

John and Jennie Nordstrom Family History



John and Jennie 1958 or 1959

John, the son of Lars and Betsy Nordstrom, was born July 4, 1903 at Roseau, MN and came to Sprague in 1906. He attended the first school in Sprague which was located south of the old Sprague Morden Highway, toward the river behind the Dave Hebel residence (a bit southwest of where Grandma Nordstrom spent her later active life). His first year of school was 1910. His formal education ended for some reason (probably lack of means in the family) with the completion of grade four. Clarence remembers Dad (John) saying that his father (Lars) occasionally commented that he (John) would be the doctor in the family. He (Lars) then took him (John) out of school to help with the family chores which included driving oxen between Sprague and Reed River. It was difficult times and it was very common for children to leave school to help with the family. In spite of this, he was an amazingly intelligent person and taught himself the three R's. He lived a very full and successful life working at various jobs besides farming. John was a wonderful man, husband, father and grandfather. In spite of hard work, he always had time and energy for fun and teasing. He was kind and gentle and "Uncle Johnnie" to many children in the community (even children who weren't related).

Jennie, the daughter of Peter and Mary Lind, was born at Sprague February 6, 1912. When she was 2 ½, her mother succumbed to basilar meningitis at the St. Boniface Hospital in Winnipeg. We always believed that Jennie was taken to live with her maternal grandmother at Wannaska, MN shortly after her mother passed. However, I have a copy of the 1916 Sprague census and she is living there with her father (Peter), Clarence and Adolph Dahlstrom and Axel, Leonard and Lewis Lind. At the time of the census (probably June or July), Jennie was 4 years and Lewis 2 years. Jennie attended school at Wannaska with her many cousins so must have moved there between 1916 and 1918. Her cousins were like siblings to her. *[I have a copy of a letter which Peter Lind wrote to his friend in Sweden dated October 9, 1918. He indicates "It is not the same now with all the children gone. I am all alone."]* At the age of 13, it was necessary for Jennie to leave school to care for her ailing grandmother and her uncle who had become partially paralyzed as the result of polio. Jennie always regretted having left school at an early age and always encouraged her children and grandchildren to work hard and to do well at school. As she worked, she often recited the "times" tables.

In November, 1930, John and Jennie were married at Sprague, Mb. They had a large family of seven children; Lloyd, Arnold, Lillian, Lawrence, Clarence, Mary Ann and Elaine. Many of their children were born at Sprague at their home, sometimes with the assistance of a very special lady, Mrs. Annie Emes, who was a nurse living at Sprague. The eldest, Lloyd, was born in Roseau and the two younger children were born at the Vita hospital.

Besides farming, John worked for Selvog Fisheries on Lake of the Woods, worked on the construction of the Sprague Morden highway during the 1930's, and worked in the bush and operated a bush camp at Mud Lake. In the earlier years, he used mules and horses for farming, skidding logs and building the highway. Later he was able to purchase a tractor and some farm equipment. We all remember the faded red combine and the red W4 tractor. Children would sit on his knee and ride for hours on the tractor as he worked the fields.

John and Jennie lived at various locations at Sprague before they purchased land with a house and barn near the railroad tracks and the Sprague Morden highway on the SE ¼ of section 14, twp 1. The house was located south of the tracks and north of the highway. The place was purchased from the Toronto General Trusts Corporation since the gentleman who had applied for "entry" for the homestead in

1916 was murdered in 1921 before the patent was issued. Times were tough during the depression and we remember Jennie telling of papering the walls with newspapers to keep some of the draft out using flour and water for glue. Around 1942-1943 they purchased 160 acres of land from an elderly Welshman named David Jones. The land was the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of section 12, twp 1; the farm we all know and remember as the John and Jennie Nordstrom farm. The farm now belongs to Robin and Margie Milne.

When the family of eight first moved to the farm, the house was situated just south of the #12 highway. The house was later moved to a new location and placed on a cellar just east of the present farm house. The house was moved using a team of horses and a stump puller. As the family grew and Lars, John's father, came to live with them, a square timber building was built next to the house providing sleeping quarters for the boys as well as a summer kitchen and a summer place for the gas operated wringer washing machine. What fun the boys must have had! We remember Jennie telling of finding the place covered in feathers.

