

# LIFE STORY OF MATHILDA MITTELSTAEDT

by  
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## EARLY LIFE:

Mathilda (Spreeman) Mittelstaedt was born in Gollnow Kreis (county or township), Naugard, Germany to Julius and Caroline Spreeman in 1871.

She was the youngest of three children, having a sister, Bertha, and a brother, Albert. Mathilda's father died of the dreaded disease, measles. The family went through hard times. Bertha died from small pox when when was 18 years of age. Mathilda attended school and was confirmed in the Lutheran faith a year earlier than usual. They must have been thinking of leaving the following year.

Her mother, Caroline, met and married Robert Borchardt. Mathilda's stepfather had a horse and buggy and he and his wife would drive into the country to sell foodstuffs and other items to housewives. Robert was somewhat crippled in one leg due to arthritis, and Caroline helped him in delivering the goods. They did not have a lot of profit, but enough to live off of.

After a few years, they saved enough money and began thinking of starting a home for themselves. A group of their neighbors were planning to go to America. They decided to go along with them. It was a big decision for them to make. The family of four left their home, taking what belongings they could, and sailed by ship with the group to America in 1882. They came to the United States on the ship *Braunschweig* from the port of Bremen to Baltimore, Maryland, USA, arriving on Nov. 29, 1884.

## ARRIVAL IN AMERICA:

The group obtained a covered wagon and a pair of oxen in order to bring them west in America. The family of four and former neighbors followed a route with other wagons going west. They came as far as the state of Nebraska, settling in Pierce County as homesteaders. Mathilda was around 13 years of age then. A neighbor, Carl Rohrke, lived nearby. They had small children and needed help in caring for them. They hired her, so she went to live with them, paying for room and board. Mathilda needed to know how to speak English, so she attended school within the district. The Rohrkes were so kind to her, helping her to adjust to life in America.

Mathilda met other young folks in the neighborhood. It was through the Rohrkes that Jarjus and Mathilda met. When she became 15 years of age, they married. Their marriage on February 10, 1887 was among the first ones recorded in the county courthouse. That meant a new life for her!

### MARRIED LIFE:

The house that Jarjus was living in was not in too good of a condition. As a bachelor, he did not keep house as a woman would. Soon the windows wore pretty curtains and their home had pretty things with a woman's touch to brighten up their home. The house was rather small. Once it got cleaned, it didn't take long to keep it clean. The upstairs was not plastered, but could be used for sleeping rooms and for storage.

In the beginning of their married life, they had one milk cow. (Jarjus like milk in his coffee.) Their few chickens were not laying at that time. In the spring, they planted a garden with different kinds of vegetables. Mathilda wanted to set a hen for hatching chickens. It wasn't easy to save enough eggs for that as the hens did not lay much during the winter. Their neighbors helped them out, selling some of their eggs.

A hired man came to stay with them. (His wages were about \$100 a year, plus a pair of overalls and a pair of work shoes.) Mathilda was kept busy cooking and baking for the menfolks. (There was no corner store to go to and buy baked goods.) The laundry was done the hard way. (Read about that in the story of the Life of Jarjus.)

The first baby arrived in the summertime, and naturally, she was busier still. Jarjus was raising hogs at that time. It seem to her that there were lots of time-consuming things to do. But, the menfolks helped her by bringing wood and cobs in for the cook stove and the heater. The floor always seemed so cold to her feet.

Naturally, Mathilda's mother came and helped her in time of need. Travel was done on foot. The roads were not too good of a condition. Jarjus had a horse and buggy hitched up for his wife, and off to the nearest grocery store she went. (Hadar was about two and a half miles away.) One day when Jarjus came into the store, the owner said to him, "Your daughter was here today to buy some groceries." With a smile, Jarjus replied, "She is not my daughter, she is my wife."

Jarjus had a brother living east of Hadar. Mathilda could expect their visit about every third Sunday. Since the house



was so small, it seemed full with them present. When children came along, they all could not come to visit at the same time. Then, when children were added to Jarjus and Mathilda, the house was crowded! We little ones didn't suffer so much from the cold winter because we had to stay indoors where it was warm. When the weather permitted, we children could go along with the folks and stay at Uncle Fred's house while the folks went to Norfolk.

The evenings were spent in Mathilda mending overalls and socks. I wonder how she got her work done with all the laundry and cooking to do as the children came along. "It seemed as if Mother was always carrying a new baby. We had three boys in our family. Then came the fourth one; that was me! They were glad that I was a girl. The name 'Clara' was a popular girl's name and about every German family had a Clara. That's the name they gave me."

"When I was six years of age, my father had a larger house built. Then a hired girl came and helped for a short time.

Mathilda was a hard worker! She raised ducks and geese every year besides chickens. Fall and winter found her butchering them and saving the feathers. It took a long time for her to make pillows and feather beds.

Since a large orchard bore lots of fruit, Mathilda and the children who were old enough to help, spent many hours picking and canning the fruit. It was nice to see the cellar shelves loaded with canned fruit and meat. As the family increased to nine children, one can imagine the number of loaves of bread that she had to bake at one time.

