women could leave their children while they shopped. It became a meeting place and a social center, especially for the farm women. The location made it an ideal place for the many food sales that were conducted there. Policemen, always on foot, used it for a resting place at night and later had a telephone installed with a flashing red signal light over the street outside. Malicious vandalism was no problem at that time and the building was never locked. Once in a while during the night it would be a haven for some of the town characters like little “Peaches” in his long flowing overcoat, shuffling in and flopping into one of the rockers or “Wheel 'Em Pete” who once pulled a pair of pliers from his overall pocket and prevailed on Oscar Norlin to pull an aching tooth on the bank steps.

The women from the country churches came to George to get their supply of pop, candy and whatever was necessary for the refreshment stand at their annual Ladies Aid Auction every summer. This was a gala day. Many of the people from town attended these auctions enjoying the sumptuous dinners they had served on long tables outdoors, eating the home-made ice cream and buying home-made articles, the most popular items being the woolen mitts and socks the women had knitted from wool that they had carded and spun at their meetings. These meetings began in the morning and even though the homes were small they brought their spinning wheels and wool and worked all day, the hostess furnishing the noon meal and lunches.

George had unlimited energy and met each day with zest. What was good for the town was what he wanted. He laughed and joked and enjoyed business for almost fifty years. When the store was temporarily closed in July during the Second World War, because it was not an essential business, George wept openly and so did many children. Charles became an essential milkman until the Minnesota Dairy found a man for the city route and later an essential worker during campaign at the beet sugar factory. He found it a novelty to work just twelve hours a day instead of seventeen or eighteen and fully enjoyed being able to stay home on Sundays and holidays. George kept in touch with his city by selling popcorn in front of the store and selling war bonds on DeMers Avenue. When the cold drove him indoors he enclosed a small area in front of the store, where he sold popcorn and whatever merchandise he could beg and buy from the wholesale houses. By the next midsummer the store was again in full operation. When the city celebrated V.J. Day, George rushed to buy American flags, remembering the clamar for flags and how he had sold hundreds of them when the First World War ended. The next day he was dismayed to find that only a few flags had been sold and he wondered what had happened to patriotism and flag waving.

There were five years and there were lean years, but George found all of them worth living. When both George and Charles were finally spent and the store was closed forever, it was a sad day for the people of the community knew them well. The young people today missed a fine era, an era that produced men like George or perhaps it was an era produced by men like George. He and his store were so much a part of the past history of East Grand Forks! Twenty-five years have passed since George entered into rest on May 21, 1951. Even though he may not have agreed with some of it, he would have been proud of the progress made by the city in that quarter century.

EICKHOF CONSTRUCTION COMPANY

Three sons were born to Daniel and Magdalene Meier Eickhoff of Wohlesbussen, Germany. Chris, the oldest son, was born September 25, 1849, and attended school for eight years at Hollenstedt, Germany. He was rejected from military service because of ill health, and became an apprentice to a contrator for three years, receiving board, room and clothing, plus seven dollars a year. After this, he studied architecture at a technical school in Buxtehude, Germany.

On May 9, 1875, Maria Kathina Christina Johanna Dammon was married to Christain (Chris) Eickhof in Hollenstedt, Germany. Maria (called Johanna) Dammon was the youngest daughter of Heinrich and Magrata Harms Dammon and was born in Alkoster, Buxtehude, Germany, on November 19, 1849. She had six sisters and one brother, namely Anna (Mrs. Bartell Heinrichs), Magrata (Mrs. Morris George), Gisa or Bertha (Mrs. Otto Wallman and later Mrs. John Kann), Elizabeth (Mrs. Carl Billig), Dorothea (Mrs. William Eggers), and Heinrich Dammon.

Johanna’s father was a shoemaker and she had a very good education. She could read and write Latin fluently and was confirmed in the Lutheran faith on March 2, 1868. Her father died when she was seventeen years old and her mother died when she was nineteen years old. After that she lived with her sisters until her marriage to Chris Eickhof. Johanna and three of her sisters later came to America to live.