In 1949, the farmhouse we all remember was built and still remains, although it was enlarged and remodeled by their son, Clarence. Horses and a scraper were used to dig the hole for the basement. The concrete for the basement walls was mixed with a small cement mixer and transported with a wheel barrow. The wood used to build was cut from a burned over area of mostly cedar trees. The logs were squared off at a saw mill and laid one upon the other to build solid square timber walls. John, his brother Louis, and the boys worked on the construction of the house.

John did mixed farming; grain, hay, horses, cows, pigs, chickens and sometimes geese and turkeys. The milk was separated for their own use and the excess cream was collected and put into cream cans and shipped via rail and in later years via truck to a creamery. A 3 gallon can of cream would bring about \$6.00 in the 1950's. Some animals were sold for beef, but they butchered their own beef, pork and poultry. This along with venison and vegetables from their garden was the main source of food along with wild berries. Until 1952 or 1953, John and Jennie did not have electricity and most meat, vegetables and fruit was preserved. What a great deal of work! In the summer, food that needed to be kept cold was put into tall pails and, with a rope tied to the handle, lowered into the well into the cold water.

A pail of water with a dipping ladle sat on the kitchen cupboard. Water was heated in the reservoir of the cook stove or in a large boiler on top of the stove when large amounts of hot water were needed for washing clothes, bathing or butchering many chickens. A “sad” iron heated on the cook stove or later a gas iron was used to iron clothes. Coal oil lamps and later an Aladdin lamp, which was a much brighter light, were carried from room to room to light the house. A coal oil lantern and later a gas lantern were used for outdoor chores. With no indoor bathroom facilities, one experienced the cold of winter and the wasps and flies in the summer. Baths were taken in a galvanized washtub after heating the water on the cook stove. In later years, inside plumbing and a fuel oil furnace were installed.

Although times were hard, their home was small and with a large family, there was always good food and “room at the inn” for many others who needed help or a place to stay. Lars Nordstrom, John’s father, lived with John and Jennie for a number of years until his death in 1949. Emmanuel and Louis, John’s brothers, and Rudy and Vernon Ostrom also lived with the family at various times. Although material things were not plentiful but sufficient, there are many great memories of the love and happiness that was experienced in the home.

In later years, John worked a short time in Atikokan, ON, a short time on the construction of the #12 highway and as a wood scaler at Columbia Forest Products particleboard plant. John was a founding member of the Sprague Credit Union, served on the school board, and was a member of the Cattlemen’s Association.

After the death of her husband, Jennie went to work in Ontario as a cook at Eddie’s Island Tourist Camp on Sanford Island north of Atikokan. She worked there about six summers returning home for the winter months. After this, she cooked for two summers at Morson, ON at a camp on Lake of the Woods. She enjoyed traveling with her family, curling, snowmobiling, and flying. She was a very active member of the Evergreen Senior’s Club and always willing to give of herself for many community functions. She liked to drive her car and have her friends accompany her. Many referred to Jennie as “the roadrunner”. Jennie lived to be 90 years and was “Grandma” to many in the community, young and old. She was a very intelligent, witty, fun loving person.

All of their children raised their family in Sprague except for Lloyd and Elaine. Descendants of John and Jennie attended the Sprague School continuously for 54 years from the time Lloyd started in 1935 until Keith Czechmeister graduated in 1989. After 47 years, the last “Nordstrom” to attend the Sprague School was Donna, daughter of Clarence, in 1982. The grandchildren of Lillian are presently students at the school. The family remained close and held an annual “get together” at Sprague, with as many as could attend, from 1964 until 2000 when Jennie was no longer able to get around. At first the gatherings were in the homes of the family but as the family grew the gatherings were moved to the Senior's Centre. John passed away October 16, 1963 and Jennie passed away May 17, 2002 and they are buried at the Sprague Cemetery.

Written by Elaine (Nordstrom) Tosberg
A great deal of help regarding information
from siblings and Manitoba census records