As told in the story of "Jarjus, the Little Homesteader", harvest time found her going out to the field to help shuck corn. As the younger boys attended school, the older boys could help shuck corn. Mathilda was at hand to help the older ones get a load and she could go to the house while they would unload it.

#### LATER YEARS:

As each of their children got married, the celebration took place in the family home and front yard. Mathilda prepared all of the food needed for three days of entertaining.

When the grandchildren came along, she helped the doctor in the delivery and stayed with the new mother to care for her and the baby. (In those days, the mother was required to stay in bed and rest for quite some time.)

Since mothers gave birth to their baby in their home, the doctor came to their home for the delivery. He asked Mathilda to help him and she became his assistant. She was called at all hours of the day and night. Sometimes the baby made its appearance before the doctor's arrival, and Mathilda ably delivered and took care of both mother and baby. She was well known in the community.

After the death of Jarjus, Mathilda stayed in the homes of her children from time to time. She made her home with her daughter, Lillie Grothe in Hadar. Opportunities arose for her in the community to stay with an elderly person and to cook for him or her.

Asthma plagued her for years. She died on July 10, 1950 at the age of 79 years at the home of her daughter in Hadar. The funeral was held at the Mt. Olive Lutheran Church in Norfolk. She was laid to rest in the New Lutheran Cemetery in Norfolk, Nebraska.



JARJUS' SON,  
ERICH MITTELSTAEDT  
AND WIFE FERN.  
Parents of Pearl, Zelda, Lois,  
Shirley, Ralph, Richard,  
Robert, Roy and Randall.

ERICH AND FERN.  
December 1952  
Note their first new car,  
a 1952 Chevrolet.





## MITTELSTAEDT FAMILY PHOTOS



MATHILDA (SPREEMAN)  
MITTELSTAEDT (in hat)  
with children, Pearl,  
Zelda, Ralph, Lois,  
Robert, Shirley & Richard.

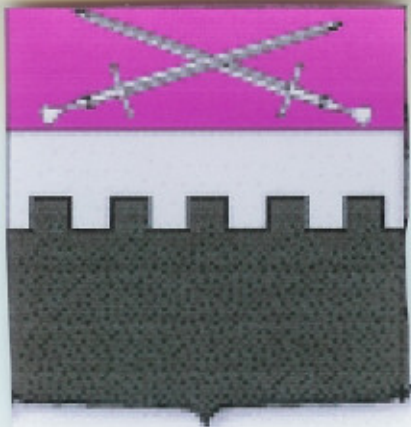
ERICH  
MITTELSTAEDT  
playing a concertina,  
with children  
(l-r) Zelda and Pearl  
(at the Red House)



Ralph Mittelstaedt on mower



MITTELSTAEDT COAT OF ARMS



**Mittelstaedt**



## MITTELSTAEDT COAT OF ARMS

The Germans, symbolize their regional loyalty, namely, by the use of coats of arms. Sometimes called "Heralds", or more correctly "Armor", the coat of arms is a system of symbols on a shield developed during the medieval period to give personal recognition. Soon the practice became hereditary and a certain shield then belonged to a specific family. At a time when only clerks could read, of course it was essential that markings be devised to document ownership. It is thought that at one time the coat of arms was truly a garment of recognition worn in battle as a uniform and serving the same purpose as our insignia.

The German word for "coat of arms" is WAPPEN, low German for the High German word, WAFFE, which means "weapon". Notice that in English we say "arms", that is, we use the Latin word whereas the medieval instigators could have selected the English word "weapon" which is of Germanic origin and directly related to WAPPEN.

Only the nobility used arms and people were given the status of nobility only by authority of the Court. Thus in Germany we have both the burgerliche WAPPEN (Civil Coats of Arms) and the adlige WAPPEN (Nobility Coats of Arms). Even more surprising, Bauerliche WAPPEN (peasant used of a coat of arms) have occurred in Germany from as early as the thirteenth century.

It is interesting to note that before 1920 the county divisions of Prussia were forbidden to use arms because it symbolized decentralized authority, whereas in Bavaria, Baden Wurtemberg and the other states, counties and cities had always used such symbols of local allegiance.

Prussia, the state where military and noble correctness was a long defined ritual, forbade the ill-defined use of the arms symbolism. Likewise, Prussia fostered and enjoyed far greater state loyalty and centralized patriotism than was ever developed in the remaining states of Germany.



## MITTELSTAEDT FAMILY PHOTOS



1956 - CHILDREN OF ERICH MITTELSTAEDT

(l-r) Sitting: Erich, Randall, Fern (Smith) Mittelstaedt.

2nd row: Roy, Richard, Zelda, Shirley. Back row: Ralph, Pearl, Lois, Robert.



1990 - CHILDREN OF ERICH MITTELSTAEDT

(l-r) Sitting: Pearl, Shirley, Fern, Zelda, Lois.

Back row: Roy, Richard, Randall, Ralph, Robert.