Chris inherited the Eickhof estate because he was the oldest son. His father lived with them for six years. Three children were born to them in Germany — Bertha, Johanna, and Dora. They sold their home in the spring of 1881 and came to America to live. They stopped ten days at Liverpool and were on the ship for twelve days in crossing the Atlantic. Chris’s brother, John, also came to America with them and the fare was three hundred dollars each. Johanna had two sisters living in Red Wing and Chris had a brother, Fred, living at St. Hilaire, Minnesota. They visited in Red Wing when they arrived in Minnesota and came to Crookston the following spring. They lived on the hill until their home at 510 North Front Street was completed on September 24.

Eight children were born in America — Henry, Laura, Flo, Carl, Ann, Nettie, Frances and William.

Chris had his own business and named it “Chris Eickhof Construction Company.” Many houses and buildings still stand as a monument of his work.

Chris and Johanna celebrated their Silver and Golden Wedding anniversaries with all the living children and their families present. They took many trips, and in December, 1908, they returned to Germany to visit relatives and friends. Johanna’s sisters and brother were still living at that time. One winter they spent in California, attended the World’s Fair and visited the Panama Canal Zone. Every Christmas their children, their in-laws and grandchildren would come home. This was an occasion that no one would miss.

Chris would not allow any of his girls to work with him, and in 1910 he took Otto in as a partner. The firm was then named “Chris Eickhof and Sons.” Henry passed away in 1885 and when William returned home after World War I he was not interested in the business. Chris retired in 1921, leaving the business to Otto.

Chris and Johanna enjoyed good health until the summer of 1927 when Chris was very ill. He was ill again in 1930 and was never very strong after that. They enjoyed each other’s company and played a game of cards called “Sixty-Six.” Chris would help Johanna with the dishes so they could return to their card game. The days were also spent reading the daily papers and when Johanna’s eyesight failed, Chris read the papers to her. The reading also included a German paper with a serial story.

On December 24, 1934, when everyone was home for Christmas, Chris passed away. The family came to celebrate, but stayed to mourn.

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"Chris had blue eyes, brown curly hair, and a mustache. He was five feet seven inches tall and weighed one hundred sixty-five pounds. He was a very proud man and carried himself very erectly. He was loved and respected by all of his children and all who knew him. He was very devoted to Johanna and a very religious man, well versed in the Bible. He was proud to be an American citizen and cast his vote at every election."

"Johanna was a very beautiful woman with blue eyes and brown curly hair. She was short and inclined to be plump. Johanna had a charming personality, was a good conversationalist and a charming hostess. She made friends easily, had a sweet disposition and was always cheerful and happy. She loved to sing and quote poetry. Her life was centered in her home, her husband and her children. She loved her garden and all her flowers."

Their home was saddened when Henry, age three, passed away of black diphtheria, and again when eleven year old Laura died of dropsy.

After the death of Chris, she stayed on in her home and often thought about what Reverend Hibbard had said: "This has always been one of the happiest homes I have ever known. No home could have meant more to the children born to it." This made her very happy and proud.

By this time she was past eighty years old, white-haired, but still beautiful. She had been healthy most of her life, but she underwent an operation for a rupture and from that time on she was in and out of the hospital. She was operated on a second time and never regained her health or strength. She passed away on May 10, 1940."

Otto, the seventh child of Chris and Johanna Eickhof, was born October 13, 1887. He was educated in Crookston Public Schools and attended Hughes Business College. Otto was a bricklayer by trade and went in business with his father. He married Denora Borsheim in 1918 and they had three sons — Ralph, born July 3, 1920; John, born April 5, 1923; and Charles, born November 21, 1925.

Some of the local buildings still standing that were built by Chris Eickhof and Sons are: Eagles Building, Polk County State Bank, Central High School Auditorium, Gopher Theatre and at the University of Minnesota Technical College: the Hill Building, and Kiehl Building. After Chris retired in 1921, Otto carried on with the building business. Otto was very active in civic affairs; a councilman for 27 years and active Chamber of Commerce supporter. He bought the Crookston Sash and Door Factory where kitchen cabinets, moldings, windows, etc. were made. Otto was an outdoorsman who loved to hunt and fish.

