

## ❧ Entertainment ❧

*The kind of entertainment that was enjoyed in the “good old days” differed somewhat to what we have now. Neighbors and friends would get together and enjoy a day or evening of socializing — picnics at the river with swimming, ball games in the pastures, sing-a-longs, cards, dancing and games of all kinds. In the winter months there was skating, sledding, skiing and tobogganing. The younger set used to be more active in outdoor sports than they are now. Can we blame it on TV?*

Dancing has always been a source of entertainment. When I hear good dance music, it is hard to keep my feet still, and I’m sure many others are affected the same way.

Sims had a ballroom where many gala events were held. The building was located near the Oakes House and Timmerman Store. Elaborate balls, masquerades, “hard time” dances, basket socials and many other events were held in the Sims Ballroom. As a very young boy, I remember attending a puppet show there with my brother. It made a big impression on me as I thought the puppets were real people. [Explanation of “hard time” dance—people would come to the dance dressed in their poorest clothes, and I recall hearing about one couple who wore clothes they made out of gunny sacks. They won first prize!]

Most of the music for dances was provided by violins, as they were the popular instrument at that time. Nearly every home had a piano or pump organ in those days, and usually someone could play it “after a fashion,” or at least could chord a little. Violinists were plentiful in pioneer days; I remember being at gatherings when I was a boy, and the violin would be passed around, and most of the men present could play a tune - maybe they only knew one tune, but they knew it well. Ben Bird, Almont’s famous cowboy, was one of those who knew only one tune, but played it well.

The best violinist whom I remember was Lorang Wang; he could produce a beautiful tone on his violin. My Dad played the violin and played for dances with the Harper brothers, who lived south of Glen Ullin, and were very musical. This was in about 1890. My Dad said other good violinists in the early years were Theodore Thompson and Bill Allen, from the Heart River area, Ted and Abe Peterson (Dad’s brothers), Frank Walker (Almont barber), Mr. and Mrs. Gunvaldson, Oscar Bethke and Fred Grimm. Walter Timpe was well-known for his old time fiddling. His brother, Punch, was also a fiddler and played with other fiddlers at the Labor Day program every year; Chris Halverson and Myrtle Hoovestol also played with the group. Rudy Feland and I are the only old time fiddlers left in this area. There may have been others in the area who played the violin — some have slipped my mind and others I did not know about. Bill Bethke and Joel Johnson have accompanied the Old Time Fiddlers on their guitars for many years.

Pianos, organs, mouth organs, accordians, guitars and banjos were also used to provide music. Carl and Norman Kilen were well-known for their accordion music, as is Archie Bethke.



**Sig, Myron Knutson, Chris Halverson, Barney and Dad — about 1926.**

At one time Sims had a Bowery — an out-door dance floor. Mrs. Laura Holritz said the Bowery was in connection with the Sims Ballroom. In the summertime it was cooler dancing outdoors. She also added an interesting note: when the bowery was no longer used, the lumber from it and the nearby Timmerman barn was used for the construction of the Sims Lutheran Church.

Another bowery, called the Dreamland Bowery, was built by Bill and Mike Johnson on their farm in the early 20’s (the farm is presently owned by Joel Johnson). In 1926 it was moved to the Steve Weekes ranch where annual rodeos were held. My brother Barney and I, with Art and Marian Russel of Flasher, played for the bowery dances there. In 1929 the same bowery was moved to Almont in time for the Old Settler’s Picnic and was located on the east side of Main Street (where the post office now stands). Shortly after this, it was moved again to the outskirts of town where the “noise” would not be disturbing to the “early-to-bed” citizens of Almont. I’m sure the dance floor wasn’t in the best shape after four moves — but no one seemed to mind. This last location was on the north side of Lovers Cliff, on a bend of the creek. Even though it was located out of town, the music drifted with the wind into town, and was enjoyed by the kids who were too young to dance, or who weren’t allowed at that “awful place.” (Marge was among those who were home in bed, listening to the music.) The bowery dances came to an end a few years later when John Jacobson bought the bowery and moved it to his farm at Sims and used the lumber

to build a barn. Dreamland Bowery from then on was but a dream.

Neighborhood party dances were quite common in the early years and were held in homes, granaries or barn lofts. The uncarpeted rooms were small, so the furniture, including the heating stove, had to be moved outside to make room for dancing. In the summertime, granaries and haylofts were swept out for the dancers. The Sam Anderson granary and Tinius Ramsland hay loft were popular places to dance, before they were used for grain storage or new mown hay. The Curlew Section House was also a place where neighbors gathered for an evening of cards, and dancing to accordian music by Carl Kilen. At all these neighborhood dances it was customary to "pass the hat" to pay the musicians. There was usually a midnight lunch, and during that time someone in the crowd would entertain with singing, clogging or telling "stories." If some wished to continue dancing past the 2 a.m. curfew, a hat was passed again to persuade the musicians to play a little longer.

My first experience playing for a dance happened by chance, and by rather unusual circumstances. The Farmers State Bank acquired the first radio in Almont in the winter of 1924, and as it was such a novelty, thought it could be used to provide music for dancing. A few days before a dance was scheduled in the Town Hall, our banker, Andy Anderson, came out to see us with an unusual request. He asked if we kids could bring our instruments to the dance Saturday evening. "We are going to dance to radio music, but in case there is too much static, will you kids be on hand?" Although we had played for programs and such, we didn't feel up to playing for a dance. We were just school kids — Valborg played the piano, Barney on the sax and I the violin. It took quite a bit of persuasion but we consented to do it. We wound up playing all night as there was nothing resembling music that came out of the radio. This experience led to other dance engagements.

The Peterson Orchestra was soon playing for public and wedding dances in the area. In 1926 we played for the opening dance at Big Heart Hall, south of Judson, and played there every other Saturday night for several years. Music came cheap in those days — we each received \$4 and played from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. with only a half hour break during the midnight lunch. Our only expense was sheet music, which was priced reasonably — three copies for \$1. We were usually among the last to leave the dance hall, so driving home in the wee hours of the morning was a tiring experience; sometime our patience was taxed when we drove behind cars traveling only about 10 miles an hour, and weaving so much we didn't dare to pass. The country roads were very rutted and narrow. After Valborg moved away, Barney and I teamed up with Art and Marian Russel of Flasher; Art played banjo and Marian the piano. We at last were getting \$7.50 each for a four to five hour night of playing.

