

~~~ Carl & Henrietta Geier Family ~~~



Carl Geier was born July 7, 1883 in the Caucasus German colonies of southern Russia. Nothing is known about his parents by any of his living descendants. Carl served in the Imperial Russian army and had not actually been discharged. He was either on extended leave of absence or placed on inactive reserve. It was during this time he and his wife, Henrietta Mahler, decided to visit relatives in North Dakota. With the outbreak of war, they chose not to return to Russia. They eventually took ownership of the farm Carl's grandmother homesteaded in Kidder County, North Dakota.



Henrietta Mahler Geier was born July 26, 1892 in the Caucasus German colonies of southern Russia. Her nationality was mainly either Danish or Dutch. Her father relocated to serve as a Lutheran minister to the German colonists in southern Russia. Henrietta was 20 years of age when she, Carl, and her two young sons made the long trip from Russia to North Dakota. Altogether, they raised 10 children listed separately below:



David Geier was born July 24, 1911 in southern Russia, the eldest of 10 siblings. He was two years of age upon arrival in North America. He married Martha Koenig and they had four children: Twins Earl and Pearl, Russell, who sadly passed away at the age of two, and Douglas. They operated a farm in Wells County, North Dakota. I looked upon Uncle David as a big, burly, teddy bear.



Charles Geier was born July 29, 1912 in southern Russia. He married Leah Beck and they had four children: Roger, Eunice, Dennis, and Sheila. They farmed in Wells County, North Dakota. It is an interesting fact that all the Geier boys lived fairly close to one another, which allowed for frequent family get-togethers.



Renada Geier Sagen was born November 11, 1913. As far as I know, Renada and those who came after were all born at the Geier home in Kidder County, ND. All the Geier girls had different but very interesting personalities. She married Al Sagen and they had four children, Jim, Judy, Robert and Linda.



William 'Dick' Geier was born December 4, 1914. All the Geier boys became farmers. Dick had land in both Kidder and Wells Counties. He married Martha Fullerton. At one time he, Martha, young William and my dad lived on a houseboat near Oakland, CA. They moved back to ND after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Dick and Martha raised three children: William Jr., Ellen, and Betty.



Selma 'Sally' Geier Baker was born December 16, 1916. She married Ed Baker and they had one daughter, Claudia. Ed worked as a civilian contractor for the military, which meant that Sally resided for a time in many interesting places, mainly the far east; a long way from her humble origins. Ed and Sally were avid golfers.



Hulda Geier Robinson was born December 14, 1919. She married Jim Robinson and they had three sons: Jim Jr., Steven, and Paul. Hulda, like Sally, got to see much of the world since Jim Sr. was a career Navy man. She was an amateur archeologist and collector of interesting antiquities. They spent their retirement years on the Hawaiian island of Oahu, though for a time they visited their Dakota relatives.



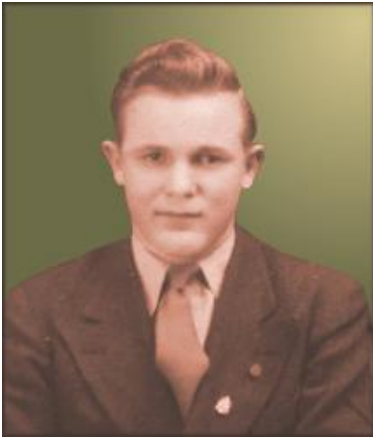
Bernard Geier was born May 8, 1922. In 1941 he went with William to California where he worked as a store clerk. That all changed after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. He married Selma Herman and they raised three children: Galen, Durwood, and Marcy. They farmed in Kidder County, the land previously owned by Carl's dear friend, August Hinger.



Rosella Geier Drake was born June 19, 1924. Rose, as most people called her, married a fellow by the name of Francis Drake. They lived for a time in Lead, South Dakota, where Francis worked for the Homestake Mining Company, one of the biggest gold producers in the world. She later worked as an LPN. They had three children: Tom, Robert, and Carol.



Edward 'Calvin' Geier was born July 17, 1926. I believe he acquired that nickname because Calvin Coolidge was POTUS at the time of his birth. Calvin was in France near the end of WWII where he guarded German POW's. After serving his country, he met and married Betty Derheim. They farmed in Kidder County and raised three children: Tim, Karen, and Janny.



John Geier was born April 25, 1929. He also served a stint in the US Army but, fortunately, the war in Europe was over by then. I'll always remember John as a keen competitor at table games. He married Joyce Fisher and they raised two children: Rick and Connie. They farmed the Geier home place in Kidder County, North Dakota.



