

Aunt Dena Saaijenga Revisited

Here is another piece written by Aunt Dena in 1994. The notebook was scanned by Cousin Cindy Jensen. Parts are missing but I will copy it "as is". The notes we have were her rough copy so punctuation and sentence structure were not "grade ready". Her existing notes begin with the story of her grandparents' decision to come to the United States and their early days in Illinois.

Interim - Little Did I Know

By Dena Saaijenga

Grandma Luka Dina, as a young woman prepared herself for the new life to come. Not only that but also to satisfy her dreams as well: She worked herself up from the lowest form of domestic help in a rich, land owner's mansion, to the top, the chief maid over all help in the landowner's employment. She well would know how to manage her "Little House on the Prairie" in a practical way as well as in a grand manner. This meant the grounds, the garden, and the orchards. Also whatever was needed then when the occasion presented itself. Ah, but those two were prepared to live up to their dreams all right. Little did they know what reality and the facts of life might bring.

That couple Folkert Karsjens and Dina Luka according to plan arrived to take possession of their 80 acres of virgin prairie, land in Stephenson County, Illinois. I spare you the exact legal description in probably the late 40s. The State of Illinois was admitted into the union in 1918. It took several decades for all the territory to be taken up. I believe it filled up from the south to the north, generally speaking it seems.

One can only imagine what it was like to clear these lands. Consider just one natural red cedar full grown and without modern equipment what it would take to clear that, stumps, roots and all. That's just one. While Northern Illinois is not exactly forest land it by no means is treeless even now. And then the tall dense grasses what a problem they must have been without modern mowers. Just imagine the weeds with seeds that stuck to anything that brushed against them - that and the dust and the pollen. Do you suppose they had to use rain water to quench their thirst until they could get a cistern or a well dug? I know of only two springs with good water for man or beast: one close to Freeport - ten or so miles or so away from our farm, the other is around a stone quarry in a field to the northeast of us. A lone white pine tree pointed to the spot. I remember once after a lightning storm, how we looked through the glasses to see a herd of beautiful Holstein cattle lay dead under that tree. Lightning had struck that tree and they had gone under for shelter from the rain. Twas a frightening scene.

Of course Dena was not a novice at utilizing whatever items showed up, from rabbits, wild turkeys, quail, and such to wild berries and grapes and seeds from various other plants to use for

juice or even wine. My parents enjoyed the tell-tale antiques they (my dad's paw) had left behind: wood products from an oxen yoke to butter nappies. Just how they got their metal objects I do not know such as a one bottom walking plow, the hoes and spades, axes and saws. Of course, we as a family treasured in the daily use the set of fireplace andirons Grandfather had made as a final graduation showpiece to speak for his "finals" in the apprenticeship program he graduated from. Of course there were the "carried along" fine cut glass treasures: cruets, wine cruets, wine bottles juice as well as wine glasses, water goblets, butter dishes, and such scraps of beautiful china sets from Germany. I remember especially some hand painted cake plates. There were some pewter pieces - a little sterling silver - long since bitten out of shape. Ah, yes, and we treasured that chocolate pot and we were curious about the mustache cup. The chocolate pot was shaped like a larger vertical tea pot decorated with brown berries on green twigs. I believe it was made of white porcelain decorated with some shiny metal - probably pewter. I could go on. Suffice it to say family antiques get lost in the shuffles that go on in time. I have herewith presented a few I can contribute to posterity from my memory in these words.

How far Dina and Folkert got along in all that I don't know. First of all, there was a cabin that had to be built. Their first cabin I know burned down. I heard stories of how they lived in the granary before another shelter could be erected. I have a picture of the second cabin and I in another paper have explained how it was incorporated into the house with that, which I call the "great room", and several built-ons and porches. Whether the second cabin had been built before they had a barn, a place for a cow, I do not know.