Some interesting observances, in comparing dances now to those of 50 or more years ago: Dances were not held in bars as they are now (there were none until the '30's), but were held in public dance halls or auditoriums; the charge for an evening of dancing was usually \$1 a couple or 10¢ a dance; everyone at a dance was dressed in his best - fancy dresses and suits and ties - a man would never wear his hat or cap on the dance floor; there was smoking and drinking amongst the men, but rarely was a woman seen doing either. Children and babies usually accompanied their parents to

dances, but were never seen on the dance floor. Big Heart Hall had a rather large stage where the children played quietly until they became tired; by midnight they were all sleeping peacefully on blankets and coats on the stage. They were never a problem or disturbance.

Movies were another form of entertainment in Almont in the early years. It was very exciting for me as a kid to be able to take in a show once in awhile. The movies were held in the Farmers Hall, across the street from the elevator - right next to the railroad tracks. The noise of a train going through town didn't bother though, as the movies were silent. The conversation and script was shown on the screen for us to read. We had to speed up our reading in order to keep up with the action on the screen. I wonder if a few silent pictures would perhaps be a good idea in this age. I not only enjoyed seeing Tom Mix and his horse Tony on the screen, but I also appreciated the live music played during the movie. The music was provided by Mrs. Carl (Olive) Hill on the piano and Frank Walker, the local barber, on the violin; Frank also beat the bass drum with his foot. Mrs. Hill was a very good pianist and played mostly by ear. The music would usually fit the action on the screen - for example, if a horse was galloping, the music was fast and 'gallopy.' We enjoyed seeing horses and cattle on the screen and someone once remarked, "You can even smell them." - some of us came directly from the milking barn so there was quite an aroma! Movie tickets were 25¢ for adults and 12¢ for kids.

In the 1930's, Alvin Peterson operated a movie theater in Almont. During the 40's free movies were shown on Almont's main street several times during the summer. Stores would stay open to accommodate the people coming to town to attend the movie; the Post Office would also be open until the stores closed their doors, which would sometimes be 11 o'clock.

"Talkies," as they were called, were shown in the New Salem Auditorium for the first time in 1931. It was quite a novelty to hear, as well as see, the action on film.

Medicine Shows and other traveling shows used to visit Almont quite often during the summer. Most of the shows took place in the Farmers Hall, however, there were some tent shows, too. The Medicine Shows were called by that name because their main object was to sell "cure-all" medicines. The show usually opened with a variety program that was pretty good, and ended with a dance. Before the show, and during the intermissions, the barkers would try to sell their medicines. I remember seeing Lawrence Welk play at one of the shows; he was about 18 years of age, very good looking and played very well. The group he was with were called the Peerless Entertainers.

There were usually wild animals with the tent shows, which made it very exciting for the kids in town. Marge says the tent was usually pitched across the street from their house on Main Street — so it was extremely exciting for her.

Roller skating was popular for a time; it was also held in the Farmers Hall. Records were played to supply music for skating. Skating double to waltz music was romantic, if you had the right partner.

The Chatauqua came to Almont a few times in the early years, too. The tent show was a series of lectures and entertainment, staged every night for several days. A five day Chatauqua was held in 1929, and again 50 years later, in 1979. The popularity of that kind of entertainment had died for almost 50 years, but was revived again in the 70's.

Home talent shows and plays were often given in the community. It gave local people a chance to show off their talents, and dream of Hollywood or Broadway. Some of the actors in the three-act plays had Irish or Scotch roles, with a Norsk accent!

— Rodeos and Horse Events —

Horse racing, rodeos and other horse competition was very popular in this western ranching community in early years. I have been told that whenever there was a gathering, such as a baseball game or picnic, it would be followed by a horse race, buggy race, bronc riding, etc. to add to the excitement and enjoyment of the day. There were no race tracks, arenas or chutes for these events — everything was held out on the prairie. The broncs had to be blindfolded, eared down, saddled and turned loose, with the rider doing his best to stay on. It added to the excitement if the horse would throw the rider sky high and run away. It was the responsibility of the hazers to protect the spectators, and somehow control the bronc, which at times was quite impossible.

The first rodeo arena in this area, as far as I know, was at the Weekes Ranch on the Heart River, south of Almont. I was very young when I attended my first rodeo there. Webb Bateman and I rode to the arena on our horses, picketed them while we attended the rodeo, and came back the next day. The arena was located on the south side of the river, on the open prairie and was large enough to hold horse races inside the fence. As I remember there were no buildings there except a tent, which probably belonged to some of the cowboys or Indians. There were also food stands, and as I remember, soda pop and lemonade were the only drinks available. There was no public address system; Don Stevenson of Carson was the announcer and rode around the inside of the arena with a megaphone to announce the next rider or event. When a Bowery was put up a couple years later, Barney and I played with Art and Marian Russel for the rodeo dance.

There were many bronc riders at that time — those I remember were George "Let'er Buck" Ormiston, Bill Weibke, George Bruington, Herb Wagner, Jim Weekes and Joe Wicks. Contestants from outside this area included George Defender, Ed Harding, Roland Finger and Arnold Stiles.

Horse racing was a major event at Weekes Rodeos. Rudolph "Red" Olson, Ben Bird, George Bruington and Tom Nolan owned the fast horses that were usually in competition. The 3-horse relay was an especially exciting event; speed, and good control of the horses was required when making the change of saddles from one horse to the other, using the fast relay cinch. Relay riders included Red Olson, George Bruington, Earl Bird, Knute Elvik and Lars Handegard. During one of the relay races at the Weekes Arena, Red Olson was run over and knocked unconscious for a few hours. I remember of them taking him to a tent where he recovered.

Earl Bird and George Bruington also competed in the Roman Race. Each contestant had two horses, and stood with a foot on each horse, as he circled the track trying to beat his opponent. It was a very interesting and novel event to watch.