~~~ Roots ~~~



I) The Origin of Germans in Russia:

In the 18th century there were basically four empires in eastern Europe vying for supremacy: Austria-Hungary, Ottoman Turks, Russia, and Sweden. The Russian Tsar Peter the Great managed to expand his empire both north, occupying parts of the Baltic lands, and southward toward the Black Sea. During the latter half of the 18th century, Russia came under the rule of Empress Catherine the Great. Catherine was born Princess Sophie of Anhalt-Zerbst in Germany. She was wed to Tsar Peter the III. This intermarriage of the royal houses of Europe was a common practice at this time. She came to power following a coup d'état which saw her husband overthrown. Under her reign, Russia was revitalized; it grew larger and stronger and was recognized as one of the great powers of Europe.

Catherine recognized the need to settle new land that had been seized from the Ottoman Empire around the Black and Caspian seas. Otherwise, if left unoccupied, the Turks may have been encouraged to take back what they lost. In 1763 she issued a proclamation allowing open immigration for foreigners wishing to live in the Russian Empire. German immigration was motivated in part by religious intolerance and warfare in central Europe as well as by frequently difficult economic conditions.

Catherine's declaration freed German immigrants from military service (imposed on native Russians) and from most taxes. It placed the new arrivals outside of Russia's feudal hierarchy and granted them considerable self-governance. Feudal hierarchy refers to a system in which those on the bottom rung were not much better than slave laborers. The masters they served - the nobility - were the landowners who in turn were allowed to keep their status by agreement with the ruling class. In the case of Russia that would have been the Tsar. All things considered, this was a powerful incentive for Germans to immigrate.

Source: [wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Germans_in_Russia,_Ukraine_and_the_Soviet_Union](https://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Germans_in_Russia,_Ukraine_and_the_Soviet_Union)

II) German Colonies in Russia:



1) Black Sea:

The Black Sea Germans were ethnic Germans who left their homelands in the 18th and 19th centuries, and settled the region north of the Black Sea of the Russian Empire and modern-day Ukraine.

2) Volga River:

The Volga Germans were ethnic Germans who colonized and lived along the Volga River in the 18th century.

3) Caucasus:

These were part of the German minority in Russia. They migrated to the Caucasus largely in the first half of the 19th century and settled in the North Caucasus.



Map to the left shows North Caucasus region of Russia. The area indicated by the blue-bounded box is detailed in the bottom-left image. This is a portion of a larger map that was given to Bernard Geier by Eugene Schander. He traveled to Russia some 40 years ago to visit the homeland of both the Geier's and the Schander's. The editions you see (circled place names) were made by him. Karlsruhe was located in, what today is called, Stavropol Krai of the North Caucasus Federal District of Russia.

How can we be sure this is where the Geier's and Schander's lived before emigrating? For one, the village of Dowsunskoye, circled on the map, is named on Charles Geier's citizenship application as his place of birth. Secondly, Grandpa Carl told me that a certain man founded four of these villages and named them after his four sons: Herman, Johann, Karl, and Wilhelm. Today, Karlsruhe is called Iskra and Dowsunskoye is called Progress.

III) Geography:

The great grasslands of every continent on Earth are the product of climate and terrain, which lends them perfectly for agricultural utilization. Too little rain and you have desert, while wetter conditions favor the growth of forests. The German colonies in Russia were located on the Eurasian Steppe which extends from north of the Black Sea, including the Ukraine, eastward to the Altai Mountains of Asia. This region is analogous to the Great Plains of North America, so naturally it became the breadbasket of Russia. The climate is similar to that of the Central Great Plains states of Kansas and Oklahoma. Winters were not so severe as we have in the Dakotas and the Canadian Prairie Provinces.

IV) German Villages in Russia:

This may not true of the older established villages around the Black Sea or Volga River colonies. The typical village described to me had one main street. Along this and centrally located were the public buildings: Post office, school, and at least one church. Villagers houses fronted the main street and behind these were buildings for livestock. Beyond that could be found fenced in areas of variable size which served as grazing land and feed storage for the livestock in winter. Most of the villagers were farmers but from early on, and for the purpose of communal protection, they resided in the village. So a typical work day would find the villagers tending their livestock in the morning, leaving the village for their farms, and returning at the end of day.

The Village Garden:

Unlike most homeowners today, the German colonists living in their villages as a rule did not have backyard vegetable plots. Instead, there was a communal garden. Each spring an individual was hired to prepare this piece of land. He would till the soil and then divide and mark each plot according to the number of families. Finally, this person would plant broom corn around the entire margin of the village garden. This served two purposes: As it grew it provided a beneficial wind break and when mature, of course, became material for making new brooms.

One very popular garden staple were melons and squashes of all kinds. In late summer, when the watermelons were ripening on the vine, a common sight was the children playing and running about while eating slices of the sweet fruit. Anyone who has eaten watermelon knows how the juice will run down their chin and onto their clothing. But children took no care about this and eventually their shirts became saturated which eventually hardened as they dried. This amused the elderly citizens communing in public areas, watching the children with their now hardened clothing rattling in the wind.