I do know that early on my grandfather Folkert Karsjens on a steamy hot day went walking - I do not know whether there were roads for him to take or whether he had to make his way on foot through waist high tangles of prickly prairie grass, or had most of the land been cultivated by the. Anyway he got to Lightsville. I think that was the name of the settlement about 5 or so miles to the south, he bought his cow, but never got it home. He died on the way home with her of a heat stroke. I know nothing about the circumstances during and after that tragedy. I do know Grandpa's grave is one of the early ones in the Silver Creek Church Cemetery. Just who erected the tombstone, I expect it was my father much later. We can gather from that German Valley as a settlement had been established and that there was a formal church building. I have photos of what the first one too and I know the date of Grandpa's death is inscribed on the marble tombstone. I can recall visiting the graves of him and Grandma Dena Luka almost every time we got to church from my earliest youth. Eventually Mom and Dad were laid to rest in 2 of the remaining three lots. When George passed away the remaining lot was found to be too narrow, too close to the road that had been built around the cemetery by then so Hattie and I bought lots to start a new family section for those who needed them. We bought 10 lots I believe. Three are filled, George, Hilvin and Hattie.

My grandmother did not give up but cuddled her two young children a little closer and engaged a hired man until George, her son my dad got old enough to take over.

She must have been healthy, undaunted, and very capable. We later 2 generations later still benefited from her careful work in developing the place! There was adequate garden space and there were trees, shrubs and vines of about every fruit and herbs imaginable: a proof of the excellence of her overall experience in Germany. I expect she carefully recognized some native yield bearing trees and shrubs and fruit bearing or the useful for nurture - some other part of the plant -such as roots or foliage.

That is not to say she neglected the ornamental: flowers, blooming shrubs and trees. As far as I can remember when I last set foot on the place Grandma's flowering almond bush was still there, there were at least 3 lilac bushes, purple and white, to mention a few. I remember elderberries, blackberries and strawberries and on. Yes, and spring flowers like the beautiful star of Bethlehem and so on.

Grandma Dena lived until she was 82 when she died of pneumonia. My mother Hilka had been with her about 10 years at the most. Father kept the memory of his parents alive by teaching us to visit his parents' graves and a picture - a large one on an easel, standing in the northwest corner of our parlor. I can tell by how my mother handled that and kept it on display as long as she lived that she truly admired and loved both her mother-in-law and husband.

The last entry of that notebook bears the following piece by Aunt Dena:

An Unusual Day in October

There come certain melancholy days in October, with its generally bright blue skies, when fickle winds softly streaming, in a hollow sort of way, interrupted by fitful lulls, yet prevailing to steer ominous clouds pumped from some critical power below the horizon to southwest ahead of them so that the sun can record the movement of those threats in fleeting patches of light and shade on the ground below, for you cloud by cloud.

Lin's notes: Now for some history that might help you understand Aunt Dena's comments.

Great Grandpa Folkert K. Saaijenga was born February 28, 1822 in Larrelt, Germany and died September 26, 1855 near German Valley, Illinois. Before his emigration to the United States he was a blacksmith apprentice, studying under German masters for a number of years. He had to carry - and have endorsed - a Wanderbuch (the equivalent of a modern-day passport).



Apparently his "final project" for this program was the fireplace andirons that Aunt Dena mentions.

He met and married (in February 1849) Luka Dina Broesder who was born January 18, 1813 in Germany and died April 8, 1899 near German Valley, IL. May 1, 1850 they had a daughter, Haukedina.

In 1850 the three of them set sail from Bremen, Germany on the ship "Orion".

10	Lucretia Gayong	18	Hannoches Hannoch				
11	Lina	19	"				
12	Haukedina	20	"				

They arrived in New York City Aug. 16, 1850 where they stayed several years and Folkert was able to use his blacksmith trade skills. Folkert became a US citizen April 29, 1852.



1852.

STATE OF NEW-YORK.

In the Court of Common Pleas, for the City and County of New-York.

I, *Folkert A. Saajenga*

do declare in oath, that it is now my **Intention** to become a **Citizen of the United States**, and to renounce forever all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign Prince, Potentate, State or Sovereignty whatever, and particularly to the *King of Prussia* of whom I am a subject.

Given this *29* day of *April* 1852.

Folkert A. Saajenga

GEORGE W. RIBLET, CLERK.

Clerk's Office, Court of Common Pleas,
for the City and County of New-York.

