

Across Oceans, Across Time® ...

Stories from the Family History & Genealogy Center ...



Marie Louise Petersen was born in Nakskov in January 1889, the third child of fifteen born to Anders and Johanne Petersen. At the age of 17 she left Denmark for Portland, Oregon, to keep house for two older brothers. A few years after her arrival Marie met and married Thomas Cockrell, who had a secure job with the railroad as a station-master and telegraph operator. In 1917 their lives changed drastically when Thomas' father Robert won 320 acres in a land lottery on the Colville Indian Reservation. In hopes of making a better life for themselves as homesteaders, father and son built a 12' by 18' clapboard shack on a hillside near Soap Lake, about six miles south of Okanogan, and here the family resided for the next eight years, turning the rich grasslands into tillable soil for wheat, corn and hay. But life in what Marie described as a little piece of paradise lasted only until 1925-6, when drought conditions forced the family to give up their dream. They returned to town, where Tom found work as a carpenter and handyman. Following his death in 1932 Marie worked as a laundress, a bakery assistant, and making apple crates at the local sawmill. The high point of her life was probably the brief visit of her mother, whom she had not seen in three decades, when Marie's younger daughter Susie graduated from Okanogan High School in 1936 (above). In later years Marie's life was a modest one. In 1948 she lost most of her belongings to a flood in Okanogan. After a time as housekeeper on a ranch, she moved to a small piece of land with a view of the Columbia River in Brewster, where she planted a garden of fruit trees and flowers before her house was even completed. She stayed active, bicycling, ice-skating, floating on inner tubes on the Okanogan River, and tending her garden until her death in August, 1969. -- Over the years Marie wrote many descriptive letters to her family back home about her beautiful surroundings on the northwestern frontier, inspiring one nephew, Otto Brask, to try his luck in the "promised land." Otto's memoir of his "Moster Marie" is a recent addition to the FHGC collection.