Another staple of the German diet is cabbage, either fresh or fermented into sauerkraut. Carl Geier related one interesting difference between his homeland in Russia and that of North Dakota. According to him, a critical piece of hardware in making sauerkraut is a large rock that is placed on the lid of the crock pressing it down on the fermenting cabbage. In Russia, kraut makers who needed a rock had to go to the mountains to get one, but in North Dakota rocks were more than plentiful. To this day I am still not sure I believe this tale about the need to go to the mountains to get a rock.


~~~ Soldier Carl ~~~



On the left, Tsar Alexander III, Emperor of Russia, King of Poland, and Grand Duke of Finland. He ruled from 1881 until his death in 1894.



On the right, Tsar Nicholas II, son of Alexander III, last Emperor of Russia, ruling from 1 November 1894 until his forced abdication on 15 March 1917.

Carl Geier - Soldier In Service to Tsar Nicholas II:

I) Did Carl Geier ever fight in combat?

No, but he came very close to it one time. For hundreds of years, dating back to the 16th century, conflicts broke out between the Russian and Turkish Empires. The Turkish Sultans desired to expand northward and westward while the Romanov Tsars wanted to gain land southward toward the Black and Caspian Seas. Four wars were fought between these two powers during the 1800's, the last of which occurred before the birth of Carl Geier. The most famous and bloody of these was known as the Crimean War in which the Turks were aided by the British and French. This was not the last time these two Western European nations interfered.



One day Grandpa Carl related this incident: His company were ordered to the railway station where they were joined by many more units. They boarded the trains and headed south, eventually arriving near the border between Russia and Turkey. Their commanders deployed and made them ready to attack. The order never came. Eventually, after an indeterminate number of days, they were ordered back onto the trains and returned to their bases in the north. Some time later Grandpa Carl learned about the diplomacy which ensued between the powers involved. The British and French, it seemed, influenced Tsar Nicholas II to remove his forces from the Turkish border.

## II) Army rations.

I'm not sure if all the fare issued to the common soldier was bad but one item certainly was. In fact, it was almost inedible. Each day they handed out to the men loaves of black bread, probably a kind of rye bread. It was so bland and awful tasting that when thrown away not even the hungry company dogs would eat it. Fortunately for Grandpa Carl he had a certain friend, a fellow German who was an officer and a married man. This kind person occasionally invited Carl home with him where he filled up on solid German home cooking.

## III) Carl Geier in big trouble:

"The state religion of the Russian Empire was that of the Russian Orthodox Christianity. Its head was the Tsar, who held the title of Supreme Defender of the Church." In many ways Russian Orthodoxy is very similar to Roman Catholicism, including its adoration of religious icons. These icons are typically paintings depicting holy people or places. Many of these are images of the holy saints. Every soldier was required to attend religious services and records were kept of those who failed to show.

One eventful Sunday, Carl and a soldier buddy chose not to attend services but loitered about the huge cathedral hallways, smoking as they perused the paintings that covered the walls. Now Carl would not confess who it was, him or his buddy or maybe both, but a cigarette was cruelly snuffed out on one of the icons, damaging it. I suppose it was a rash act done without thinking, but it was eventually discovered and irate church officials began an investigation who might be responsible. Checking the records they soon discovered that only Carl and his friend could not be accounted for during the time in question. So, it came as quite a surprise when an order arrived requesting their presence before a panel of church officials.

"Alright then, Carl, we know it was you who did damage the holy icon. You may as well confess and face your punishment." Carl began to think hard and fast how to answer. Then he remembered his religious upbringing which was not Russian Orthodox. He thought he had a way out of this mess but not 100 percent sure it would work. This is what he answered:

"You believe that these saints shown in these pictures are alive in heaven and you can pray to them?"

"Absolutely we believe that and we pray to them every day."

"Well then, you pray to them now and if they answer that I did this terrible thing, I am ready to lay down my life." Needless to say, after many confusing looks on the faces of the officials, the matter was dropped and Carl was free to go.

#### IV) Carl Geier is smitten:

One day, while on a leave of absence, Carl and a couple buddies were taking a leisurely stroll through the village when they came upon a group of young women in the village park. They stopped to chat with them and find out who they were. Carl was quite taken with one very lovely girl. She gave her name as Henrietta Mahler, the daughter of a Lutheran pastor. After a brief courtship, they were married in the summer of 1910. I do not know the exact date of their wedding, but the whole family gathered to celebrate their 50th anniversary one fine summer day in 1960.

#### V) Carl Geier ordered home:

About a year after arriving in North Dakota Carl received a telegram from the Russian Embassy in Washington demanding his immediate return. How did the Russians know of his whereabouts? Well, either they obtained this information from some US government agency, or Carl himself provided this information before leaving Russia. I believe the latter is true because Carl was still ostensibly in service to the Imperial Russian military. The other question is: What prompted this telegram in the first place?

In June of 1914 the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and his wife, were assassinated while touring Sarajevo, Bosnia. This was the spark that ignited the beginning of the First World War, the 'war to end all wars'. It quickly expanded to become a global conflict. There were several factors that precipitated this tragedy, not least of which was the rise of nationalism throughout Europe.

Sources:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_War\\_I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I)

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nationalism>

Back to Carl Geier's dilemma. Turns out he had borrowed money from Farmer's State Bank in Heaton, a small town in Wells County, North Dakota. He took the telegram to the president of the bank to ask what he should do. The president, a Mr. Turner, took the telegram, tore it into several pieces, and tossed it into his pot-bellied stove (i.e. Carl, they can't make you go back).

