

Across Oceans, Across Time® ...

Stories from the Family History & Genealogy Center ...



Kristine's Memories -- Born near Brovst in 1909, Kristine Nielsen came to the U.S. with her parents and younger sister Elfrida via Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1911. The Niensens first settled near Battle Creek, Iowa, where, knowing one English word -- 'pencil' -- Kristine started school at the age of seven. Since her family moved frequently, her education took place at several country schools in Iowa. One year the students rode to school in a horse-drawn "schoolbus." They felt lucky on cold days, because the bus was heated by a stove under the floor with a register on which they placed their feet. During one day's trip home, however, the stove caught fire. While the driver unhitched the horses and removed them to safety, the students formed a fire brigade from a nearby creek with the syrup buckets they used for lunch boxes. By racing back and forth between the creek and bus they succeeded in putting the fire out, and the next day the bus was there to pick them up, right on time. Another year Kristine and her sister drove the family's two-wheel cart to school, harnessed by one of the family's younger horses named Queen. Queen was a frisky colt, but limped from a badly-healed broken leg, so the girls were sternly admonished that he was to carry no more than the two of them. But as frequently happens with young people, this injunction fell on semi-deaf ears. One day the girls decided to take three friends home and loaded them into the cart, with Kristine driving. En route the seat broke loose, abruptly tumbling the passengers out of the cart. Kristine's younger sister Elfrida, who was at the bottom of the heap, hung on to the seat and ended up being dragged by the horse for some distance before letting go. Luckily, she wasn't badly injured, but Kristine got in big trouble for not following instructions.

Later on, Kristine's family moved to the Kimballton area, where she and her younger siblings attended the Gates School. At the time this small community, a stop on the Atlantic Northern Railroad, consisted of a grocery store, implement store, an elevator, a train depot, stockyards and a blacksmith shop. Today it is a ghost town, planted over in corn. In Gates, the children walked a mile to school. Some of the teachers lived in Atlantic and rode the train to work. If the train was late their pupils were often at school before they were. In that case the older girls were supposed to be in charge of minding the younger children, but sometimes they played jokes on the absent educators, such as hiding in the coal shed

These stories and many others form part of Kristine Nielsen Fries' memoirs on file at the Family History & Genealogy Center. The photograph above shows the female students at Gates School ca. 1924. Kristine stands in the back row at the far right; her sister Elfrida is in the dark middy blouse on the left.