Otto was president of First National Bank of Crookston, Crookston Building and Loan Company, Oakdale Cemetery, Charter Commission, Chamber of Commerce and also president of Rotary Club with perfect attendance for forty years.

They built their home in 1929. It is located at 549 Summit Avenue. He also bought land on Union Lake in 1921 and built a lake cottage.

Otto died February 1, 1974, at 86 years old. He was active in business until the last year, when the progression of his cancer decreased his physical strength. He was dearly loved by his fourteen grandchildren, who each wrote personal thoughts for his eulogy, which was read at his funeral.

Denora, as the young matron in the community, set the style for a lovely home and social entertaining. She was a charter member of P.E.O. Sisterhood, which was founded in 1930, and also an early member of the Matrons Club. She has been a member of this club since the 1920's.

Denora graduated from Moorhead Teachers College and taught school before her marriage to Otto. She was also a member of the Presbyterian Woman's Association, Eastern Star, and P.T.A.s.

Her hobby was playing bridge and reading. She died March 19, 1976.

In 1948, a corporation was formed with Otto and his three sons and was called Otto J. Eickhof & Sons, Inc. In 1949, the Eickhof Corporation received its first large job and built the St. Francis Hospital. The company expanded and completed work in North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Colorado, Indiana, Kentucky, Nebraska, Iowa, and Virginia. The Eickhof enterprises are involved in wide range diverse activities.

They include the building of multi-million dollar structures, to the selling and servicing of heavy duty trucks. This includes such projects as banks, schools, hospitals, and bridges.

In 1954, the company moved into its present headquarters at 209 North Main. After the death of Charles in 1962, Ralph and Jack continued the construction business.

In subsequent years the company expanded and one division of the organization specialized in the construction of piling work and substrutures at the bottom of rivers. Another division of the company specialized in the construction of micro-wave facilities at the tops of mountains for the American Telephone and Telegraph Company.

Another phase of the Eickhof Construction Company activity has been the manufacture of finished millwork. The supplying of ready-mixed concrete for construction has been another enterprise. At this present time, plans are being made to expand into real estate and housing.

Ralph Eickhof was born July 3, 1920, in Crookston, graduated from Central High School, Minnesota School of Business, University of Minnesota and attended Columbia University and became a Navy Lieutenant in World War II, serving in the Pacific for two years. On his return home, he went into business with his father, Otto, in 1946. On November 16, 1946, he married Betty Joy Saul at Trinity Lutheran Church, Crookston. Betty was born in Pelican Rapids, Minnesota, and attended MacMurray College for Women in Jacksonville, Illinois. She learned how to fly at 18 and met Ralph while he was a stunt pilot. Betty enjoys horseback riding, swimming, and many forms of art expression. She is a member of the P.E.O. Sisterhood, Agassiz Study Club, and a 25-year member of the Matrons Club of Crookston.

They have four children: Joan Marie, born January 10, 1949; she graduated from Crookston Central High School, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, with an art all level degree. She married Russell Dennis Smith of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, on November 13, 1969. Russell is a mechanical engineer and they have two children, Anne Marie and Johnathan Russell and reside in Houston, Texas, where Joan has a ceramic shop in her home.

Ralph Otto, born March 26, 1951, graduated from Shattuck Military School, Faribault, Minnesota, and received his bachelor of science from the University of Denver. He attended Gonzaga University, Spokane, Washington, and the University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, Washington where he is a law student.

Scott Earl was born February 11, 1954, graduated from Central High School, where he was an avid hockey player. He attended the University of Denver and the University of Minnesota and is now managing the Red River Alfalfa Company of Crookston. He is enjoying his private pilot license.

Ann Corinne, born April 29, 1957, also a Central High School graduate, whose interests were art and music. She is attending Rollins College, Winter Park, Florida, where she is majoring in art and active in swimming events. She spent one summer in England attending Durham University.

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Ralph Sr. has been active in civic and church affairs. He is President of the Red River Alfalfa Company and was President of the American Dehydrators in 1964, when it met in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He was president of the Rotary Club, Chamber of Commerce and Crookston Jobs, Inc. He is a director of the Polk County State Bank and the American Federal Savings and Loan, and a director of the Minnesota Association of Commerce and Industry. The family resides in their home built in 1951, located east of Crookston and they also have a lake home on Union Lake and an apartment residence in Boca Raton, Florida.