~~~ The Journey: Russia to North Dakota ~~~



The Case for Trans-Atlantic Correspondence:

Carl and Henrietta Geier immigrated to North Dakota in the summer of 1913. To tell the truth, it was supposed to be just a visit which turned out otherwise. About one year after their arrival in North Dakota, war broke out which eventually involved many nations and came to be called the First World War. Carl received a telegram from the Russian embassy requesting his immediate return, but that story is told elsewhere.

As I stated before, Carl Geier and family made this journey of visitation and fully intended to return to Russia. It is perhaps a little known fact, but relatives of Carl Geier had immigrated to North Dakota at least 15 years earlier. Who were these people? A brother, John Geier, Carl's grandmother, Marie 'Katie' Geier, and her daughter, Dora. Below is a portion of the census taken in June, 1900, for Kidder County, North Dakota:

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------|---------------|-----|------|------|-----|---|---|---|---|--|--------------|
| Geier Henry | son | w m | July | 1895 | 4 | S | | | | | North Dakota |
| John | son | w m | May | 1897 | 3 | S | | | | | North Dakota |
| Edward | son | w m | Apr | 1899 | 1 | S | | | | | North Dakota |
| Henrietta | Head | w m | Nov | 1876 | 23 | m | 3 | | | | Russia |
| Dora | wife | w f | Dec | 1870 | 27 | m | 3 | 2 | 2 | | Russia |
| Henry | son | w m | Nov | 1897 | 2 | S | | | | | Russia |
| Katie | Daughter | w f | June | 1894 | 1/2 | S | | | | | Russia |
| Geier Matiss | Mother-in-law | w f | Jan | 1836 | 64 | w | | 8 | 4 | | Russia |

The first column holds the persons name (last name first). This is followed by the persons relationship to the head of household, race, sex, birth month, birth year, current age, marital status, and years married. The next two columns are for mothers showing the number of children born to them and the number still living. The last column holds the persons birth place.

On the fourth row is the name Fred Schander, who is listed as Head of Household. Dora Schander is his wife of three years, and they have two children, Henry and Katie (age two and eleven months respectively).

On the last row is the name Katie Geier. The census taker misspelled her last name. She is listed as Fred Schander's Mother-in-law. In 1900 she is 64 years of age, widowed, and the mother of eight children, four of whom are still living. Katie homesteaded land that abutted the Schander homestead and which would eventually become the Carl Geier farm. The history between the Geier's and Schander's goes all the way back to Russia.

With these facts now firmly established, one has to ask the question: Did relatives in North Dakota communicate with those living in Russia? Specifically, did they provide information useful to the undertaking of such a long trip into unknown territory? I strongly suspect, but have no proof, that this is the case. It is tantalizing to imagine that we could have access to these letters, but alas, none of them survive to the present day.

By Train, Ship, and Automobile

1) Russia to Germany:

We don't have any details for this leg of the trip, but we can venture a guess. Europe had an extensive rail system dating back to the early 19th century. The nearest train station from Karlsruhe was the major city of Stavropol, approximately 112 miles (180 Km) to the west. Hard to say what mode of transportation they used to get there, perhaps some kind of horse-drawn vehicle. From Stavropol the most likely rail route might have been via the following cities:

Rostov-on-Don, Russia

Kiev, Ukraine

Warsaw, Poland

Berlin, Germany

Bremen, Germany

This had to be an enjoyable trip for Carl, having only lived in relatively backward Imperial Russia and then be able to experience traveling through these modern metropolitan cities in Europe.

2) Trans-Atlantic Voyage:

Carl, Henrietta, and the two boys, David and Charles, departed from Bremen, Germany onboard the Rotterdam, a steamship operated by the Holland-America Line. In the late 1800's and early 1900's it transported cargo and passengers to ports in the United States and Canada. In those days the trip took nearly a week. Grandpa Carl regaled me with many stories but not one about this experience. Maybe because it was not very pleasant. Most landlubbers suffer horrible motion sickness onboard ship. Then there was the food:

"For most immigrants the sea voyage was far from a cruise ship with lavish buffets. Passengers in steerage survived on lukewarm soups, black bread, boiled potatoes, herring or stringy beef." Smithsonian Archives

However they fared, the ship finally made port at Montreal, Canada. Wait a minute! Did not most immigrants arrive at Ellis Island in New York? True enough, but not in this case. Below is a portion of Carl Geier's declaration of intention to become a citizen of the United States:

