

## BIOGRAPHIES OF WILLIAM FREDERIC WENKE AND LIZZIE BELLE [COOK] WENKE

William Frederic Wenke was born April 18, 1873 in Wisconsin to Simon Henrich Frans (Henry) Wenke and Amalie Wilhelmine Elizabeth [Wehrbein] Wenke. William was the fifth of eight children born to his parents that included five sons and three daughters. (Henry and his first wife, Sophie, had three daughters, William's half-sisters.)

In 1875, when William was 2 years old, the family moved to a farm near Plattsmouth, Cass County, Nebraska. He lived there with his parents helping his father farm.

William attended country school in Cass County. On the day of the blizzard of 1888, when he was 15 years old, he had to walk home from school by following a fence. His mother had made him wear an overcoat, but it was warm in the morning and he threw it off in a haystack, so he didn't have a coat. No doubt he regretted his decision to take off his coat.

As a young man, William was a caller for square dances. He also played a mouth harp for barn dances. And it was at these dances where he met and became acquainted with Lizzie Belle Cook whom he was later to marry.

Lizzie Belle Cook was born July 6, 1883 in Cass County, Nebraska. She was the sixth of ten children, included five sons and five daughters, born to Phillip and Sarah Frances [Winscott] Cook.

Belle, as she was called, led a typical young girl's life in rural Nebraska where she attended country school. She also took dress making lessons in Nebraska City, Nebraska before she met William.

William, 28 and Belle, 18, were married January 4, 1900 in Plattsmouth, Cass County, Nebraska. On the day of the wedding, one of Belle's younger sisters clipped a curling iron to the bottom of her skirt and Belle didn't know it until she got home.

After William and Belle were married, they lived on a farm near Murray in Cass County. William's brother, George August, and Belle's sister, Minnie Sophia, lived with them for awhile and were later married.

On November 13, 1900, William and Belle's first child, Opal Wilhelmina, was born. Their second child, William Percy, was born March 19, 1903. (He died January 26, 1926 at the age of 22 of Hodgkin's disease after an illness of 1½ years.)

In the year after Percy was born, 1904, the family moved to Pierce County with George and Minnie Wenke. Because the farm William and Belle bought had no house or other buildings, they lived with the George Wenke's for a short time.

William and Belle bought a small house north of Norfolk and moved it to their farm. William added a kitchen, a pantry, bedrooms, and a porch to the house. In addition, he built a barn, corncrib, shop, and washhouse. Fences were also put up and trees planted.

During the winters, William shelled corn and could be heard leaving with the cornsheller before daylight. He hauled corn to Hadar and Hoskins in lumber wagons. Horsedrawn wagons and buggies were the only transportation until the family bought their first car in 1916.

On June 26, 1907, three years after the Wenke's moved to Pierce County, a third child, Ray Wilfred, was born. Three days later he died.

