

A Memoir by Franz F. Boechler, Jr.  
Allan, Saskatchewan  
*Edited by Hannah Schuler*

MY MEMORIES

Franz F. Boechler, Jr.

I, Franz F. Boechler, was born on February 15, 1884, in the province of Kerson, near the city of Nikolayev, on the river Bug, near the Black Sea. My father, Franz, was born in 1857, in the same province, and my mother was also born in the same province on June 11, 1859. Her name was Regina Kary. My grandfather, Gregory Boechler, was born in Karlsruhe, Baden, Germany, but I do not know where my grandmother (on the Boechler's side) was born. Her name was Katherine, and her maiden name was Geiger. My grandfather (on my mother's side) was Michael Kary and my grandmother's name was Margaret. Her maiden name was Boespflug. They were all born in Russia.

We left Russia in the fall of 1890 for the United States of America as immigrants. We boarded the Ocean Liner, Auguste Victoria, at Hamburg, Germany. We sailed across the English Channel and the Atlantic Ocean to New York where we stayed for a few days. From there we went west and came to Yankton, South Dakota. My father rented a little house for \$5.00 a month and we lived there for three months. There was a little cooking stove in the house, but nothing else. We used dried corncobs as fuel and our table was the top of an old sewing machine. I cannot remember what we used as chairs, but we very likely used boxes. We lived in the outskirts of the town, about five blocks from the stores.

I was about six years old at the time, and my mother very often sent me to the stores to buy a ring of sausages, or liver, or meat for a dime. I wore a Persian lamb cap and high leather boots, so the children knew immediately that I was from Russia. They made it very hard for me. They called out, "a Russian, a Russian" and they threw snowballs at me. The only way I could protect myself was to run from one window to the other, knowing that the boys were afraid they would break the glass if they missed me. Once I caught one of the boys and I showed him I was a "Russian".

We got acquainted with our neighbors. They were Lutherans, very good and generous people. One of the neighbors was Wolf and another Ratcky. The Ratcky's owned a homestead in the north with a dilapidated house and barn all in one on it. They had two good milk cows and a heifer, a yoke of oxen, a cooking stove and all kinds of other things that are needed in a household. They had 40 acres of land, which was broken and ready to be seeded in the spring. He was willing to sell it for \$25.00 and give full possession to my father. My father accepted the deal and we began preparing to move to our new house. My father bought two horses for \$180.00, harness, a wagon and a few other items that were needed for farming. He leased a boxcar for \$40.00 because we had to transport everything by train. We were ready to leave when suddenly we heard a rumor that the Sioux Indians from the Indian Reservation called Fort Yates, which was about 50 miles from our new home, were rebelling. We heard that men were sent daily to Eureka (the name of the town 12 miles from our new home) and that people near the Indian Reservation were leaving their homes and were housing in Eureka. All the people and especially we were in a panic. We were lucky that we were not there. It was not very long, however, until things became calm again. The Indian chief, "The Sitting Bull", was killed. They must have brought him to Yankton, because us children saw him lying dead behind a show window in a big store. We went to see him for a few days. I

think they kept him there to convince the people that there was no longer any need to fear the Indians and that the rebellion had ended.

I think it was about the beginning of January 1891 when we moved to our new home. It took us three days to get there. Ratcky's cattle were kept by a neighbor one mile away so we went to see him. His name was Edenger and belonged to the Baptist religion. I remember now new it was the them when I made the sign of the cross and prayed. They were friendly. They had two children. One was my age and the other was smaller. We got along very well and had no trouble at all.