I emigrated to the United States of America from Bremen Germany
on the vessel: Rotterdam : my last
(If the alien arrived otherwise than by vessel, the character of conveyance or name of transportation company should be given.)
foreign residence was Warsaw Russia
It is my bona fide intention to renounce forever all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign
prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, and particularly to The States Russia
of whom I am now a subject:
I arrived at the port of Portland Canada thence to Portal in the
State of North Dakota

Portland is a small town in eastern Ontario, Canada, but it is not a port city. Portal, North Dakota sits along the Canada-United States border and is a major port of entry for road and rail traffic. The language difference (English versus German) may have contributed to this confusion. So, if the ship did not dock at Portland, where did it?

Detail of Charles Geier's citizenship application:

my last foreign residence was Dawsunk, Russia
I emigrated to the United States of America from Dawsunk, Russia
my lawful entry for permanent residence in the United States was at Portal North Dakota
under the name of Charles also Karl or John Geier on July 17, 1913
on the vessel Canadian Pacific Railway

Here it clearly states the family entered the United States at Portal, North Dakota, not New York or any other American city. Turns out during the period 1909-1914, some ships of the Holland-America Line had the following ports of call: Hamburg - Bremen - Rotterdam - Quebec - Montreal.
Source: <http://www.theshipslist.com/ships/lines/hollandam.shtml>

3) Canada to North Dakota:

From Montreal they boarded a west bound train on the Canadian Pacific Railway. Their first stop might have been Ottawa, the capital city of Canada. Other cities along the route were Sudbury and Thunder Bay in Ontario, and Winnipeg, Manitoba. Most of this journey would have taken them through the vast coniferous forest of southern Canada. Not until they approached Winnipeg did the landscape change from forest to grassland. A spur of the CPR tracks from Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, entering North Dakota at Portal, servicing several cities including Minot, Harvey, Fessenden, and Carrington.

4) Journey's End:

When Carl, Henrietta, David and Charles disembarked from the train, most likely at Fessenden, I like to think family they knew were there to receive them. I bet they had a lot to talk about.

~~~ Carl Geier, MIA ~~~



### Interesting Thing Happened on the Way to North Dakota

The third leg of Carl and Henrietta's journey from Russia to North Dakota was the trip across southern Canada on the Canadian Pacific Railway. They traveled across four provinces: Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. Somewhere along the way - Carl could not say where - he and another man got off the train to have a look around. Where is irrelevant because, as it turned out, the two did not get back to the station in time and the train left without them. If memory serves, I seem to recall Carl's fascination with certain food items he saw in a grocery store. Who can say what really caused them to dawdle too long.

You can imagine, of course, the horror experienced by Henrietta when the train pulled out of the station leaving her alone with two young boys and another child on the way. It is a shame that I never heard her side of this story. And sadly her distress was only to become greater when she brought this to the attention of either the conductor or the station master at the next stop. Remember that Henrietta most likely knew not a word of English, so we can assume someone had to be found who could translate. You see, Grandma was told she might never see Carl again. That is correct, one possible explanation was that Carl purposefully abandoned his family.

So what happened next? As it turned out, Henrietta did the only thing she could do knowing in her heart what kind of man Carl was. She remained at that next stop on the way and waited for him, and in due time he showed up. You can imagine the joy of their reunion and perhaps the just berating handed out to Carl. All is well that ends well.



## ~~~ Farmer Carl ~~~



### I) Farming With Horses:

Before the advent of steam and fossil fuel powered tractors, farmers employed draught animals such as horses and mules. The earliest tractors came on the scene in the late 19th century but were not commonplace until several decades later. By the middle of the 20th century one never saw a team of horses working the land except perhaps at county fairs or agricultural expositions. However, if you were fortunate to be a farm boy or girl back then, you might have seen the old tack hanging in a farm building like dusty memories from an age long past but not forgotten. And so it was that I would stand and stare at the wondrous collection of bits, blinders, bridles, buckles, collars, collar pads, hames and reins; all the equipment that was used to prepare a team of horses for field work.

My father told me of working with a team of horses as a young boy. He was not content sitting on a hard metal seat for hours. He'd jump off and go chasing after gophers or rabbits while the team kept up their dutiful work in a straight line down the last furrow. Before reaching the end of the field, he would jump back on, raise the implement out of the ground, turn the team around and get them started again. This accomplished, he'd jump off once more and resume a more entertaining activity than watching the back sides of smelly, sweaty animals.

### II) Rust Belt:

No, I am not referring to those areas of the United States where industry has declined. Rather, I speak instead of the bane of wheat farmers: Leaf and stem rust. Rust is caused by a fungus, most commonly *Puccinia Graminis*. It has plagued cereal grain production throughout history causing significant reduction in yields as well as the quality of the grain that is harvested. It is not as serious a problem today thanks to the development of rust resistant varieties.

One day long ago, Carl Geier hooked up his binder to cut a field of wheat. He had been watching it all summer; a season with plenty of rain at the right times. He estimated a very good yield, maybe as much as 50 bushel to the acre. He drove out to the field, likely thanking the good Lord for the blessing, and began to cut. As he looked back to see the first bundle exit the machine, he was dismayed to see it blow away with the wind. Wheat is a heavy grain. If of good quality, a bushel of it can weigh 60 pounds or more, so a bundle should easily stay were deposited. Carl hopped off the machine, plucked a few heads of grain and rubbed out the kernels. Some heads had very few and most were shriveled and small. Turned out to be a very bad year for wheat rust.

### III) Threshing Bee:

Back in Carl Geier's day, cereal grains like barley, oats, rye, and wheat, were harvested in three labor intensive stages: Cutting and binding, shocking, and threshing. Cutting and binding was accomplished with a machine appropriately called a reaper-binder. One is pictured in the middle frame above. This has a reel and a sickle bar like a modern grain head for a combine harvester. The cut stems fall onto a canvas bed which conveys them to the binding mechanism. This mechanism

bundles the stems of grain and ties them with a string (binder twine) to form a sheaf. Once tied, the sheaf is discharged from the side of the binder to be picked up later by the stokers who piled the bundles vertically into shocks. When the grain is sufficiently dry enough, the shocks were then ready for threshing. Grain threshing was usually a community event since very few farmers owned a threshing machine (pictured above right). This behemoth was moved to one location on the field. Workers would then go and pick up the bundles, and pitch them into a wagon to be hauled to the thresher. There the bundles would be tossed into the working belly of the beast that separated the grain from the chaff. The grain flowed into a hopper while the chaff was expelled in a great arching stream to form massive piles of straw. Today, one may still find these threshing machines, rusting relics of yesteryear, lying abandoned and forlorn.