Rudolph Red, as we called him, spent most of the summer attending races at rodeos, horse shows or fairs. He would leave home in early summer with a team and wagon leading

his string of race horses, and not return until fall. His daughter, Judy, oftentimes accompanied him to help care for the horses and take part as a contestant. At some of the events, Judy would perform Roman Riding — standing on one horse while galloping around the arena. Ben Bird would also be seen at many of the major horse events and he and Red would wind up with a good share of the winnings.

Horse racing can easily get into your blood, so to speak. I rode a very fast horse, "Dodge," to school for two years and raced against a number of good race horses, and was never beaten. In later years, I also had a gold colored horse, "Nugget," that had a lot of speed, especially in a quarter mile race. The excitement of racing was almost too much for me at times — especially if it was a neck and neck race.

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## Almont Shodeo

SPONSORED BY ALMONT COMMERCIAL CLUB, ALMONT LEGION POST 261 AND ALMONT SADDLE CLUB

### Saturday, June 11, 1949

Bob Feland, Arena Director      Entry Fees Added To Purse

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### Entry Blank

Deposit money for all entry fees with Everett Olson, Almont

MARK WITH AN X, EVENTS ENTERED

ENTRANCE FEE	EVENT	PRIZE
1 —	Grand Opening	
2 — <del>none</del>	Pleasure Horse Class	\$5, \$3, \$2
3 — none	Stake Race	Trophies
4	Drill Team	
5 — \$3.00	Calf Roping, 1st Section	\$15, \$10, \$5
6 — \$3.00	Steer Riding, 1st Section	\$10, \$6, \$4
7 — none	Wheel Barrow Race	\$5.00
8 — \$3.00	Bending Race	\$15, \$10, \$5, Entry Fee Not Included
9 — none	Bronc Riding	\$5 Mount Money
10 — <del>\$1.00</del>	One Horse Relay	Winner Take All
11 — none	Musical Chair Race	\$5.00
12 — \$2.00	Scoop Shovel Race	\$5, \$3, \$2
13	Steer Riding, 2nd section	
14	Calf Roping, 2nd section	
15 — \$2.00	Wild Cow Milking	\$10, \$6, \$4
16 — <del>\$5.00</del>	1/2 Mile Race	\$10, \$6, \$4
17 — <del>\$1.00</del>	Cow Boy Race	\$5, \$3, \$2
18 — \$1.00	Cow Girl Race	\$5, \$3, \$2
19 — <del>\$5.00</del>	Pony Express Race	\$15, \$10, \$5

In consideration of the foregoing entry, I hereby release the Almont Commercial Club, Almont Legion Post 261 and Almont Saddle Club, and the officers and the members thereof, and I hereby assume and accept full risk and danger of any hurt, injury or damage which may occur through or by reason of any manner and also any injury or damage to any horse I use to take part in any of the entries during the Almont Shodeo Day.

Name Alvin Jensen  
 Address Burlak St. Sear

If this blank is not signed, the entry will not be effective.

Local cowboys who competed in various rodeo and race events up to about 1960 included Art Feland, Bob Feland, Jake Larson, Lars Handegard, Joe Erhardt, Bud Dawson, Wendal Dawson, Richard Bahm, Bob Bahm, Marvin Olson, Dick Bond, M.G. Olson and cowgirl Dolly Cronin Feland. There may have been others who have slipped my mind.

In 1946, a rodeo arena was built in Art Feland's pasture by Bob Feland and Claude Ritz. They staged a rodeo that year and also in 1947 and 1948. In 1949, the Almont Range Riders Club was organized, which included local cowboys and interested citizens. The club bought the equipment from

### Winners in Sunday Junior Horse Show—July, 1961

Winners in the Junior Horse Show, Sunday afternoon at the rodeo grounds were: Pleasure class: Lester Feland, Nancy Gustafson, Carol Feland. Pleasure class under 10: Joan and Timmy Feland, Mary Jane Thorson, Greg Olson and Jody Olson all placed first.

Musical chair: Royal Handegard and Patty Feland. Musical chair under 10: Timmy Feland and Greg Olson.

Potato race, two sections: Rodney Peterson and Larry Handegard, Lester Feland and Charles Olson, Carol Feland.

Bending: Lester Feland; Bruce Peterson and Royal Handegard, tied.

Cloverleaf: Royal Handegard, Lester Feland, Bruce Peterson. Cloverleaf under 10: Greg Olson, Timmy Feland, Joan Feland.

One horse relay: Joel Olson, Douglas Thorson, Carol Feland.

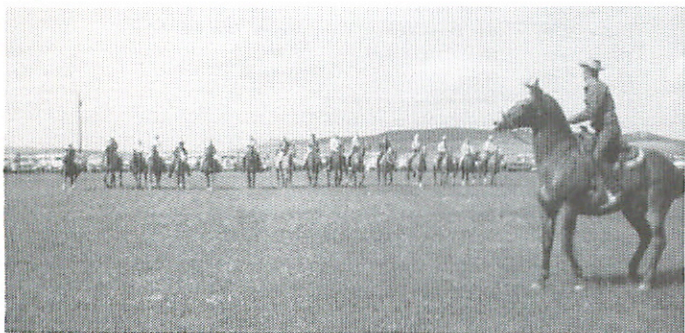
Rescue race: Royal Handegard, Stuart Olson, Aaron Zemple and Bruce Peterson, Charles Olson and Larry Handegard.

Pack up and go: Carol Feland, Joel Olson.

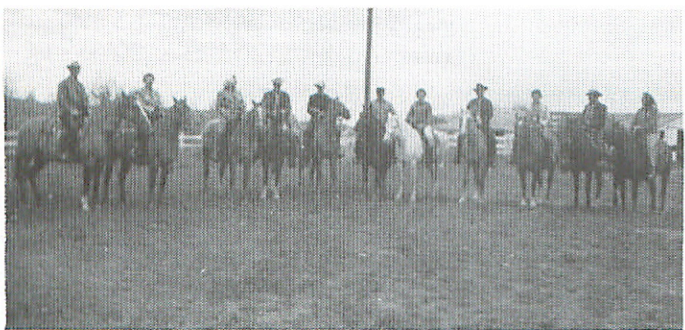
Obstacle race: Rodney Peterson, Carol Feland, Larry and Royal Handegard, all tied for first.

Stake team winners: Royal, Bruce, Charles, Larry and Patty Feland.