About the first of April me moved to our place. Oh it was so good and so nice to be alone again. Our neighbors to the west were all Catholics while those to the east were all Protestants, but all were German from Southern Russia, near Odessa. Our neighbors were very good to us, especially the Catholics. They gave us a few hens, a rooster, some potatoes, etc. and we were very grateful to them. By the time we were settled we had no money left. We had a lot of milk, but no earthen jars to keep it. We had no bread nor flour, so my father made a trip to town to see what could be done. He went to a flour and food store, but was told that they do not sell anything on credit. He left and went to a grocery store. He walked around the store and saw a stack of earthen jars which held about one gallon each. They were just what he needed. He stood eyeing them and wondering how he could get one when he felt a slap on his back. He turned and saw the storekeeper behind him. The store-keeper said, "Well farmer, are you needing some jars?" "Oh, yes I do," said my father, "but you must understand that I am not a rich man." "Well," said the storekeeper. My father told him that he had no money. The storekeeper asked, "How much do you need?" My father said, "Mr. Store-Keeper, I have other worries. We have no flour and you know that one needs flour to make bread." The storekeeper replied, "We will see what we can do. Come over here and we will talk things over." When my father came home, he brought with him some milk jars, a sack of flour, some coffee and sugar, but the first load of wheat that went into town that fall, paid the grocery bill. We had a good harvest that fall. From the 40 acres we threshed 500 bushels of wheat as well as some oats and barley.

In the fall of the year, 1891, my Uncle John, the father of Jack Boechler and his brothers, came over. He spent the winter with us, and in the fall of 1892 Uncle Philip, Math Boechler's father came over. I remember Uncle John bought his first two horses. His mare took sick and he was afraid she would die. He had no money to buy another mare, so he called in a lady to do witchcraft to her. The lady was about 80 years of age. She told my uncle that her witchcraft would have no effect unless he had faith in it. He said, "I have," and the mare got well. I do not know if he had faith in it, but I know that even at that time people believed in witchcraft.

I think I should also tell you what our yield of crops were at that time. I can remember two crops that we called good. We had 18 bushels to an acre. The rest of the 13 years we had 4 to 6 bushels per acre.

Kassel North Dakota was the name of our Post Office. It was in McIntosh County, Seat Ashley, Township 129, and Range 72.

Before I speak about our church and religion, I would like to tell you about the different prices we received for the things we sold. We never received more than 45 cents for a bushel of wheat, but 30 cents was also the lowest rate. Butter was 6 cents and 7 cents a pound, while beef was 3 cents a pound and pork was 2 cents a pound. These were the prices all through the 13 years we spent there. I remember one fall when my father showed us a \$10.00 gold piece and told us it was all he had. Out of it we had to buy all our groceries etc. and it had to last us all winter.

Our church was called the McIntosh Church. We lived 12 miles from it. We had no buggy in those days so we had to use the lumber wagon to go to church. Our Parish Priest was Reverend Father Joachim Witman.

In 1895, when I was 11 years of age, I made my First Holy Communion together with my first cousin, Franz, and my second cousin, who was also called Franz. The three of us were of the same age, and we dressed alike in white shirts, white pants and white jackets. We looked very nice and caused quite a stir amongst the people, who remarked how handsome we were. We received Confirmation on the same day.

We also had our music and dances. Some of the Jund boys, who were related to our mama, played very well. I haven't heard anyone so far, who could compete with them. Our dances consisted mostly of square dances. There were a dozen or more of different types; the sort of Don Messers style dances we now have on TV. The three days and three nights before Lent, called "Fastnacht" were spent in dancing. Of course, we had to do our chores in between. We were mostly teenagers from 16 to 20 years of age.

-How It Happened That We Came To Canada And Our Entering There.....

In the year 1900 the Soo Line was building a railroad west of Ashley, and it happened to pass through our land. They took about 6 acres of land from us, and in return they gave my parents a pass. They could travel free of charge anywhere they wished along the Soo Line. We knew practically nothing about Canada at the time, but were planning to move to some place. In my school atlas there was written across Saskatchewan "A Big Wheat Country", so I suggested that we go there! During the winter of 1903, we saw an ad in the newspaper called "The Wanderer". This paper was printed in St. Paul, Minnesota. The ad was published by the St. Benedict Fathers. They had made a deal with the Government of Saskatchewan for a piece of land, which was 30 miles square and east of Rosthern, called St. Peter's Colony. Now we had something to work on. In the spring of 1903 we had a sale. We kept only a few cows and five horses. My mother kept the kitchen stove and all that belonged to the household, but we sold all the farm implements.