~~~ The Geese Guffaw ~~~



Before I begin, a couple definitions:

Gaggle: A flock of geese when not in flight.

Gagging: The cackling sound made by geese.

The German word for gagging is 'Schnaufen', but Grandpa Carl's German was somewhat different. The word he used in the telling of this story was 'Schnuter'. I spell the word according to its pronunciation.

Allow me to give you a brief description of the Geier farmstead as I remember it. The house was situated on the top of a low hill. The barn was perhaps 100 or more yards below the hill to the east in a relatively flat area. Between the house and the barn, and toward the north, stood two or three utility buildings. One or more of these housed their flocks of chickens, geese, and turkeys, which they raised for the usual purposes. It is important to visualize this setting as it relates to this tale.

Like most farmers Carl Geier began each day getting ready to do the morning chores. No, breakfast would have to wait until these chores were completed. So he got dressed, left the house, and walked down the hill toward the barn. I don't know for sure in what order he completed his tasks. In my day we began with the milking and finished with the cleanup. There were any number of other jobs in between, but now I digress.

Just picture this in your mind: Carl is down by the barn and Henrietta is in the house, probably in the kitchen preparing breakfast. Between the house and the barn are a large and varied group of domesticated fowl, scattered about, feeding on the grain put out for them. Suddenly Grandma appears at the front door of the house, spies Carl out in the yard, and hollers out some word to get his attention. Carl is now on notice and hollers back in German, "Was?" Unfortunately, this is when the trouble begins. Every time the two of them attempt to communicate the geese begin their caterwauling, or in Carl Geier's vernacular, schnutering. In the end, Grandpa has to stop what he was doing and walk up the hill to the house to find out what Grandma wants. I got the distinct impression this happened all too often.



Evening Chats With Carl Geier

In the summer and early fall of 1976, I had the good fortune of residing in Grandpa Carl's house on second avenue NE, Jamestown, North Dakota. I was a book seller at the time and had the honor of looking after the grand old man. It wasn't difficult. He dressed and groomed himself. All I did was make his breakfast and a light supper. At noon, when I was usually gone, his lunch was delivered by Meals On Wheels. In the evening, before bedtime, we would sit in the living room, sometimes quietly and other times not so quiet. What follows are a few recollections of our frequent lively discussions.

I) The Eclipse Explanation:

I had read there was going to be total solar eclipse but that the path of totality was mainly going to be over the Indian Ocean. Grandpa, per his usual custom, was reading his German Bible. He peered at me above his spectacles and said, "Was?"

I said again that there was going to be a total solar eclipse. "That occurs when the moons orbit brings it directly between the earth and the sun, blocking out the sun except for a brilliant disc of light called the corona."

To this he replied with a smile, "No, that is not correct."

I shall leave off quoting because this was 40+ years ago so I don't exactly know how the conversation went. Knowing myself, I probably went a bit too far with all the scientific jargon and eventually realized it was futile. Grandpa Carl said he had witnessed such an event. According to him it happened when such and such a mountain, far away, blocked out the sun.