Bob and Claude and sponsored Shodeos (combination of rodeo and horse show) for the next years. The first Shodeo was held June 11, 1940 and attracted 150 riders from eight different communities. Almont's 16 horse drill team (which also included women riders) made their first appearance that day.



Junior Horse Club Drill Team - 1962. Sig in foreground directing.



All set for a trail ride from the  $\frac{0}{0}$  Ranch.

One of the events of the Shodeo was a stake race between different towns in the area. We had both a Sims and Almont team which competed against Hebron, Glen Ullin, New

Salem, Wing, Flasher, Carson, Elgin and Heart River. The Sims team won the traveling trophy for three consecutive wins; it can be seen in the Almont Museum.

The Almont Junior Horse Club was organized July 1961, with 25 members and three advisors. The club sponsored a yearly Junior Horse Show. The largest show was in 1961 when Walt Neuens judged the events and Brad Gjermanson (who has gone on to be a 4-time World Champion bronc rider) was one of the contestants. Five cents was the entry fee for each of the Jack Pot events. We organized a 16 horse drill team, which included both the boys and girls, and performed at several events, including the Morton County Fair.

Horses have always been a big part of my life and I will never get over my love for them. It's hard for me to explain the feel of a horse under me. Presently I have a team of six-year-old buckskin quarter horses. They are broke to harness as well as saddle. I prefer to drive them, because at my age, reaching the stirrup for mounting is a problem. Age does make a difference!

## — Hunting —

Pioneers found an abundance of wildlife when they settled this area. The many streams, hills and valleys made it a natural habitat for many wild animals, including deer, antelope, elk, wolf, coyote, bobcat, raccoon, porcupine, skunk, badger, beaver, mink, muskrat, grouse and ducks. What a haven for a hunter.

Buffalo had already disappeared from this area at that time. Bear, caribou and moose were seen in other parts of the state, but I have not heard of them being here.

The larger animals provided meat for the table, and the hides and fur from these and smaller animals were sold as an added income for the pioneer. The hides from some of the animals were tanned at home and sent in to be made into coats, jackets, muffs and stoles. We have muffs made from beaver pelts that were trapped by Marge's dad.

The hunter and trapper in our family was Barney, who sold quite a lot of coyote, mink, beaver and muskrat pelts. Some of my school pals trapped skunk, and at times brought a very strong aroma with them to school. In one instance, a student was asked to go home and change clothes.

Rabbits became so numerous in the late 20's that they became a problem. Rabbit drives were organized, and after one such hunt 400 were bagged. They sold for about 50¢ apiece.

In about 1918, when we moved from Sims to the farm, there was an abundance of grouse (we called them prairie chickens). The birds roosted in the trees, close to our house — we could "pick them off" with a .22 rifle. Their mating or stomping grounds were just across the creek; the males would strut and stomp, showing off to the females. It was a colorful show.

My older brothers enjoyed duck hunting in the lake area near Dawson. Many duck hunting parties headed east in the fall season. There was no limit as to the amount of ducks you could shoot, so the cars came back loaded. Marge's dad was also an avid hunter who enjoyed the annual trip to Dawson, coming home with more ducks than her mother cared to clean (he did the shooting - no cleaning!). She also saved the duck down to make bed pillows, which was a big

job.

Chinese pheasants were "planted" in this area in about 1927. They multiplied very quickly, so in just a few years they were the favorite game bird (there was no bag limit).

Raccoon hunting was a popular night sport, especially if a person had a dog. The dogs would tree the animals, and the hunter would shoot them, with the help of a flashlight. Clifford Kelsven ordered a trained "coon" hound from Kentucky which he named Trailer. After Barney had hunted with Kelsven and Trailer a few evenings, he got the "fever" and ordered a female coon hound. Barney's dog Sue was much smaller than Trailer, but had a better nose for following the trail of a "coon." The foursome did a lot of hunting along the Heart River.

I should mention that I was never a hunter. Being the youngest in the family, I was elected by my brothers to scare and bark the birds out of the brush, and carry the dead game to the car. No fun. Is it any wonder that I'm not a hunter?

I preferred riding the range on my favorite horse.

### — Basketball, Golf, Tennis, Etc. —

Basketball became a very popular sport in Almont after the school gym was built in 1928. Previous to that time, some basketball had been played in the Town Hall, even though it was much too small for a game; however, it did provide enough space for a scrimmage. The players did not look like basketball players, as they played in overalls — no one owned a pair of basketball trunks.

Other towns had independent basketball teams, so not to be outdone, Almont organized, not one, but five teams. The teams were sponsored by Kelsven's Store, Halvorson's Store, Hyde Lumber Yard, Nelson-Templeton Implement Co. and the two grain elevators. Team members came from both town and country and enjoyed playing intramural games all winter. At the close of the season, the team with the lowest record was obligated to treat the other four teams to an oyster stew. Interest in this new sport was high — the gym was usually packed with spectators who came to support their favorite team or player, and cheer them on. The games were quite exciting, and amusing, too, as many had not played before — there was a lot of fumbling and clowning. Some of the older men wore bathrobes while they "warmed the bench," so the spectators expected to see a few rounds of boxing during half-time! I played on one of the teams (Kelsven's Store) and I'm sure I didn't add much to my team's score as it was a new experience for me. Marge's dad played on the Nelson-Templeton team, and because of poor health was not supposed to play at all — but he positioned himself under the basket and his teammates fed the ball to him to shoot (and hoped he'd score).

An Almont Independent Team played in a tournament at New Salem in 1929. Both Leo and Punch Timpe played on the team, and kept the crowd entertained with their antics and clowning. When the game ended with a blank shot from a gun, Punch and Leo fell flat on the floor, faking being shot! Though the scores were low, and Almont was usually the loser, the home folks were enthusiastic supporters. Almont had the reputation for being a good loser!

A summer sport that was quite popular in Almont was tennis. A court was laid out on the native sod in the school yard, when I was in high school (in the 20's). The court was busy

all day as the teachers would select a different foursome to play during each 40 minute school period. Another court was laid out in about 1928 and was located across the street (east) from the old Lutheran Church. Marge says she and her friends played tennis every day the weather was favorable. She still has her tennis racket — it's a heavier racket than those of today.