My father leased a boxcar on the Soo Line at Venturia and on the 12th of April we were ready to go to Rosthern. We knew that Rosthern was in Canada, but that was all. The manager of the Soo Line didn't know where it was either, and couldn't find it on any map. As he could not find it in Saskatchewan, but found a similar name in Manitoba, he booked our car to Resters, Manitoba.

We left Venturia on the 12th of April 1903 on an Easter Sunday. My parents went by passenger train with the pass they had received from the Soo Line, and I traveled by boxcar with our belongings. I saw my parents again the next day on the way to Canada, and then no more until I reached Rosthern. My father had given me \$2.00 in case I needed anything unforeseen along the way. They thought they had provided for everything. On the second day, April 10, I arrived at North Portal, where we were stopped to perform all the formalities required to enter Canada. I found out that I was going in the wrong direction, and had to convince the officials that the mistake was made by my father and the agent at Venturia. They gave me a fresh document for Rosthern, Saskatchewan. This document proved a great help to me later on.

When I arrived at Regina, I had to go through customs and swear that I had no new articles, etc. in the boxcar. I was not questioned any further, neither was I asked where I was going. I stayed about a day in Regina. My boxcar was one of the long rows of boxcars; all heading for Rosthern, so I felt quite at ease, and as morning came on I fell asleep. When I awoke the next morning I found my car sidetracked out on the prairies, near a little town. It was a beautiful morning, and as far as the eye could see, the land was very nice and even. There wasn't a farm or anything else to be seen besides the little town. I went to the depot just as the agent arrived. I asked him why I was side tracked and switched off from my companions. He said I had not long to wait and I would be picked up again. I told him my car had to go to Rosthern and asked him the way. I also told him about the mistake that was made in the beginning, and I showed him the document I had received at North Portal. He phoned and didn't use very nice language for awhile. Then he told me that a passenger train would be due shortly and would pick me up and take me to a station where I would be linked on to the Rosthern line. I went up to the little town and bought a dray for \$1.00 from the livery barn. The drayman took over and we had just finished pulling in my car, when the train came in. My boxcar was hooked on to it, and went off again. I can't remember the name of the little town where I was dropped to link on the Rosthern line, but I met my companions there and we traveled together as far as Dundurn. On the way we had to stop for another train, so I went to the engineer and fireman, and told them that my livestock had had no water for a few days. They were very kind and helpful and watered all the stock from the water tank behind the engine. At last we arrived at our destination, "Rosthern". My father and mother were at the depot and welcomed us with open arms. My journey lasted six days. When we left the United States on the 12th of April, the farmers were already seeding their fields, but when we arrived at Rosthern on the 18th of April, the people were still driving with sleighs.

Rosthern had a big Immigrant House, which I suppose was built by the Government. It was 30' x 80' with a wall through the center and rooms on both sides.

The rooms were 10' x 15' each. My parents took a room, and when the car was unloaded we installed our stove and some of the other things. My father bought a soldier's tent for \$10.00. It was round, measuring about 12' across the center, and ten feet in height. It sloped down to 8' on the sides. In it we kept the things we couldn't keep in our room. Later on we used the tent as our summerhouse. We stayed 10 days in Rosthern. I found a little job here and there. Then we built a hayrack on our wagon. It was big enough to hold all we possessed.

Rosthern had some kind of a Land Office where land was registered. The whole of St. Peter's Colony was registered. One could register land that has as yet not been taken, go and see it, and nobody could take the land before you returned to either claim it or release it. We filled in two-quarter sections on Range 20, about 80 miles from Rosthern. We loaded all we had, took our livestock from the livery barn, and set out at dinnertime so that we could cross the river the same day, and we did. At Fish Creek we had to cross by ferry. What a difficult time we had to climb the riverbank. We had to hire a team of horses to pull us up. We stayed there for the night.

All the people of Fish Creek were half-breeds and all were Catholics. They had a nice little church and a few huts. That was the whole of Fish Creek. We got up very early the next morning, because we had to make 30 miles to Leofeld. I bought some hay from a half-breed, and told him we were ready to move on. He replied, "You are Catholic. You have to stay for Mass." So, to Mass we went. We left after Mass, and the progress was very slow, though the day went quickly. We had a shotgun with us and the bushes were full of prairie chickens, so we had enough meat. We reached Leofeld the same day, but we had to cross a very soft marsh. We had to unload some of our things 12 miles away from Leofeld so that we could cross.

