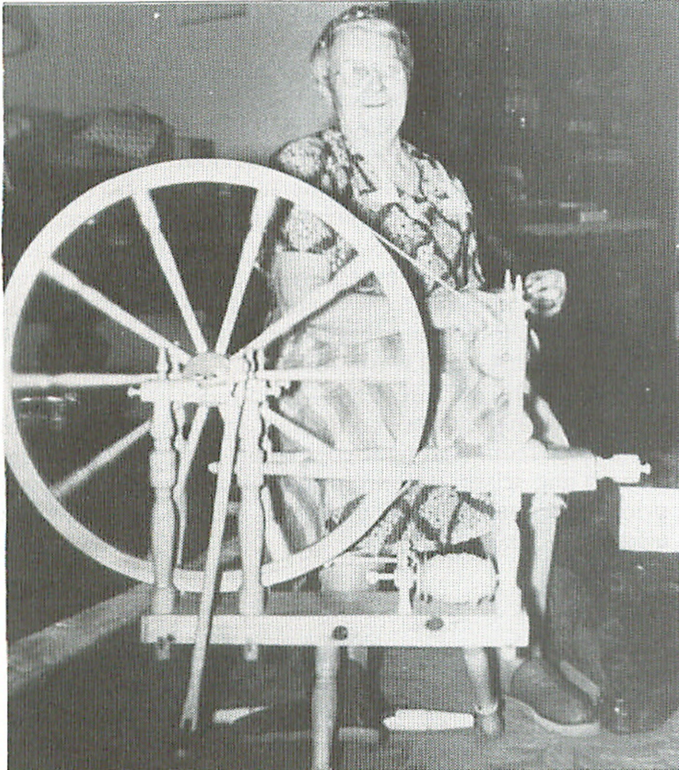
Much of the clothing used in early days was hand made, especially women's and children's clothing. The sewing machine was a very important item in the home. My mother sewed for herself and my two sisters, using her hand-cranked machine; she also sewed for her neighbors in Sims. There was a shortage of money so flour sacks were used to sew petticoats, corset covers, bloomers, nightgowns, etc. Valborg remembers an undergarment she wore with the words "Lyons Best Flour" showing plainly on the drop seat of her one-piece underwear.



**Thora Peterson — March 1953.**

Marge's mother was the main seamstress in the Almont area — and said she ruined her eyes sewing black dresses for the hard-to-fit older ladies in the community. Many articles of clothing were made-over from clothes that were out-dated and not too badly worn. Marge's first "store bought" dress was a prom dress in her senior year.

Sweaters, stockings, mittens and scarves were knit by hand, and in many cases, the wool was carded and spun on a spinning wheel at home. My mother kept a couple sheep for that purpose. They were also used to keep the weeds and grass down in the yard, as we didn't even own a rotary push mower.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

County fairs have changed considerably through the years. In 1895, at the Morton County Fair in Mandan, prizes were given to babies under these categories: prettiest - heaviest - best natured - sweetest smile - nicest smile - the boy with the prettiest hair.

I remember attending the County Fair at Mandan when I was a young fellow; it seemed as if there was more swine shown in the livestock exhibits than any other animals. I witnessed a farmer getting his leg broken as he was showing a large boar pig; the boar's tusks had evidently not been removed. There was also horse racing at the fair. Two of our Almont men, Ben Bird and Red Olson, won the fast horse and relay races that day. I was facinated by the Trotting and Sulky races; most of the trotting horses had come from Fergus Falls, MN. The five-gaited horses were also very interesting.

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Great minds discuss ideas — Average minds discuss events — Small minds discuss people.

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GYPSIES — Gypsies visited this area quite often years ago. I remember them stopping at our place in Sims on several occasions. I think we were all a little afraid of them as we didn't know what they might do. They came in a horse-drawn caravan of several wagons. They were dark skinned people — the women wore bright colors — flashy dresses and scarves. The women would offer to tell your fortune for a fee, and they would sell or trade goods for chickens or anything else we had that interested them. While the women were dickering, the men would check out the place, looking for trading stock or maybe something to steal. They were not to be trusted. They did not seem to find anything of interest at our place so were soon on their way — and we were glad.

Sometimes they led extra horses — often it was a very nice matched team that they would trade for another team and extra "boot money." It usually turned out that the team they traded off would be spoiled and balky or have other faults; the next week they would be back and buy the team for a much lesser amount — the farmer was glad to get rid of them. They made such a trade with Charley Hoeger — but were disappointed when they came the following week to get the team back — Charley would not part with them as he had worked them over and cured them of all their bad habits.

As we said — the gypsies were not to be trusted. They came to the Emil Willman farm at Sims when Mrs. Willman was gone for the day and had left a young girl (Hilder Jacobson) to care for the children. The Gypsies decided they would like to have little two-year-old blond Margido — so grabbed him and fled. Hilder knew she could not overtake them so ran to Theodore Felands for help and they immediately gave chase, gathering a posse as they went. They caught the caravan in the vicinity of Curlew where they rescued Margido, who was scared, but unharmed.

Marge remembers, too, how scared she and her friends were when a band of Gypsies would come into Almont. Everyone locked their doors! She doubts if anyone had their fortunes told by them.