Golf was a sport that did not last too long in Almont. Marge's dad, Lawrence Nelson, was instrumental in getting the 9-hole course laid out in the hills south and west of Lovers Cliff. It was reputed to be a very good, but hard course. Barney and I tried it out one Sunday morning, using borrowed clubs; we didn't even get to the second hole before we had lost all the balls. That was the end of our golfing — and I haven't been interested in it since. A tournament was held at Almont in October 1928 and Lawrence was the winner with a 97 score on 18 holes. Lawrence also helped lay out the New Salem course — and enjoyed playing and winning tournaments there, as well. He was interested in athletics of all kinds and was the promoter in most of Almont's sports projects and events until his early death in 1930.

The sport of wrestling came into the community through a young man who worked for Otis Malone. John Bush was a scientific wrestler who taught various wrestling maneuvers to the young men in the area. Punch Timpe became a very good wrestler for his weight; he was quick, and being in perfect condition, he would wear out his opponents. The matches would last until one man was pinned, which sometimes took a half hour or more. I witnessed several of Punch's matches, and although he weighed only about 140 pounds, he was always the winner. Clifford Leach from Sims had done quite a bit of wrestling in the Army during World War I; he and Punch engaged in many long lasting matches. There was also a Hebron wrestler who was a difficult opponent for Punch. Fritz Kaelberer, who lived east of Almont, was Punch's biggest opponent. At their first match, Fritz got pinned, but after he spent the winter practicing, he came back to pin Punch. In their second match, Fritz would pick Punch up and slam him on to the mat; Punch's ribs got fractured during that match. Of course, there were many fun type wrestling matches to scientifically test one's strength.

Boxing was quite a popular sport, also. We boxed as kids when we lived in Sims, and often there would be a workout in different places. A young man, Ernest Leland, came to Almont from Sidney, Mont. in 1926 to work at the Nelson-Templeton Implement Co. Ernest was quite a clever boxer, and willing to take on any young man in the community. A number of boxing meets were held in the basement of the school and I don't remember that these matches even required a referee — it was all for fun. Perhaps Ernest's best matched opponent was Melvin Jacobson. (Ernest later became County Commissioner in his home community at Sidney, and his ranching operations in the Squaw Gap area grew to a respectable size. His son still operates there.)

### — Winter Fun —

Winter sports in this area included skiing, tobogganing, sledding and skating. Norwegians are well-known for their ability to excel in these sports. Many Norwegians who came to Sims were very good skiers as they had skied in Norway

for transportation as well as for enjoyment. The hills around the Sims area were great for this sport. I enjoyed seeing our neighbor Martin Willman ski; he stood erect, with one foot slightly ahead of the other, as he sped down the hill. He also skied to town for mail and groceries quite often. Martin's nephew Nels spent a winter in Sims and did a lot of skiing. The snow had drifted the hills favorably for jumping and he made a spectacular 90 ft. jump off the big hill behind the church. Several pioneers made their own skis; my grandfather made a very good pair of 5-footers, on which my brother Barney covered many miles. Skiing continued to be a popular sport through the 20's and 30's; Sundays would find the hills around Almont dotted with skiers of all ages.

Tobogganing was also a favorite winter time sport. On Friday afternoons, if the weather was favorable, school would be dismissed so students could ski or toboggan. A tobogganing incident I remember happened in the C.A. Knutson pasture, when five or six of us boarded a rather long toboggan and took off at the top of the hill. The snow was fast, and with such a heavy load the toboggan traveled faster and faster — and further than we had anticipated. A three-wire fence at the foot of the hill was unavoidable, and instead of baling out we went under it, resulting in a few wire cuts but nothing serious. It could have been much worse. Another reckless sport was to ride a toboggan tied to the back of a car on a long rope. One Sunday, Bob Atkinson, Vernon Knutson and I were riding a toboggan, at a rather high speed, when the car pulling us turned a corner too short on Main Street. We collided with a power pole and were thrown off the toboggan. We all got hurt, but with no lasting effects.

Skating has always been an enjoyable winter activity. The railroad dam at Sims, and the creeks at Sims and Almont provided good skating. My cousin Ole Peterson and I would "inhale" our school lunch at noon so we would have time to skate on the Almont Creek from the Templeton home, around the bends of the creek, to the Ole Ellingson Store. We wore skates which Ole's dad had made; they were similar to the ones he had brought from Norway. They were very good skates and were tied to our shoes by rope. The best skater of my age was Ray Bateman. Hans and Harold Hansen, who were older than I, were clever figure skaters and fun to watch. Water was pumped from the creek for Almont's first skating rink, which was made in 1923 and was located at the south end of Main Street.

## — Baseball —

Baseball has been a favorite sport since pioneer days. Sims always had a good ball team; the first baseball diamond was about a ½ mile southeast of town. The Sunday ball game was of interest to everyone, and horse racing and bronc riding were added attractions.

Sims also had a good youth team. I remember Clarence Jacobson pitching, and my brother Barney catching for the team. They played the New Salem boys team and traveled by train - going to New Salem on train #8 and returning later that afternoon on train #7.

The first games that I remember attending were played on the bend of Sims Creek, just south of Timmerman Store. The pitchers mound is still visible; the outfield was just east of the railroad.

The Johnson name was well-known, when referring to

baseball. Of the older generation there was Simon, pitcher; Joseph and Andrew, catchers; "Fatty" Jake, second base. Andrew Holritz seemed to be the manager and promoter; he also pitched and played first base. The second generation of Johnson ball players included Andrew's sons — Norman, Milton, Palmer and Willard and Joseph's sons — Duane and Joel.

I especially remember a game played at Sims against Pumpkin Center (south of Almont). The Timpe boys — Punch, Leo and Ed played on that team and Joe Olson was their pitcher. I don't remember who won, but I remember it was an exciting game.



Almont's baseball team — 1910. Back (L. to R.): Neil Gillis, ?, Shorty Erickson, Lawrence Nelson, ?. Front: ?, Frank Johnson, ?, Ollie Johnson.