So, I let the matter be.

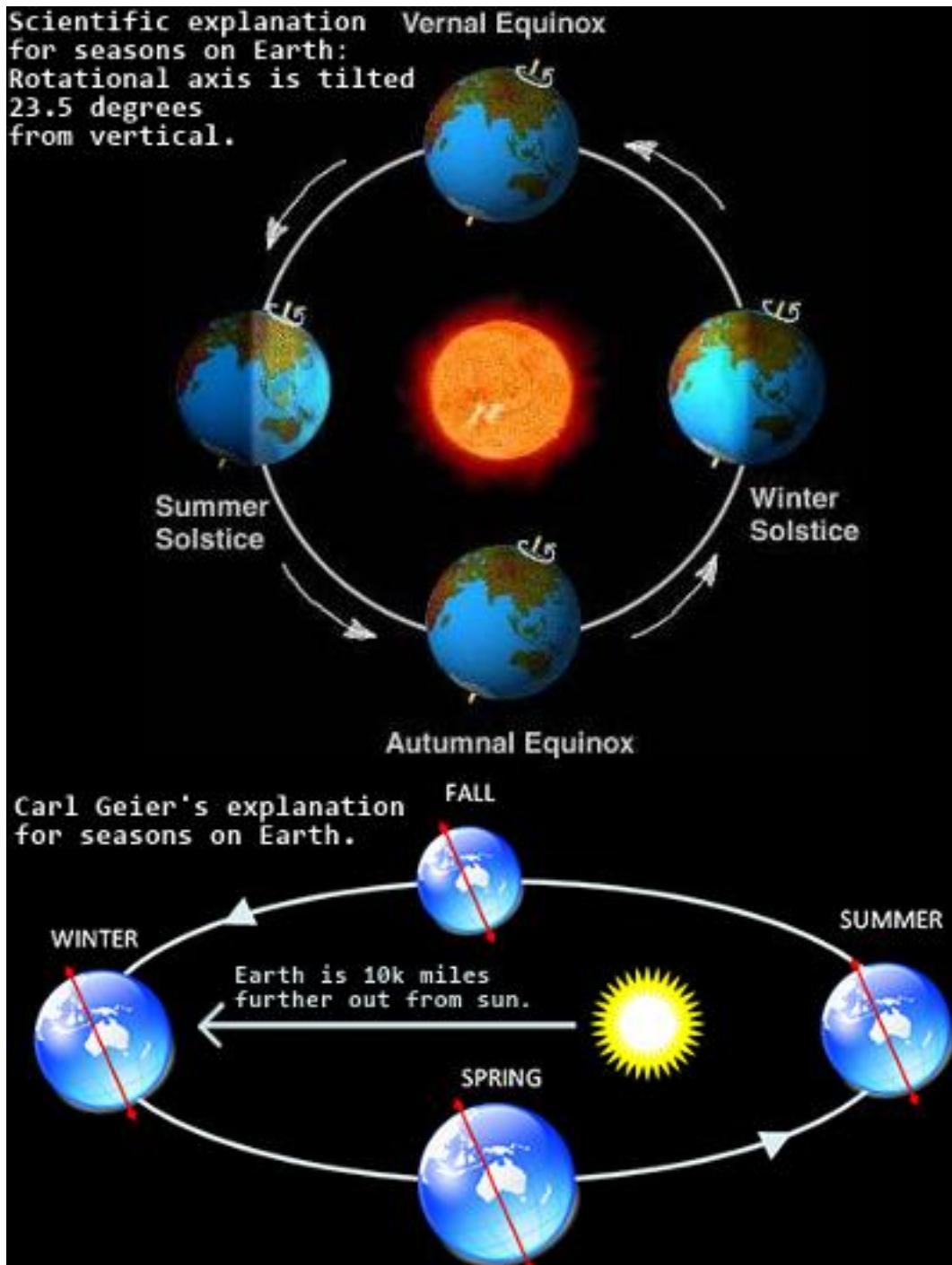
II) The Seasonal Oscillation:

Another evening Gramps was sitting in his chair, reading his German Bible while I was commenting (to put it mildly) on the heat wave we were experiencing. Once again I made the mistake of trying to impress the grand old fellow with my knowledge.

"You do know, Grandpa, what causes the seasons? It is hot now but in a few months it will be much colder."

"Yah. What do you say?" I then explained that the earth orbits around the sun and it takes 365 days to complete one circuit. But the earth is also rotating around the axis of the north and south poles. The seasons are caused by the fact that this axis of rotation is tilted..."

That is as far as I got in my explanation as Grandpa interrupted me at that point. "Das ist nicht richtig!" He then proceeded to correct me and I think it best to illustrate his belief on this subject:



III) The Chronicler's Conundrum:

On another occasion Gramps interrupted his Scripture reading, looked over the brim of his spectacles, and asked, "Did you ever read in the Old Testament about the dead man who came back to life?"