The buildings at Leofeld were about the same as those at Rosthern. In the immigrant house we had a room towards the middle. There were cracks in the boards of the walls, wide enough for one to see everything on the other side. There was plenty of wood, to burn and a lot of pieces of poplar wood, to which one could help oneself. The barn was hardly a shelter for the cattle, but it kept the stock from running around. There was no hay, but there were some poplar trees and the grass was plentiful. They gave me a very blunt scythe with which I had quite an experience and a hard time to cut the grass, but I managed.

The next day I had to go back the 12 miles to where we had unloaded. It was late by the time everything was loaded, and as there was a little farm nearby, I asked the people if I could spend the night with them. They welcomed me in. They were Galacian Russians and a young couple in the 20's with no children. I couldn't speak Russian very well, but could make myself understood and all went well. I was surprised to see such a neat little home. Everything was clean and tidy. Her husband had made the furniture out of poplar wood. The stove was like a big fireplace which was used to heat the house as well as for cooking and baking. They ground their own wheat and made their own flour, and had all the vegetables they wanted. They had a cow, a horse and a colt. The cow was about to calf, so the milk was not good. They made me a cup of coffee, which tasted

like burnt wheat, but they both looked healthy and strong. The man worked out on the section during the summer and his wife helped in the field, besides doing her own housework. A farmer nearby had a yoke of oxen and worked the land for him and for a few other farmers around that area. The man, with whom I spent the night, told me he was trying to earn enough money to buy another horse so that he could do more work on his farm. Every farmer lived about the same as this young couple. They were all Russians from Galicia. About 80% of their land was covered with bush poplars, with land here and there which could be broken for crops. They were very happy people.

I returned to Leofeld the next day and we remained there about a week. We had a snowstorm for a few days. My father had a chance to go, with some other farmers, 40 miles east to Range 20, where we had selected 2-quarter sections for our homestead, when we were in Rosthern. The place was near Munster. There were shacks scattered all over the country called St. Joseph's, St. Walburg, and so on. One could stay over night and cook a meal in any of the shacks. While my father was away, a little boy about 7 or 8 years of age got lost in the bush. His name was Billy Lendorf. All were very upset, anxious and worried. They lived in a room next to us. Once we heard the boy's mother say, "Oh! They took 20 loaves of bread with them." Mr. Bens, her brother, stayed with them. They were jolly people and he was full of fun. They gave us a hearty laugh.

Having been present myself, Franz F. Boechler, would like to tell you when this land around Allan was settled and how it came about.

I will not dwell on our stay in the United States nor the journey through Saskatchewan. I will start from the first time we left Rosthern to go to Leofeld in the St. Peter's Colony. Here my father had gone into the bush country to see what was available.

When my father returned, he said, "I did not come to Canada to clear bush." So we loaded everything again and returned to Rosthern. When we arrived there, we found new settlers had arrived. They were, the families of Mr. Joe Heisler, and his parents, Mr. Joe Kraft, Mr. Martin Leier, Mr. Karl Silbernagel, Mr. Nick Hauck, Mr. Ignaz Garman and Mr. Joe Volk. With us there were nine families. We needed 13 homesteads, and many more were needed for those who were to come after us. They stayed a week or so not knowing what to do.

Some went to see St. Peter's Colony, but they returned dissatisfied, because they found nothing suitable for homesteads. All the boxcars were still loaded, so they had to come to some conclusion as soon as possible. They decided to hold a meeting. During this meeting they picked 3 men to travel elsewhere to see if there wasn't more land available. Mr. Joe Heisler, Mr. Karl Silbernagel, and my father were selected. They somehow heard that west of Hanley there was land suitable for homesteads. They discussed the matter again, and it was decided that they should go and see the land. They took the train and when they arrived at Hanley, they hired a livery team which took them all over the land. There were a few quarters that were suitable but there wasn't enough land for a homestead for each family. They required much more land, so they returned to

Hanley and decided to go by train to Saskatoon. As they were sitting near the station asking about the next train, they had another little discussion, during which it was decided that they would walk to Dundurn, the next station. It was a spring day, towards the end of May.