Soon after Almont was founded, a baseball team was organized and there was keen competition between Sims and Almont. Almont won the first game played between the two towns; the ninth inning ended at a 2-2 tie, and Almont was able to score in the tenth. Elmer "Red" Brown, pitcher, was credited with the win, but it was McGary who drove in the winning run. Brown, a homesteader in the area, was the father of Fay Brown, a well-known sports announcer for KFJR in the early days of radio.

Almont's first baseball diamond was north of the railroad tracks, just north of Main Street. There was also a race track there. Ole Feland remembered that there was an elevated judges stand for the horse racing events. Baseball and horse racing seemed to be very popular in the early years.

There was also a diamond on the open area at the south end of Main Street. Norman Hansen remembered an All-Nations team that came through and played Almont at that location. One of the black men on the team said "I'm going to hit the next ball pitched, and it's going to land right over there, across the creek." And it did. Almont was no match for that team.

Another ball diamond in Almont was located northeast of the school. The players I remember on the team at that time included Joe Olson, pitcher; Johnny Gillis, catcher; Amandus Larson, third base and Norman Hansen, short stop. The diamond was close enough to school so was used by the boys during noon hour.

Perhaps the best pitcher Almont ever had was Elmer Wanstrom; he had a lot of speed and good control. His

brothers, Wilbur and Charles were also very good players. Others on the team at that time were the Johnson boys, Irvin Olin, Ed Reef and Barney Peterson. Wilbur Scharff and Otis Malone were managers and Thorleiv Peterson, scorekeeper.

I was never much of a baseball player, but enjoyed the game. Almont was short a right fielder when playing a game at Hebron so I was asked to fill in. I managed to make a couple good catches, but I also pulled some boners. On the

way home from the game, Lawrence Nelson remarked, "Here we've got the best and poorest player on the team!" (meaning me)

Softball has taken over baseball in the last half century, except for the major and minor leagues. In the 30's, radio made it possible to keep up with the progress of a favorite league team, as the games were broadcast over the radio air waves.



Almont baseball team, August 12, 1906. Standing: McGary, Albert Anderson, Seimers, E.W. Hyde, J.W. Burt, Cornelius Knutson, Amandus Larson, Ted Peterson. Sitting: "Red" Brown, Stevenson, Byron DeLange.



Almont baseball team — 1930. Front (L. to R.): Norman Johnson, Wilbur Wanstrom, Ed Reef, Norman Kilen, Milton Johnson, Irvin Olin, Wilbur Scharff. Back: Leander Johnson, Willard Johnson, Charles Wanstrom, Palmer Johnson, Barney Peterson. (This photo was used in the promo ads for the 1992 ND Prairie Rose Games.)

## 🎵 Music 🎵

*“There’s music in the Air-” The Almont-Sims community has always had a reputation for its good music — whether it be church, school or community.*



Community chorus - 1961. Front row: Harold Foley (director), Sandra Christianson, Cheryl Christianson, Mildred Olson, Marilyn Miller, Ardys Brinkman, Jean Wetzel, Marilyn Olson, Nancy Gustafson, Karen Olson, Veralyn Wanstrom, Judy Gustafson, Ginger Gustafson. Middle row: Laura Gustafson, Joan Johnson, Caroline Schwartz, Linda Jacobson, Maxine Bachler, Mary Renner, Doris Feland, Dianne Olson, Carol Kilen, Norma Kilen, Ida Olson, Carol Huber, Alma Olson, Donna Johnson, Marge Peterson. Back row: Stuart Olson, Rodney Peterson, Harvey Hogan, Paul Myers, Wayne Schwartz, Mark Willman, Roman Peterson, Sig Peterson, Joel Johnson, Clarence Jacobson, Duane Johnson, Darrel Nilles, Dwayne Thiel, Ernest Feland, Lee Harper, Carlyle Reeff, Myron Rosendahl, Larry Dawson, Ray Myers

Music has always been an enjoyable part of my life, since the first I remember of my childhood, about 80 years ago. My dad taught me musical notes before I could read words, and I was playing a little tin fiddle when I was 5, and also sang at a very young age. My father, who was a self-taught musician, also taught me to play the fiddle and taught my brother Barney and two sisters the notes. The girls played the piano and Barney the trumpet. Barney also played the cello and saxophone. We had lots of music in our home as dad played string instruments and was a good singer, as well. For a number of years Dad was responsible for the music in the Sims Church — he led the congregational singing with his violin, and also directed a choir. He put me in the tenor section of the adult choir when I was very young. I graduated to a 3/4 size violin which I played until I was in high school. That instrument is now being played by our grandnephew, Lafe Nelson of Sims — it’s back in Sims where it was first played.

After moving to the farm from Sims in 1918, I also became involved in the Almont Lutheran Church choir. Mrs. N.E. Becklund always managed to maintain a very commendable choir. In 1927 the choir presented an hour and a half program on KFYZ Radio. There were solos, duets, and mixed,

male and ladies quartettes included in the program. The Almont Lutheran Church has been known for their good music, thanks to many good directors through the years. There were also very good soloists in the early years, including Marge’s Mom, Grace Nelson. Others that I recall were Anna Feland, Bessie Williams, Ruth (Mrs. Pat) Feland, Erling Willman, Caroline Frey, and Myrtle Hoovestol; and later — Vernon Knutson and Laura Gustafson.

In 1928 Chris Halvorson, Myron Knutson, Leon Jacobson and I started a male quartette. We practiced every Monday evening at our (my folks) home. We were much in demand to sing for various events in the church and community. In a few years, Myron and Leon left the community and were replaced by Howard and Vernon Knutson, and later Harold Halvorson. In 1937 we presented a program over KGCU-radio. When Chris moved to Hettinger in 1945, I was the only one left of the original four. Then we expanded to an octette — recruiting more members. This group presented a half hour program on KXMB-TV which was well received as we got a lot of fan mail. We also sang at church conventions and other functions away from home territory. One fall we traveled to eastern North Dakota to sing in Harold Foley’s home church at DeLamere and also at a neighbor-



ing church. In the 1970's we disbanded for lack of voices who could sing 4-part harmony. Margie was our accompanist since 1935 — in fact, our romance started after she started playing for us. After we were married in '37, the group met at our home every week (coffee and lunch afterwards!). Those days will never be forgotten.