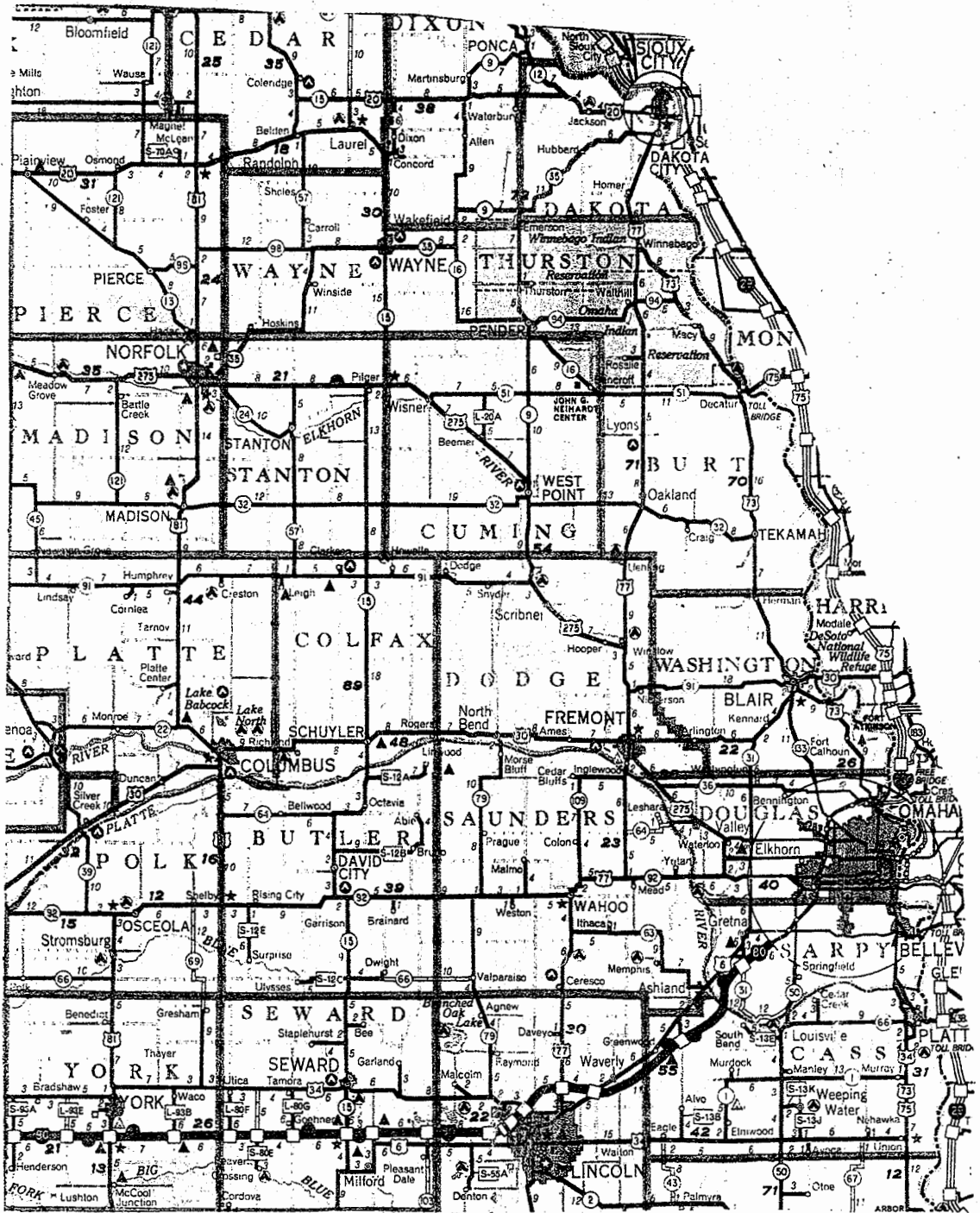
A second daughter, Erma Grace or Grace as she was called, was born July 3, 1908. Five years later on January 2, 1913, their last child, Wilson Harley was born.

As the Wenke children got older, they helped with what farm chores they could do. During the time field work was being done, they took great pride in doing household chores for Belle while she worked outside with William. It was a close, loving family and the children never heard their parents quarrel.

William and Belle lived in Pierce County until 1936 when they sold their farm and bought a gasoline service station on South 13th Street in Norfolk, Madison County, Nebraska. William ran the gasoline station until his sudden death May 30, 1937 when he was 64 years old.

After William's death, Belle continued to live in Norfolk, sometimes in her own apartment and at times with her children and their families in Norfolk and Lincoln. She worked from time to time as a housekeeper. She died of cancer in Lincoln on July 9, 1949 at the age of 66.

William and Belle Wenke and their children, Ray Wilfred Wenke and William Percy Wenke, are interred in the Prospect Hill Cemetery in Norfolk, Nebraska.



The "Biographies of William Frederic Wenke and Lizzie Belle [Cook] Wenke" were written by Jan [Wenke] Mills, daughter of Wilson Harley Wenke who was the youngest son of William and Belle Wenke.

The material for the bibliographies was gathered from the two daughters of William and Belle Wenke - Opal Wilhelmina [Wenke] Kennedy of Grand Island, Nebraska and E. Grace [Wenke] Caauwe of Norfolk, Nebraska.

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