John (Jack) Eickhoff graduated from Crookston Central High School and from the University of Minnesota-University College. He served in the Navy in World War II. Jack met Audrey Graupmann while he was attending the University and she was doing graduate work in the College of Education. They were married in Faribault, Minnesota, on March 19, 1949.

Jack spent his high school and college summers working for the construction company. Since 1949, and twenty-seven years at the time of this writing, he has been self-employed in the general construction of projects that have included the diverse terrain of river bottoms to the tops of mountains. Jack's expertise and ingenuity in construction is in problem solving. His creative hobby, relating to construction, has enabled him to acquire patents on many of his ideas.

Jack's community activities include Board of Directors of the First National Bank, past Lion's Club President, and Presbyterian Elder and Trustee. In 1970, he was one of the developers and co-chairman of the financial drive for artificial ice for the ice skating program for the City of Crookston.


Jack and Audrey have six children and since 1962, Robert Charles and Paul Matthew have been with their family. Audrey's community activities have followed the interests of their family's children as they grew up through the schools and took their places in the community. Seven year member and Past President of the Crookston School Board, Director of the youth telephone hot-line, and Presbyterian Church Deacon and Release time teacher of young people. Audrey is Polk County Republican Chairwoman, Legislative Advisory Board for the University of Minnesota Technical College, and coordinator of the Search Committee in its efforts to find new physicians for Crookston. She has been president of P.E.O. and the American, Association of University Women. In 1975, Audrey was awarded state recognition for community involvement and service and called the "Beautiful Activist." She is presently Co-Chairman of the Bicentennial, Horizon Division, Conference on Rural America.

Jo Dell, born July 30, 1950, graduated with honors in 1972 from Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts, with a B.S. in Occupational Therapy. Her love of and service to people tells about her personality. She married Mark Brekken in 1972, in Crookston. Mark graduated from Notre Dame University and farms in the area. Jody's career assignment included initiation of the Occupational Therapy program for Riverview Hospital. Jody and her husband, Mark, are very active in the Baptist Church of Crookston.

Le Anne, born May 13, 1952, has completed her education at the University of Minnesota, with a major in horticulture, specialization in fruit and vegetable culture. She has been a member of the University of Minnesota Woman's Crew Team and was recognized by the Board of Regents for their National Championship team in 1975. She is very interested in the outdoors and sports and plans to remain in Minnesota to develop her livelihood from horticulture enterprise.

John Karl, born September 8, 1953, graduated from Crookston Central High School as an honor student in 1972 with letters earned in hockey, tennis and football. He will graduate in civil engineering from Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island in 1976. He has been a hockey player at Brown and has spent his summers working in construction. John is a mature, amiable, outgoing young man who relates well to all ages. He has great interests in skiing and sailing.

Kurt Friederich, born March 2, 1955, graduated from Crookston Central High School as an honor student, earning letters in hockey and tennis. He is pursuing an engineering degree at the University of Minnesota. He is active in Chi Psi Fraternity and the American Society of Civil Engineering. Kurt is the hunter and fisherman of the family.

Gretchen Lynn, born October 9, 1957, is noted for her poise, her serious academic character, and her interest in horses. She was voted the 1975 Homecoming Queen and will graduate in the spring of 1976. She has taught Sunday School at the Presbyterian Church for four years and was responsible for organizing the ecology walk to clean the "entry ways," road side ditches, into Crookston.

Heidi, born October 21, 1958, is spontaneous, friendly, and out-going. She is a high school cheerleader and participates in volleyball, tennis, gymnastics, and horseback riding. She has taught Sunday School for three years and will graduate from high school in 1977. Heidi was an exchange camper to Sweden the summer of 1975. She was the organizer and co-chairwoman of the ecology walk to clean "entry ways" into Crookston, 1975.