Other choral directors were Carol Knutson Atkinson, who conducted the Sims-Almont Parish Choir in 1953-56; this choir also presented cantatas and programs in other communities. Harold Foley directed the Lutheran Parish Choir during the years he taught here — 1959 to 1964 and also directed a community Easter Cantata two consecutive years. Margie started a Junior Choir in the Almont Lutheran Church in 1957 and has managed to keep the group active ever since.

Almont also had a band. The first school band was organized in 1928 by Leslie Klopfleish, who was the school principal, and a very good musician. Margie played saxophone. The band was discontinued for a couple years (lack of a director) and resumed in 1937 under the direction of Mrs. Carlson. After she left, Lowell Britton, who taught in Glen Ullin, directed the band for a couple of years. In 1953 Philip Johnson (teacher) started from scratch and organized a new school band, with the help of a few adults who played instruments — Rev. Jolivette, Mark Willman, Marge and I. We appeared in Almont's 40th anniversary parade (marching) and also played open-air concerts during the summer



Almont 20-piece band in 1956 parade.

on Almont's main street. The band continued under Harold Foley, and then Duane Bauer, but has been non-existent for more than 20 years.

Margie's musical talent was most likely generated by her Mom's beautiful contralto voice. Her sisters, Frances and Audrey, and brother Burt have all been involved in music. The "sound of music" has come from both our family homes; it has enriched our lives. We hope our love for music will be handed down and carried on to the next generations.



Male chorus at 1970 school reunion. (L. to R.): Chris Halvorson, Mark Willman, Roman Peterson, Sig Peterson, Vernon Knutson, Marshall Feland, Harold Halvorson, Joel Johnson, Jim Harper, Harold Foley, Eugene Harper, Leon Jacobson, Duane Johnson.

## ❧ The Dirty Thirties and The New Deal ❧

*The 1930's, often referred to as the "dirty thirties," started out bad and got even worse! The banks were closing, about a third of the American working people were out of work, we were in a dry cycle, prices of farm commodities were very low, and we were in a depression. Things couldn't get much worse!*

Livestock prices were so low that in some instances the shipper had to pre-pay freight charges as there was a good possibility that their stock would not bring enough at market to cover shipping. I still have sales receipts showing a net return in St. Paul of \$576.41 for 29 head of two-year-old steers on October 23, 1933 — and on August 20, 1934, 33 head brought \$605.66. On December 16, 1931 we received \$594.59 for a carload of top hogs. These prices averaged from 2½¢ to 3½¢ a pound. Foreclosures were averaging about 1000 per day across the nation, and in one 24 hour period in the state of Missouri, one fourth of the state's farmers lost their farms. My brother, Barney, and I felt the pinch also, as we had started farming in 1928 after buying a section of land for \$10,000.

The Republican administration at that time was headed by President Herbert Hoover, and we were of the opinion that nothing was being done to correct or ease the deteriorating conditions in the country. We have since learned that in 1930 President Hoover recommended that Congress appropriate money to help the farmers, to employ the needy and give relief to the homeless and unemployed. These programs had not shown results by the time of the election of 1932, so people were anxious for a change.

The first opportunity I had to exercise my voting privilege was in 1832; Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the Democratic candidate for President. Almont had always been a strong Republican community, in fact there were only two known Democrats in this area; but by this time people seemed to feel like I did — things couldn't get any worse — we needed a change. The local vote was a landslide for FDR.

The Roosevelt Administration was referred to as "The New Deal"; it was a contrast to the former administration. One of President Roosevelt's first actions was to make the nation's banks secure so we could once again feel safe that our hard earned savings wouldn't be lost by bank failures. Banks had been closing every day, including our Farmer's State Bank in Almont.

The New Deal created jobs. When the NRA [National Recovery Act] was enacted, it provided for many projects designed to put people back to work. The PWA [Public Works Administration] gave grants and low interest loans to local governments to finance community projects, using local workers. The selection for the jobs was based on family size and needs. Unskilled laborers received 50¢ per hour, and could earn a maximum of \$15 per week. Skilled laborers earned up to \$1.20 per hour. Some of the Almont projects included pouring concrete sidewalks on Main Street and construction of a concrete dam across the creek. The dam project included building a park, planting trees, and providing access

to the park by making a swinging foot bridge across the creek (at the end of Main Street). Construction of a city hall was considered, but the dam project was favored by "city dads." (The park and swinging bridge were destroyed by the 1950 flood.) Clarence Jacobson was coordinator of these PWA projects.

This era seemed to mark the birth of using capital letters to refer to projects, etc., instead of complete titles. We began to hear of NRA, FERA, CWA, PWA, CCC, NYA and many others. Capital letters have been used in this way to quite an extent since that time; it boggles one's mind sometimes to interpret the full titles.

The CWA [Civil Works Administration] sponsored smaller projects, the most known one in this area being the surfacing of local dirt roads with scoria. (As a word of explanation — scoria is the baked red clay commonly found and mined in the hills of western North Dakota that was used for road surfacing when gravel wasn't readily available. It was because of the use of scoria that the first east-west highway through North Dakota was called the Red Trail.) The surfacing was done by local farmers who, with their teams and wagons, would haul the scoria from local scoria pits in the nearby hills and spread it on the roads, doing all the loading and unloading by hand shovel. The road past our farm was surfaced in that way during the winter of 1934-35; it was an open winter so snow was no problem. Thorvald Larson was boss of that crew and the scoria was all hauled from the Amandus Larson pit. On occasion my brother, Thorleiv, and I went to the pit during the noon hour to put shoes on several of the teams.

The FERA [Federal Emergency Relief Administration] made it possible for farmers to get low interest seed loans. Our Morton County Extension Agent said that records show that about 1600 farmers in Morton County took advantage of that opportunity.

The CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] was another project of the New Deal. This project provided work opportunity for otherwise idle young men, and was quasi-military in that they were sent to camps throughout the United States, and usually enlisted for a one-year hitch. Over 2,500,000 young men were so employed, earning board, room, clothing and \$30 per month, of which \$25 was sent home to their family for use or saving. The main projects they were involved in included planting and pruning trees, fighting forest fires, building roads, dams and playgrounds. As you travel through state and federal parks, you still see much of their handiwork still standing and being used. Twenty or more young men from our community worked in CCC camps in different parts of the country.