I Certify, that the foregoing is a true copy of an original Declaration of Intention, remaining of record in my office.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto subscribed my name, and affixed the Seal of said Court, this *29* day of *April* 1852.

George W. Riblet Clerk.

On May 19, 1853 they had a son, George Folkert. The couple purchased, sight unseen, 80 acres of farmland near German Valley, IL April 23, 1853 for \$250.00.

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THIS INDENTURE, MADE THIS *29* DAY OF *April* 1852, in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and *52* BETWEEN

James C. Bridger of the *City and* County of *New York* and State of *New York* of the FIRST PART, and *Folkert Saajens Saajenga* of the *City and* County of *New York* and State of *New York* of the SECOND PART,

WITNESSETH, That the said party of the first part, for and in consideration of the sum of *two hundred and fifty* DOLLARS, to *him* in hand PAID, the receipt of which is hereby acknowledged, has Granted, Bargained, Sold, Conveyed and Confirmed, and does hereby Grant, Bargain, Sell, Convey, and Confirm unto the said party of the second part, and to *his* Heirs and Assigns FOREVER, all that Tract or Parcel of LAND, situate and being in the Town of *Adott* County of *Stephenson* and State of *Illinois* and known and described as follows, to wit:—

The east half (1/2) of the Northwest quarter (1/4) of Section No. twenty seven (27) containing eighty (80) acres be the same more or less: Said land being situated in township No. twenty six (26) North, of Range No. nine (9) East of the fourth (4) principal meridian.

TOGETHER with all and singular, the Appertinances therunto belonging, or in anywise appertaining:
TO HAVE AND TO HOLD, the above described premises unto the said party of the second part, and to ^{his} Heirs and Assigns FOREVER: and the said party of the first part for himself and his Heirs, Executors, and Administrators, do ~~COVENANT~~ AND AGREE to and with the said party of the second part, ^{his} Heirs and Assigns, that ~~he is~~ well seized of the premises above Conveyed, or of a good and indefeasible inheritance in the Law in Fee Simple, and that the said premises are clear of all incumbrances, whatever.
 And the said party of the first part the aforesaid premises, unto the said party of the second part, and ^{his} Heirs and Assigns, against the claim or claims of all and every person whomsoever, do ~~AND~~ will WARRANT and FOREVER DEFEND by these presents.
 IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, the said party of the first part, has herewith set ^{his} hand and seal the day and year first above written.
 EXECUTED IN PRESENCE OF
H. C. Partridge
Chas. C. Williams

New York
 STATE OF ~~NEW YORK~~ ^{NEW YORK}
 County of ~~NEW YORK~~ ^{NEW YORK}
 I, *Henry C. Partridge*, Commissioner of said ~~County~~ ^{County}, do hereby certify that *Jamsey H. Partridge* who is ~~personally known to me to be the person whose name is subscribed to the foregoing Deed as having executed the same, registered before me this day in person, and acknowledged that he signed, sealed and delivered the same, as the free and voluntary act and deed for the uses and purposes therein set forth. And the said~~ ^{personally known to me to be the wife of the said} ~~as the party who subscribed said Deed or deed, and so duly acquainted with the contents and meaning of said instrument, and executed separate and apart from her husband, acknowledged that she executed the same, and testified that her doing so she did and intended therein, voluntarily, freely, and without compulsion of her said husband and that she does not intend to retract the same.~~
 GIVEN UNDER MY HAND and Official Signature at the City of New York this *Twenty third* day of *April* A. D. 1853
Henry C. Partridge
 Commissioner of said ~~County~~ ^{County}
254 New York Hall
New York
 STATE OF ILLINOIS, ^{Office of Clerk of the Circuit Court,}
~~Whitewater County,~~ ^{Whitewater County,}
 I CERTIFY, that this Deed was filed for Record, in my Office, on the *28* day of *April* A. D. 1853 at *9* o'clock, *A. M.* and that the same is Recorded in Book (C) of Deeds, Page 252 and indexed.
Joseph B. Smith
 Clerk

(I often wondered why two people from Germany would choose to purchase land in a totally unknown area. Why not move to Iowa or Indiana? When Silver Creek Church published their history book "A Spiritual Saga 150 Years", I discovered that Luka Dina's sister and brother-in-law Jacobina and Jelle Ruetter were among the charter members of that church August 10, 1851. Ah, now I had an answer to that question.)