When they reached Dundurn, something did not correspond with their plans, so they made up their minds to go to Saskatoon at their leisure. They prepared to spend the night behind a snow fence, but the mosquitoes were so bad, they found it impossible to remain there. So they went on to Saskatoon. After a meal, they went into a hotel. As they were sitting in the lobby, Mr. Heisler, who was a young man, and a soldier in the old country, hung around the bar, as he liked his beer. When returned, he found his companions very tired. Mr. Silbernagel's feet were so swollen he could hardly remove his shoes. They decided to leave Mr. Heisler in Saskatoon. He was the youngest and also understood a little English. Mr. Silbernagel and my father returned to Rosthern.

Mr. Heisler returned after three days, and everyone was curious to know how he made out. Then he told us his story. After the other two had left, he sat down in a saloon and began to talk about land. A man approached him and asked him if he was looking for land. Mr. Heisler said he was. The man then said, "I am a man appointed by the Government to help people who want to settle around here." Mr. Heisler said, "We need about 20 homesteads." The man then told him there was enough land, but it would be about 30 to 40 miles out of Saskatoon. Mr. Heisler agreed that it would do, so he accompanied the man on a buggy drawn by two little ponies to 2 miles southwest of the Big Hill. He saw the whole area of level land. There had been a prairie fire the previous fall, which had burned everything, so there were green meadows as far as the eye could see. Mr. Heisler was delighted, but my father was a little skeptical. He thought that Mr. Heisler may not have been very sober, when he saw the land. It was then agreed that all should move on, so we loaded our six wagons with all that we possessed, even the chickens and geese. Mr. Leier had a sheep which was driven with the cattle, behind the caravans, by the men and boys who had no team to drive.

We left Rosthern about the 1<sup>st</sup> of June, and reached Saskatoon in the evening. We were caught in a snowstorm there. We and several others brought our livestock to a livery barn, but some of the others had to tent outside the town. We stayed a day or so until the weather cleared up. I remember my father looked for a Catholic church and he and I went to confession and to Holy Communion. After we were all together again, we got ready and crossed the river by ferry. When we reached the other side of the river, we found our horses too tired from the lack of food to climb the riverbank. Mr. Heisler had a pair of dabble grey horses, and good pullers, in fairly good shape. We used these to pull up our loads into Nutana. We got busy putting up our tents. We needed them that night. We had about 3 inches of snow. We remained there a few days and then moved on heading for the land Mr. Heisler had selected for our homesteads.

The journey was not to be an easy one. There were no roads across the prairies, but Mr. Heisler knew the direction we followed. There were swamps called the Black Strap across which we had to go. We tried to cross with the load that was the lightest, but



it got stuck. Then we took our teams to the other side of the swamp and by means of chains and ropes fastened to the lead, we managed to pull it across. In this way we finally managed to get everything across. After much trouble, we finally arrived at our destination and pitched our tents for the night.

The next day we were all curious to see what the soil was like. They took spades and began to dig here and there. My father was the first to say that the soil was sandy, although it had a good grass top. Some decided to remain, because they were tired of moving around, and they were not millionaires, who had money to waste. At about midday the Government agent, who had previously shown Mr. Heisler around, appeared on the scene, and asked if they were satisfied with the land. We told him the soil was very light. He said, "This land will be better for you, because it will produce good crops which will ripen sooner in the fall. If, however, you want heavier land, I can show you some." We decided to go with him. He took us south to the hills. He showed us around for a few days, but we didn't like that land either, so we decided to go back and remain where we were.

A heavy rain began, which lasted about three days. Everything was soaked and in a mess. I do not know how it happened that my father milked the cows one morning. It was a thing he never did before. My mother always did the milking. He was in a very bad mood this morning so when he had finished milking the cow, he turned around with a pail full of milk, and threw it over a 9-year-old Kraft girl, who just happened to pass by. She was the sister of Mrs. Tony Selzler. We always had to throw away the milk, because we had no use for it. After the rain was over, the sun came out, and as far as the eye could see, the landscape was most beautiful, with green meadows in abundance, which contained enough feed for all the horses and cattle.