"Hmmm, no I don't recall that story. Where can I find it?"

Grandpa, with a chuckle and a smile, quickly gave me the verse: 2 Kings 13:21. It was obvious he just happened to be reading it, for the umpteenth time no doubt. I opened my Bible to the verse and read it. It was the account of several Israelite's who were bearing a dead man to his tomb when they spied a band of men. Apparently this was not a friendly band based on what they did next. "They cast the [dead] man into the tomb of Elisha and... when he touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood up on his feet." Apparently Elisha's tomb was near at hand when these bad guys showed up so the dead man was quickly tossed in and his friends then ran for their lives.

Many students of the Bible know Elisha as the prophet of Israel who succeeded Elijah in that role. The implication in this verse is that there was some kind of magical properties in Elisha's bones that brought the dead man back to life. I could not go along with this notion and said, "You know, Grandpa, this kind of thing is not unheard of, especially considering that Israelite's were instructed to bury their dead quickly. Maybe the man wasn't really dead and when his friends tossed him into Elisha's tomb the shock revived him somehow."

The look on Grandpa's face changed and I knew right there and then I was in for another correcting.

IV) All Is Not Well:

"What happened to your leg?" I asked Grandpa one evening.

"Was?"

"You have a limp. I was just wondering how that happened and when."

"Ach, yeah. I'm not sure when it happened but I do know how." He then proceeded to tell me which I will relate as best I can in my own way.

Many years ago came a summer, hot and with very little rain. You remember the water for the house came from a cistern that collected rain water. When that went dry we had to get water from the well down by the barn. One day I went to get water, but no matter how long I pumped none came out. Thinking perhaps something was blocking the pipe interfering with the flow of water, I decided to call my neighbor for help.

We took the pump apart and pulled up the pipe to see if I could find the problem, but I couldn't find anything wrong. After a lengthy discussion, someone suggested that I should be lowered into the well to have a look see. We removed the wooden platform and I, with some trepidation, was lowered down on ropes. I am not sure how far down I had gone but it must have been near the bottom when it happened: One of the ropes briefly slipped out of the hands of its bearer. This caused me to spin around and in a panic I grabbed onto one of the wooden slabs that lined the well. Much to my dismay, the wood came away in my hand and soon after, mud begin filling in.

The mud was nearly up to my waist as I hollered to the boys above to pull me out. As they did so, I felt a sharp pang in my right hip and a feeling that something was amiss. In those days people didn't normally go to the doctor for trivial ailments. I figured it would just hurt for a few days and heal on its own.

So what happened? As Grandpa was being hauled out of the mud he suffered a dislocated hip, but he didn't know that. He should have gone to the nearest doctor who would have performed a simple procedure called a reduction. One person holds onto your upper torso while the doctor pulls hard on the affected leg until the head of the femur snaps back into the socket, often accompanied by an audible "clunk". But Grandpa didn't go to the doctor. In time the dislocated part became fused to the pelvic bone, and that is what caused his characteristic limp for the rest of his days.

V) The Revelation Revolution:

Grandpa Carl's library included most of the German language editions of books written by Ellen G. White. There was one book he prized above all others except, of course, the Bible. That book was Daniel and the Revelation by Uriah Smith, originally published in 1897. Prophecy was a passion of his but it got him into a bit of trouble one year. It would have been avoidable but for the fact that he frequently preached at the little country church the family attended.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ellen_G._White

In the book, Daniel and the Revelation, Uriah Smith presented several chronological charts based on historical fact and his authorized interpretation of prophetic symbolism. I won't bore you with the details. Suffice it to say that the book was an expose of Old and New Testament Biblical prophecies; those that had been fulfilled and those which pointed to a time in the future. Now Grandpa knew something of governments, history and politics in general. These things intrigued him almost as much as spiritual matters. There came a time when Carl thought he could improve on Uriah Smith's chronology and interpretations, and that is when he came under the attention of church officials. Not for the first time, was it?

I can't be sure how the subject came up one evening. As mentioned earlier, I was working as a book seller for the North Dakota Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, which had its headquarters in Jamestown. Perhaps I told Grandpa about a contact I had made that day which resulted in the sale of Daniel and the Revelation. This is pure conjecture because, to be honest, my memory is a little sketchy on this point. I do recall Grandpa's telling of his confrontation with several church officers concerning his departure from accepted church doctrine.

As I stated earlier, Grandpa Carl was often tasked with delivering the Sabbath sermon. He used this opportunity to present his version of Biblical prophecy where it differed from Uriah Smith's. How this reached the ears of those in Jamestown is not known. One day they called upon Grandpa to inquire of him and to look at his materials. Now Grandpa never shied away from a friendly debate, but in the end he had to abide by the will of the church. I have thought on this many times since and each time wished Grandpa had saved those "materials" but, alas, they are lost.