They moved to German Valley and began farming and building up the property as Aunt Dena wrote in her story. Times must have been hard because they apparently lost the farm due to nonpayment of taxes but were able to redeem it for \$5.75.

State of Illinois }
 Stephenson County } Office of the Clerk of the County Court
 of Stephenson County

I, James Davis & Samuelson Clerk of the County Court
 of Stephenson County, hereby certify that Falkner
 Krainger has deposited in this office Five \$400 Dollars
 for the redemption of the East half (1/2) of the North West
 quarter (1/4) of Section No Twenty Seven (27) in Township No
 Twenty Six (26) North of Range No Nine (9) East of the 4th
 P.M., which was sold to Bright & Smith for State, County,
 and Township Taxes due and unpaid for the year 1854
 on the 11th & 12th days of June A.D. 1855. by the Treasurer of
 Davis County

Amount of Sale	\$ 2.70
One Dollar per Cent	2.70
	<hr/>
	\$ 4.40
	<hr/>
	\$ 5.70

Witness my hand and the Seal of
 said Court this 31st Day of August
 A.D. 1855

Davis & Samuelson Clerk

Then disaster struck! As Aunt Dena wrote, Folkert died at the age of 33 in Sept. 1855. By that time Luka Dina's sister and her family were moving to Iowa. Here she was a widow, two small children, and a farm to keep up. In a booklet of notes kept by Folkert, he listed paying Henry Sjoberg for helping put up straw. This was the man Luka Dina married August 21, 1856 at the Silver Creek Church in German Valley, IL.



This marriage was not a success and legal proceedings were put in place.

State of Illinois }
Stephenson County }
In County Court of
Said County

The people of the State of Illinois to
Henry Sjoberg of the Town of Ridott in
Said County greeting

Whereas complaint has been made this
day in our said Court that you the
said Henry Sjoberg have and are without
due authority or right & contrary to the
wishes of the parties most interested
exercising ownership by removing &
appropriating to your own use
certain property goods & effects
belonging to Haukedins Follhet Sasij-
-enga and Geord Follhet Sasijenga
Minors who have no guardian.

Now you are hereby
warned at your peril from removing or
appropriating any goods chattels live
stock or effects of any kind soever in
which said minors may have or can be
likely to establish a claim to during the
pendency of proceeding in this Court for
the appointing of a guardian for said minors
or until further order to you directed

by this Court

Witness George Thompson the
Clerk of said Court and the
Seal thereof affixed at
Tremont this 4th day of
December 1867
Geo. Thompson
Clerk



Then came even more legal problems:

STATE OF ILLINOIS, }
 Elkhart County, } ss.

In the County Court, December Term, A. D. 1867

The People of the State of Illinois, to John G. Bode
 of said County, GREETING:

WHEREAS, at the December term of the County Court of
 said County, A. D. 1867, holden at Freeport you were, by
 order of said Court, duly entered of record on the twentieth day of
 said month, duly appointed Guardian for Nauvabine, Pallek
 Saaijenga and Gust J. Saaijenga

Trusting in your fidelity, therefore, the said Court doth by these presents constitute and
 appoint you to be Guardian unto said minors and authorize and empower you to take and
 have the care of their person and the custody and management of their property,
 frugally and without waste or destruction, to improve and account for the same in all things,
 according to law.

Witness, Geo. Thompson Clerk of
 the said County Court, and the Probate Seal of said Court hereto
 affixed, at Freeport this twentieth
 day of December in the year of our Lord one thousand
 eight hundred and sixty. seven

Geo. Thompson Clerk.

Neighbor Bode was appointed guardian over Luka Dina's children December 21, 1867!

Luka Dina took back her Saaijenga name and lived another 32 years on the family farm.



She passed away April 8, 1899.



In 1901 her son George and Hilka Popkes were married. Nine children were born to this union and Aunt Dena was one of these. *That's Aunt Dena (tallest gal in the plaid dress) below:*



Such a rich history this family has!