

## Old Dutch Fred

Frederick Wilhelm Feldmann was born in the town of Bunde, Prussia, in the year 1828. He married Wilhelmina Eilers, and one child, a daughter, Marie Sophie Feldmann, was born of the union. Irked by Prussian requirements of military service, and longing for the freedom of American citizenship, Fred plead with his wife to accompany him to America. She, thinking of her relatives and friends and fearing the possible dangers in an unknown land, refused to go; but she was willing that Fred alone should make the venture. Leaving wife and child, he came to the United States and, about the year 1866, arrived at the home of Hannibal H. Waterman at O'Brien, in O'Brien County, Iowa. Mr. Waterman, who was the first white settler in the county, hired him as a helper on the farm and built a small tenant house, which Fred plastered and in which he lived. One year Fred rented and operated the Waterman farm.

On August 22, 1868, Feldmann was in the United States Land Office in Sioux City and filed a homestead claim on eighty acres of land in section thirty-four, Waterman Township, O'Brien

County, Iowa. This was rather rough land, partially covered with timber, but having a small area suitable for crop cultivation.

After digging and erecting a sod shanty, he built a stable for his livestock. He owned a yoke of oxen, some chickens, and a pig. The framework of the stable was made of poles, set erect, firmly planted in the ground, to form the sides of the structure. The top was covered with poles and then the whole building was covered with wild prairie grass, in quantity and position to keep the stable warm in winter and dry in summer.

In the fall of 1868 he plowed some land for the next year's wheat crop and started cutting dead and down oak timber for fuel. During the winter he continued to cut timber for poles, rails, and fence stakes, which he easily sold at a profit. Nine-tenths of O'Brien County was prairie and only a small acreage in the southeastern part of the county, where Fred lived, had timber. His oxen hauled him to O'Brien, the county seat, three miles away across the Little Sioux River, when he needed food. At first he traded at the store of H. A. Sage, but when "Clark" Green came to the county in 1869, he seems to have patronized his store.

Fred had two large red oxen, rather wild in their disposition, and prone to run away and break

things. To better control his "neat cattle", as the assessor called them, Fred had two ropes. Each rope was tied to the horn of an ox, while they were yoked and being driven. Fred held the other ends of the ropes, to jerk the heads of his team backward when necessary to bring them to a standstill.

With an old second-hand breaking plow he broke the tough prairie sod and each year raised wheat and garden truck, but his cut timber brought the most revenue. As there are only thirty-six numbered sections of land in each government township, and in those days there was considerable timber land still owned by the United States, the settlers frequently cut wood on a mythical section "thirty-seven" and prospered thereby. We have no record that Fred did this but he might have accidentally got over a government line not well marked.

Fred had no saw, but he was handy with an ax and also a small hand ax which he kept sharp on a grindstone suspended in a wooden frame and rotated by an iron handle. At the time of his death he had a large amount of rails, poles, and fence stakes on hand.

While Fred was friendly, he rarely talked to people. He had few confidants. Especially was he reticent concerning his early life. About his

family in Germany he kept silent in two languages, until he realized that death was near. Though he lived by himself in his little sod house, and must have been lonely, he was always cheerful, good natured, and rarely worried. He cooked his own meals and made some of his own clothes. No one ever called him by his real name. Universally he was known as "Dutch Fred" or "Old Dutch Fred". He seemed to like the appellations.

About five feet eight inches in height, he weighed 155 to 160 pounds. His eyes were blue, his hair brown, and his beard dark. He always wore his trousers inside the tops of his heavy boots. For one pair of boots he paid H. A. Sage \$6.50.

In spite of his seclusion Old Dutch Fred had many friends for he was honest, industrious, and droll. A number of anecdotes indicative of his character are still remembered by persons who knew him well. Among his pioneer acquaintances who contributed information for this article are Jacob Waggoner and Charles F. McCormack of Sutherland, Iowa; Charles Youde of Signal Hill, California; and Mrs. Emily McLeran, oldest daughter of H. H. Waterman, who resides in Chicago.