Charles Odean Eickhoff graduated from Crookston Central High School and the University of Minnesota. He also served in the Navy in World War II. Charles married Barbara Stangler in 1951. Barbara Stangler graduated from the University of North Dakota in 1951 with Phi Beta Kappa honors. In the few short years of her married life, she was a charter member of the American Association of University Women, charter member of the Investor's Limited Stock Club, Agassiz Study Club member, and a member of Matron's Club. She was an avid reader. They had four children: Robert Charles, born May 26, 1952; Paul Matthew, born August 31, 1953; Catherine Denora, born July 11, 1955; and Martha Jane, born August 4, 1958. Charles was associated with Otto and his brothers in the Otto J. Eickhof & Son, Inc. firm. Charles and Barbara were killed in an airplane crash on April 18, 1962. They were on vacation with two other couples and were killed in a crash which occurred near LaCeiba, Honduras. Eleven children were left without parents as a result of this accident. Ralph and Betty now have the two girls, Martha Jane and Catherine Denora, and Jack and Audrey have the two boys, Robert Charles and Paul Matthew. All fourteen grandchildren of Otto and Denora lived within a block of each other.

Martha Jane, an introspective and outdoor girl, will graduate from Central High School in the spring of 1976. She is a member of the National Honor Society and has letters in tennis, volleyball, and basketball. Church activities include being an executive on the Youth Council for four years and teaching Sunday School.

Catherine Denora graduated from Central High School and attends Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota. Catherine is very interested in horses and attended Mornen Park Jumping School in Virginia and won many ribbons in English Class Riding Shows. She went to Greece and Italy on an art seminar.
Robert Charles after graduating from Crookston Central High School attended the University of Colorado at Greeley and Boulder. He studied politics, Russian history and traveled to Europe and Russia on summer study tours. Bob is generous, friendly and an uninhibited person who loves to ski, backpack, and live “back to nature.” He has been working with book stores in the Colorado area.

Paul Matthew, after high school graduation, attended the University of Minnesota studying history and psychology. He was a member of the Chi Psi Fraternity. Paul has a good sense of humor and great sensitivity to all those around him. He is an enthusiastic skier, likes cars and enjoys reading.

HORSES WERE PEOPLE

by Treva Wallace Jones

Horses were important members of Wallace farm life. Each had a definite personality — mostly good traits, but some bad. I will mention a few of those wonderful animals.

Topsy and Venus, brought with us from Iowa, were tall, rangy bay coach horses. In spring 1920, when the entire countryside was flooded from the broken dam at Crookston, Venus drowned in the ditch which ran through our property. It seemed Topsy never forgot her mate; she was sort of lonely and out-of-place with the other horses. She was too bony for a saddle horse, too light for heavy work, although she did duty as both. She was over 29 years old when she died.

Princess and Minnie, powerful black work horses brought from Iowa, were capable of freeing the heaviest bogged-down equipment, sometimes straining so hard forward that they were almost parallel to the ground. However faithful, they had an annoying trait. Whether frightened by the noise or by the slithering belt on the thresher, no one knows, but once during each threshing period, they would run away, usually dragging a loaded grain rack behind them.

Ted and Jerry were hard-working, black broncos bought on the range in Montana. Fred’s alternate team mates were Mollie (a sorrel) and Queen (from Montana). Fred came to an untimely end; he smothered when an eaten-out strawstack fell on him. Queen foaled a pair of matched Arabian colts. When they were three-year-olds, lightning struck so close to the house that it knocked Dad out of bed but worse, the bolt hit one of the colts and laid its neck open. Dad was devastated. In the 1950’s, at a time when most farms were completely mechanized, Dad still had a team of work horses, dappled grays.

Vic, our saddle horse from 1920 on, was fun, reliable but tricky. He was hard to catch and when being saddled, puffed out his belly so the cinch wouldn’t hold. He never lost his urge to “run for the barn.” When doubling as a work horse on light equipment, he was teamed with Topsy; often he led her on a runaway, always heading for home, once dragging a bouncing dump rake over a half a mile.

