

SISTER EUPHRASIA HANSEN

When a wagon train of Luxembourg settlers arrived in the Alton, IA area in 1870, they brought with them strong family ties and an abundance of religious faith. The Luxembourg Heritage Society of Northwest Iowa is working to carry on the stories of those settlers.

The Frank Hansen family was among those who made the trek across Iowa in ox-drawn covered wagons in 1870. Frank, born in Kopstal, Luxembourg, and his wife Margaret Streng Hansen, born in Cruchten, Luxembourg, came to the United States in 1865 and settled in St. Donatus, Iowa, with their five children. In 1867, another daughter, Margaret was born. A few years later, the family set out for Northwest Iowa.

The youngest daughter, Margaret, later recalled, "The neighboring city, LeMars, counted five houses and was twenty miles from us. Because of the distance, we went to Holy Mass only three or four times a year. Then a team of oxen was harnessed--we had no horses for we were too poor--and several neighbors drove together to the city. Once a year the little children were permitted to go along."

She also remembered that, "...my youngest brother and I tended the cows in the large open prairie." She later moved to the growing town of LeMars where she worked for her sister who ran a hotel, and Margaret also worked as a seamstress and for a tailor.

At the age of twenty, Margaret joined with two young women from New Ulm, MN and they traveled to Wilkes-Barre, PA, where she joined the religious order of the Sisters of Christian Charity under the name of Sister Mary Euphrasia.

Prior to joining the convent, the young woman had her waist-length hair cut short, and her family had the hair woven into a watch fob. In 1986, Sister Euphrasia's great-nieces,

Florence and Frances Hansen moved into the Nic S. Hansen home in Alton and discovered the fob in the attic.

During her more than 70 years as a religious, Sister Euphrasia worked with orphans in St. Louis and Normandy, MO. At the time of her death in 1959, she was the last living member of the group of first settlers who arrived in Alton in 1870.

The Luxembourg Heritage Society of Northwest Iowa honors the memories of Luxembourgers who contributed so much to the history and culture of this area. The next meeting of the Society will be Saturday, February 23 at 9:30 a.m. at the Remsen Public Library meeting room in Remsen. Anyone interested in Luxembourg, its people, or in helping with the sesquicentennial celebration of the arrival of the wagon train in Northwest Iowa is welcome to attend.