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Early Deerfield Revisited in Vida

Last week a zephyr of history breezed through Deerfield, whirling bits and pieces of memorabilia for the Ott Cabin and gales of memories.

Vida Jacobson visited Deerfield travelling from her California home and delighting residents with stories of the past and the people of Deerfield in the early 1900s.

Mrs. Jacobson was the product of a historical Deerfield union. Her mother was Ella Rockenbach and her father was William Plagge. The Plagge and Rockenbach names are legend in Deerfield, enjoying large and colorful places in the village's history.

The 1928 issue of "The History of Deerfield" describes George Rockenbach, Mrs. Jacobson's grandfather, as "the oldest man in the vicinity, who has lived in this locality since four months of age.



"In April, 1841, at the age of two months, with his brother Philip, his father, and his mother who was Salome Redlinger, his grandfather, Philip Redlinger and other families left Gerstheim, near Strassburg in Alsace, to escape the crowded condition of their village, and to avoid military service in Germany.

"Their sailing vessel took 35 days in crossing. Their journey from New York was by canal to Buffalo, then by ox team to Chicago. After arriving in Chicago, they remained a week. Jacob Rehm's wagon carried the women and children of the Rockenbach pioneer party from Chicago to Lake County, the men walked all the way."

The pioneer spirit evident in the Rockenbach line continued throughout their residence in Deerfield. In 1871, Rockenbach set off for Chicago to sell his produce. He went all the way to Chicago, despite warnings of people on the way that "the whole town was on fire."

He carried survivors and their furniture back to Wheeling. "Most of the trip was on the railroad tracks, and so brilliant was the illumination from the doomed city that a newspaper could be read in Wheeling and Deerfield at midnight by members of the family who were eagerly awaiting the return of their families," relates the book.

William Plagge, son of Fredrick Plagge Sr., married Ella Rockenbach, daughter of George Rockenbach in 1901. They had six children, Irwin, Margaret, Auston, Harold,

Vera and Vida. Vera and Vida were one of 10 sets of twins in the Plagge family.

Slender and lively, Vida Jacobson, who respects history and here forefathers, remembers the old Deerfield well. Her memories drift from the 40 acres she and her family tended to "the long dresses we had to wear to school, and various Deerfield families and their exploits.

Mrs. Jacobson "milked the cows, and tended the farm when the boys took up and left for World War I. I remember bringing the milk to the depot in a horse-drawn wagon to ship to Chicago. I used to wait for the farmers to come up behind me - they couldn't pass me, so they'd unload my cans. They were too heavy for me.

This perky senior citizen has recently donated an oxen yoke, trundle bed, rocking horse and old high chair to the Ott Cabin which is a microcosm of the number of things she has saved from her life in Deerfield.

"We're a keeping family. I've been raised to take care of historical things," she says seriously. "I know how to save things. People today are going to start feeling the money pinch because they haven't learned to save. For instance, no one here knows how to can. I learned how to preserve things early in my life, and in the fifth grade I even entered some of my canning in the Lake County Fair."

Although the work in Deerfield at the turn of the century was difficult and taxing, religion and religious services played a large part in community life. "We had to go to church all the time," explains Mrs. Jacobson. "Every Wednesday night, even when my father was so tired from farming, we would walk to a prayer meeting.

Mrs. Jacobson has definite ideas on Deerfield today and Deerfield's youth.

"The parents of the children now are waiting for the police and the teachers to raise their children. A child that does wrong should get his name put in the paper, I think," says this outspoken person. As to the town of Deerfield, Mrs. Jacobson says, "It certainly has grown, but they need to put in wider streets and do something about giving pedestrians a chance to cross the street."

Mrs. Jacobson still drives her 1948 Studebaker around the streets of California. She admits, "I never sit still. That's how I stay so thin. I raise my own crops and I keep busy instead of sitting around smoking."

Besides raising her own crops, canning and preserving the antiques of her ancestry, Mrs. Jacobson is an avid reader of the Deerfield Review. "I don't even wait until I sit down," says the perky lady. "I stand up and read the Review."

Bless you, Mrs. Jacobson.