Mayor Charles McCormack tells of a threshing accident in which Fred, working near the ma-

chine, caught the corner of his smock in an iron cog wheel. He was being drawn into the machinery when two men caught him and with considerable difficulty dragged him away, leaving a large portion of his smock in the gears. He had made the smock out of cotton grain sacks sewed with heavy twine. If he had used thread, the garment could have been torn loose more easily. While he was being drawn into the machine he made no sound, but after he was free he remarked apologetically, "I make him too stout."

Again he would shake his ragged clothes and laugh: "Dese be boor dings mit clothes, but Old Dutch Fred be under here, and his heart beat shust like odder mans."

Some of his sayings were widely repeated. "I am der peoples", he used to say. "Der rest all be officers. Don't it?" This was almost literally true because when Fred came to the county the Waterman family and he were the only ones there without a stain on their reputation for honesty. The county was controlled by a gang of transient carpetbaggers, who had organized it for profit, and held all the offices.

One winter day he was found alone in the sod hut on his homestead claim, unable to rise. The neighbors immediately gave him their friendly care and took him to the home of Frank O. Rad-

eke, who lived just over the Cherokee County line, about a mile from Fred's cabin. Against Fred's wishes, Mr. Radeke secured the services of Dr. M. S. Butler of Cherokee, a pioneer physician of unusual ability. Dr. Butler made three trips to see Fred and gave him careful attention, but the patient did not seem to want to live and did not help the doctor as he might have done. Without fear or trembling, on February 13, 1873, Frederick Wilhelm Feldmann passed on to the Great Beyond. In the presence of two score of friends, D. W. Young, a neighbor and a layman, preached the funeral sermon. A ladies' quartette sang appropriate hymns.

Of all his friends Fred esteemed most highly Archibald Murray who had been exceptionally kind to him. Murray was a ubiquitous individual who successively held the O'Brien County offices of surveyor, sheriff, recorder, treasurer, county judge, and auditor. Incidentally he had acquired what in those days was considered great wealth. While Fred was suffering in his last illness he spoke complacently of his coming death, and seemed to be a fatalist. He said he was going to die; there was no use to call a doctor or give him medicine. He expressed a wish that his daughter would be given his property. He also said he wanted to be buried beside his dear friend, Archi-

bald Murray, who had died a few weeks prior to Fred's illness. But the latter request was not fulfilled.

While Fred had occupied his homestead four and a half years after entry, he lacked six months of the required five years' occupation and the administrators were unable to find an heir to continue possession. Patent issued on August 26, 1896, to Conrad Smith, and the land is now owned by Charles Youde who has given consent to the placing of Fred's grave and monument on the old homestead.

The assets of the estate were sold for \$237.30. The inventory filed by W. S. Fuller, John W. Brockschink, and Frank O. Radeke, his administrators, listed 600 rails and poles, 450 fence stakes, eight pine logs, a stable, a pig, 44 chickens, two oxen, a truck wagon, bob-sled, fifty bushels of wheat, carpenter tools, cooking utensils, and a coffee grinder that sold for twenty-five cents.

After payment of debts the estate was kept open until proof of heirship could be secured. This was furnished through the German Consul at Chicago, and Marie Sophie Feldmann, the daughter, was paid \$32.55 in 1880.

In 1922, through the perseverance of James P. Martin of Sutherland, a fund was secured by dollar contributions, with which to purchase material

for a marker for the grave. Roy Lampman disinterred the remains which had been buried in a valley and excavated a new grave on a bluff. Over the grave, facing the Little Sioux River, a suitable monument, bearing his name and the date of his death, has been erected to the memory of Frederick Wilhelm Feldmann.

"Old Dutch Fred lived a hermit life, far from wife, daughter, home and the fatherland" in order to escape the tyranny of Europe and enjoy the freedom of life in the United States of America. In his humble way he contributed to the best elements of the community in which he lived.

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