

## A tale of Two Sisters - by Jeanie Green

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1916, a hundred years ago, two sisters, Anna Obach and Polly Wachula, came south from Canada to start a new life with their families and their Ukrainian heritage. They stopped the ox cart 40 miles north of Hinsdale, Mont., and started up their own town with six adults including BaBa, the mother of Anna and Polly and Grandma Obach, mother of Tom Obach with 18 children between them, mostly girls, 15 girls and three boys to be exact. My Grandpa John Ivanovitch was ahead of his time being part of a blended family being a step-son of Mike Wachula, as his father in the old country of Ukraine had died of typhoid fever as well as his three-year-old sister.

Polly and Mike Wachula's only biological son died on the prairie site, at 3 days old. Time on a prairie might be like "Time in a Bottle." There never seems to be enough time to do the things you want to do. They made hay while the sun shined, but many times, the rain did not come. Animals and people got sick and wind was destructive to makeshift sod and wood shacks. One thing that never wavered was their faith in God to sustain them through all their trials.

The sisters helped each other with babies, cooked, canned, gardened and probably cried and laughed and wondered if they should have made this trek to nowhere. I have been told that my Grandma Polly Wachula would bless her loaves of bread before putting them in the oven knowing by faith they would turn out right! A nephew of Anna Obach's husband came to the Promised Land also and his name was Pete Walchuk.

100 years later, in June 2016, descendants of this tale of two sisters invaded the Montana prairie to fling some ashes, bury a time capsule, eat some ethnic food, visit some cousins, swim in the hot springs, dance some jigs, talk a lot, tear a bit, laugh out loud and ruffle their roots.

Rose and Elsie Obach's ashes were set free over the prairie land of their youth where they had their beginnings and now their endings. Some plans changed as they did 100 years ago as the chicken dinner picnic and a prairie toast to our tenacious ancestors with a plan for white tablecloths dotting the tufts of prairie grass and maybe some cactus spikes were foiled by a never cussed at prairie rain!

A gathering of about 100 people had a banquet in Malta, Mont., at the Great Northern. Janice Reichelt made up some tasty morsels of cabbage rolls with sausage and Borsch soup which is really beet soup for appetizers to show how gardens and preserved foods were so important to their sustenance. Julie Cole brought the chicken dinner from Glasgow to the Sleeping Buffalo instead of making the turn to Meharry which is 40 miles north of Hinsdale, Mont. Julie proposed a thank you toast to those who have gone before us, those that are here with us and for those that will come after us!

The Ivanovitch family has through Sally Austin and Jeanie Green's branches of the family tree, seven generations with four generations still living.

Sally Austin and Patsy Donich both shared vivid memories of their Grandparents and Aunts!

Patsy was proud to recall the round, white with red trim porcelain washbasin being used to bathe the babies in days of scarce water supplies.

Sally Austin recalled lots of card games and string with a big button for hours of kid entertainment, the alternative to video games.

Joyce Donovan shared some Ukrainian customs with a wedding bread about who will be the breadwinner in the family. The joke is that the bread has to be prepared by seven happily married women. Joyce hopes that the Albertsons' bakery women were happily married! Joyce was proud to show her collection of stacking dolls in the tradition of Ukrainian customs and she decked out some Ukrainian Easter eggs, too.

One Walchuk descendant, Diane Tripp, rode her motorbike 800 miles one way to make the reunion from Minnesota. Others were from Canada, South Carolina, Louisiana, Virginia , Colorado, California, Hawaii, Wisconsin and of course, Montana.

Only one of the original homesteaders born on the Northern Montana prairie is still living and that is Roy Obach, a survivor, for sure. Most of the Wachula branches of the family tree stayed in Montana, but most of the Obach branches were planted in other states. There are a variety of occupations from farmers and ranchers, teachers, engineers, doctors and nurses, to cooks, postal workers and most importantly to Moms, Dads and Grandparents. Leo Walchuk started out living in a sod hut and retired from being the Vice-president of finance at Carroll College in Helena. Not bad for a sodbuster.

These dreams were made possible by a lot of hard work and sacrifice by some tough pioneers led by two sisters who decided to stick together and raise their families vested in the prairie, which could be bitter and sweet both at the same time.

Two men, Mickey Ivanovitch and John Gutierrez, second cousins, got their heads together and dreamed of a reunion of the families set on the original homestead place and worked very hard to make it a reality. Thanks go to them for their dedication to getting such a wide and varied group of relatives all together in one place. Yes, time has a way of passing and 100 years of this Tale of Tw Sisters has left a mark, etched into the prairie that can be felt deep in the hearts of a lot of Ivanovitch, Wachula, Obach and Walchuk, prairie progression people!