Another project which gave employment to a younger age group was the NYA [National Youth Administration], which put young folks to work on local projects, earning \$14 for 44 hours work. Harold Halvorson was the local coordinator.

In 1934 a government livestock buying program was instituted, paying farmers from \$20 for good animals (cattle), and down to \$4 for the poorest. An appraisal team, made up of local men (Carl Knudson and Olaus Christianson in this area), were responsible for setting the price paid. Most animals so purchased were brought into Almont for slaughter, except for the very poor or sickly which were disposed of on the farm. Those brought to town were checked again by Al Shauer, local butcher, and any not suitable for butchering were killed before the rest were shipped off for butchering. It is my understanding that the meat thus obtained was distributed to organizations feeding the needy.

The social security system was put into effect in 1935, which was to provide financial security for senior citizens in their "golden years."

Another very beneficial and long-lasting program of the New Deal was the Soil Conservation Service, introduced in 1934 and implemented in Morton County in 1944. At the time of implementation, the results of the terrible dust storms of the thirties were still visible with some fences completely buried in sand. During those days in the thirties, the dust was often so bad there was zero visibility and the drifting of sand was such that often when Margie and I made trips to the County seat in Carson, we would get stuck in the sand on the main road! I found out when you get stuck in sand — you are STUCK.

The Soil Conservation practices of strip cropping and stubble mulching soon stopped the blowing of drifting sand, and the gullies in our fields, some so deep they couldn't be crossed with farm machinery, were made productive by making grassed waterways. The SCS promoted tree planting, both in field plantings and farmstead shelter belts, while before the mid-forties, about the only trees seen were in the river and creek bottoms. Now, a farm without trees is very unusual. Contour farming, cross fencing, deferred grazing, grass seeding and other such practices were also introduced by SCS. I was privileged to serve on the county SCS board for 22 years.

President Roosevelt gained much favor, not only in our country where his programs were a "God-send," but also in Norway, and with the Scandinavian population of this country. At the time of the German invasion of Norway, he invited Crown Prince Olav and his family to his family home in Hyde Park, New York, if they had to flee their home country. Crown Princess Martha and three children did come to this country, staying both in Hyde Park and Washington, D.C.; but the King of Norway and Prince Olav fled to London.

The era of the Dirty Thirties came to an end when the drought cycle seemed to break in 1937. Farmers and ranchers got "back on their feet" again, and commodity prices gradually increased. This welcome change for the better had an affect on everyone, including the merchants who had managed to survive the depression, and could now enjoy better and improved business. Times were tough during that era — but I think we were tougher!



**Wash Boards.**

Our Wash Boards are made for us by the manufacturer who has the reputation of making the best wash board in the market. The frames are all hardwood, and the construction is the strongest and finish the best possible to produce. The rubbing surface is heavy zinc, and has the deep Globe crimp, as shown in cut.

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**Men's Western Saddle.**

No. 93022—

This is a beautiful saddle, made of russet leather. Has a 13 inch Jackson hide covered tree, open seat, leather covered; horn and cantle covered, 1¾ inch tie straps, 1¼ inch stirrup leathers with fenders and stirrup leathers in one, 5 inch soft woven hair sinch, fancy covered stirrups, regular single sinch rigged saddle. Weight about 12 pounds.

Our price..... **\$8.00**

No. 93022, \$8.00,

## ❧ War and Patriotism ❧

I have never understood why any nation would find it necessary to fight a war against another nation! The results are always the same — tremendous loss of life, destruction of land and property, and astronomical costs that seldom if ever are paid off. The need for a nation to defend itself is, however, understandable and brings forth patriotic feelings and deeds from all her citizens. War is not necessary for a show of patriotism, however. The early settlers were so impressed with the freedom they had here compared to what they didn't have in the old country that they took every opportunity to show their loyalty to America. I remember all during my youth and into manhood, whenever there was a gathering of people at our house and there were many, my mother ALWAYS requested the singing of "The Star Spangled Banner." She was proud to be an American!

I was quite young when the United States entered World War I, but I remember when Joe Hoovestal, Bob Gray and Lawrence Ims enlisted in the Army and the large gathering of families and friends who bid them good-bye at the Sims depot. It was a sad and frightening time as no one knew what lay ahead for themselves, or for the boys who were leaving for distant lands. The home-folks knew they had to put up with rationing of sugar and coffee, and in order to contribute more to the war effort, an active Red Cross chapter was formed in the community. One of its projects was having all the ladies knit warm sweaters for the soldiers.

This war ended on November 11, 1918 and in nine months all the boys who had enlisted were back home again. Almont's homecoming celebration for her returned heroes was in September of 1919 and Sims' the following month. A total of 40 young men from this area served their country during that war, five of whom lost their lives.

World War II became part of all our lives in December

1941 when Japan attacked our forces at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, forcing us to join the battle against the Axis powers of Germany, Italy and Japan. This time there were 86 young men and women from the area who joined the armed forces, with two fatal casualties. (Considering today's population, if 86 young folks were taken from the community, there would be precious few left.) The Red Cross chapter was reactivated with Marge serving on the local committee and the ladies were again busy making clothing for War Relief to be sent abroad. Much of their effort was directed toward helping the people of Norway who were trying to exist under the occupation of Hitler's army. In this country there was strict rationing of sugar, coffee, gasoline and tires, but no one complained of shortages or hardships as they knew their sacrifices were going to help their young folks overseas. (Marge's brother was in the Navy in the Pacific.) We rejoiced first with the surrender of Germany on June 8, 1945 and even more so when Japan gave up on August 14. Again there were gala celebrations for the homecoming veterans, but I suspect that what pleased them most was just being back home again to pick up the threads of the lives they had abandoned upon going into the Service.

As for me, I was never called or even considered for military service. The fact that I was married and involved in extensive ranching and farming with no hired help — except Marge — gave me exempt status from the draft. It was hard work, and Marge helped with all the field work besides keeping house, but we got along all right and suffered not.

We have deepest respect and admiration for all those men and women who served their country in World War I and II, Korean War, Viet Nam, and just recently, the Persian Gulf. Will wars never cease?