About the 8<sup>th</sup> of June us younger boys hitched up Mr. Joseph Kraft's new buggy - "a democrat" - with two seats, and went east, on our own as far as Mr. Joe Heisler's farm. The day was very clear and sunny, and wherever we looked, we saw only level land. The soil was good too. We returned and told the good news to all at home. The next day the Government agents arrived again, so we asked him if the land we found could be homesteaded. He looked at his map and said, "Oh yes!" We hooked up several wagons and went east to mark out the land we wanted. There we found iron poles, about 6" above the ground into the four corners of every section. It took us several days, but when the agent drove around with a red string tied to a spoke of his buggy, and a compass in his hand, he found not a single mistake. We had the name of each quarter section with the township and range on the iron posts. After this we put the numbers of the quarter sections on tickets. Each one had to draw a ticket to see which quarter was to be his homestead. As the families wanted their sons nearby, they agreed that the man who drew a ticket was allowed to take as many quarters as he needed around his quarter, before another man would draw his number. They all drew their tickets, but when all was over, some of the farmers were dissatisfied with what they had drawn. It took a long time to settle things. My father did not accept the land he drew, so the agent told him there was more land a little further north, and he showed my father the land. My father accepted this land for our homestead. It was the south ½ of 22 - 34 -1, where the potash

mine is today. Then we all went to Saskatoon to register our land in the Land Title Office, and on June 16", we all packed and each one moved to his own land. I here quote the Bible: " to the land that The Lord has prepared for us right from the beginning."

We were happy on our new homesteads. We had a few potatoes left, and we planted them. We reaped 16 bags of potatoes that fall. We had also sown some flax, but by the time we had prepared the land, it was too late, so the flax did not ripen. We managed to break about 30 acres that year. That summer we also built a barn about 26' x 36' with sods, and a house 14' x 18' with lumber. In the fall, from a distance of 30 miles, I hauled 13 loads of poplar wood, for firewood for the winter. I also hauled 2 tons of hard coal, so we had nothing to fear for the winter. We also bought a half a pig, about 200 pounds, and half a cow. We also had our potatoes, so we were ready when the winter set in.

The winter set in unusually late that year, so some of the people thought they were living in a "Wonderland". During the first part of December, however, the winter was the most severe up until after Christmas. Then we had to thaw for about 2 weeks. It rained on the 6<sup>t</sup> of January. After that the winter more than set in with even greater force up to the 20<sup>h</sup> of April. For four months we were isolated. All the settlers began to get panicky. They had nothing left to burn, and some had to burn hay in their heaters, to kept themselves from freezing. They also had no groceries of any kind. There was no tobacco, and that was hard on all smokers. Some had mixed leaves from the slough with the tobacco, to try to make it last longer, but even that was not enough. They changed their minds about the "Wonderland." During the winter my father and I went hunting and trapping. There were not many rabbits, but we caught seven foxes and sold the skins at \$3.50 - \$5.00 a skin. Once I broke my ski about 2 miles from home. I could hardly get home, because the snow was so deep. Yet it looked so even. I have never seen anything like it. About the 20<sup>t</sup> of March six of our settlers decided to go to Dundurn, the nearest town. They made about six miles and then they had to turn back, because the snow was too deep. This is easy to understand. There were no roads, and the snow looked so even, but some of the ditches were about seven feet deep. On the surface everything looked even. If, however, you got into one of those ditches, you could hardly get out again, even with the best team of horses. It was impossible to go anywhere. One just had to wait till spring.

More settlers came to our district in 1904, and more homesteads sprang up. The place became quite a big settlement. We youngsters began to look around for a partner in life. I now speak about myself. In the spring of 1905, Mr. K. Selzler moved up from the United States, and settled in our district. His daughter, Katie, was about 17 years of age. I got acquainted with her, and we became friendly with each other. We next decided to get married. I lead her to the Atlar on the 11<sup>t</sup> of November, 1907, and we were married in Saint Aloysius Church, which was built on the prairies in the spring of 1906.