I rode Vic back and forth to high school, ten miles a day; generally, he bucked for the first half mile before settling down to an easy lope. As he got along in years, he was retired to being a riding horse for the younger children. He had ways of dealing with them; he’d lower his head so they would fall off; or when Virginia would start him down the lane, he’d turn around and go back for a drink. When over 30 years old, he was sold to a neighbor, ostensibly for their young children to ride. Later, we learned he was sold to a fox farm. Sad thought!

Major had a habit of shying at a fluttering leaf or piece of paper, so once sighting a bumble in a bamboo thicket, he found himself sitting on the ground as Major raced for home. Wildfire was so unpredictable that only Dad could ride him.

In the 1930’s, Dad began breeding horses. At one time, he had 37 head running in the Blow-Out. Tom, a big dappled gray Percheron stallion, was like no stallion you ever heard of. He loved Dad; he would nip Dad’s arm, lay his head on Dad’s shoulder, or pull Dad’s jacket over his head.

Except for a few accidental deaths, all of our horses lived long, useful lives. They were loved and received loving care. They are remembered.

THE SETTLING OF POLK COUNTY

by Albany Capistran

This hand bill was found in a bundle of old papers in the attic of an old wood building in Crookston that was being torn down in 1935. It was 52 years old when it was found. As of 1976, it is ninety-three years old. There were also brochures printed that explained the Homestead Act that Congress had passed and the 1877 Railroad Land Grant.

The brochures that were printed explained very well how any person could get land in the Red River Valley under the many options that were made available to them by the Homestead Act or the Railroad Land Grant. But the hand bills that were put out were a different story. Men at that time had big dreams of Crookston and thought that it would become a very large city and some day maybe as large and as important as Minneapolis or St. Paul. So if little crookston was a little, it was all done to benefit Crookston and Polk County.

Crookston and Fisher’s Landing were the two jump-off points for settlers coming into Polk County and the Red River Valley. By 1878 the railroads had most of their main lines laid and branch lines surveyed. But to have railroads and steamboats without people and produce to haul was no paying investment. The railroads and land companies started big promotions to get settlers on the land. They had promoters in foreign countries and in New York. They also had free train trips for investors and speculators. These were provided by the railroad, to get settlers on their right-of-way lands, and by land companies that had bought up territorial settlement rights for resale of farm land.

The men who came were usually rich men, oil men, mining men, and boat company operators from foreign countries and eastern United States. Many of these men liked what they saw and bought large acres, which became our bonanza farms in the Valley.

In 1878 the United States Land Office moved from Detroit Lakes to Crookston and over 4,100 homestead entries were made before 1879 — this is more than was ever made before or since!

The railroad grant gave the railroad land for constructing a railroad. The land acquired by the railroad company under the grant was every alternate section, designated by odd numbers, for six sections in width on each side of said road and branch lines and odd sections of land outside of this as indemnity for any they failed to get in the original limits by reason of settlers having acquired right to the land under the Predemption Act of the United States. The indemnity limit was not to exceed fifteen miles from the line of road, less the two sections in every township held out as school land.

The railroad promotions under Jess Farley and Jim Hill were that any person could come from New York to St. Paul for $1. Then it cost $35 per family from St. Paul to Glyndon, Moorhead, Crookston, or Fisher’s Landing. This included all belongings in a box car to be brought to any steamboat landing or other destination for buying land or taking a claim or settling on railroad land under the three provisions that were available.

Specifications for Acquiring Land

Railroad Land for Sales to Settlers

Option 1: Sold the land for $2.50 per acre at 7% interest on a 5 year contract. (Some land sold higher in later years, $5.00 to $8 per acre)

Option 2: If a farmers plowed and seeded the land in the first three years, he or she could get 50¢ off the price of the land.

Option 3: If a farmer built a house or barn, and broke up 10 to 30 acres, he would be credited off the purchase price $2.50 for each acre broken up and 50¢ per acre for every acre seeded.

Acquiring Land under the Homestead Act

Article 1: Any person, male or female, 21 years of age could pay $1.25 per acre to the United States Land Office for 160 acres of land.

Article 2: Any person, male or female, 21 years of age, who would live and build on the land and work it for five years would get 160 acres free, except they must pay registration fee of about $14.00 to the United States Land Office.