

LOUIS BERTRAM

1882-1948

Hello everyone! I'm Lovie Bertram. I'm here today to stir up a few memories. Some of you may remember me as the owner and operator of the drug store right on Main Street in town. It's the place where you could come to buy the medicine to heal your aches and pain or maybe buy a can of Prince Albert tobacco. Oh ja! Those were the days when you could do all your shopping right here in Westphalia - buy your groceries at Snitgen or Aren's store, meat at Belen's, and the women shopped at Kate Bohr's or Schueller's Ready-to-Wear. You didn't need a car, but if you did, Johnny Bengel sold Fords and Wieber's Station had the gas for your car.

Do I see a few smiles? Sure, and for a Sunday treat, Martin's and Schafer's Restaurant served those good chicken dinners for 50 cents or a steak for 35 cents. And oh yes! We can't forget the Westphalia Milling Company west of town. That's the place to get into a good conversation with Pete Smith or those other guys in there. What were their names? Ja, and the Milling Company is still in business.

But now I should tell you why the Bertram's came to Westphalia. It was back in 1842 when my grandparents, Lorenz Bertram and his wife Katharina Bohr left the German Eifel for America. Lorenz's two brothers and his mother-in-law came with them. They settled down in Detroit. My father and his two brothers, Michael and Peter, were born in Detroit and that is where the young Bertram family intended to stay, but sadly, Lorenz, my grandfather died. Now my grandmother was a young widow with three little boys. Fortunately, we can say, she married Adam Wirth, and plans were made to leave Detroit for Westphalia. Adam's parents had already settled here.

I want to tell you more about my family. My father's brother Michael married Mary Kloeckner and lived in Fowler, and his other brother Peter died at a young age. My father, John Peter, married Theresa Rademacher and lived in that big white house at 204 East Main Street, now the home of Frank and Jackie Schneider. My father started the drug store business back in the 1870s. He sold most anything to stay happy and healthy.

I guess I was one of the lucky ones of my age - I got a few more years of schooling. I attended the Westphalia Public School on Ash Street in town. Some of my classmates were Joe Freund, Joe Spitzley, Bill Arens and Bill Bohr, and oh yes, I can't forget Clara Spitzley Hufnagel.

After my school years I started my work in my father's drugstore, and when he died in 1929, I took over the business. I continued selling medicines, tobacco products, and even a full line of religious articles. I sold confectionaries for a while, but eventually stopped - I didn't want to compete with John and Dorothy Platte's confectionary business. Many of my customers were farmers who were looking for something to keep the crows from eating the freshly planted corn seed in the fields. So I stocked a product called "Crowtox", which was used to treat the seed corn with a creosote compound. That made the seed taste awful and the farmers said it did the job.

When Dr. Cook opened his first office right next door to the west of my store, I had a good friend and advisor. Doc Cook believed in many home remedies. Did you know that castor oil will get rid of warts on your feet or hands? Just dab some on the wart for 5 or so days and the wart will fall out. Try it! But my biggest seller was roasted peanuts. I ordered 25 or 50 pound bags of raw peanuts from the southern growers. People used to say "Christmas is just around the corner, Louie Bertram is roasting peanuts."

Yes, I had a good business and I needed help. Minnie Stump Thelen was one of my good clerks. I could always depend on Minnie. Bernita Simon also helped me but she mostly worked as our housekeeper. My mother was getting on in years and needed a lot of help.

I was also the town's notary. Some of you may not believe me when I say there was a time when there was no Secretary of State office. People started driving cars and of course they needed a license to drive. I was the one they came to for a driver's license. No written test or driving test.

Well, I guess it's almost time to close my talk, but a little more about us Bertrams. There were 14 of us kids in that big white house on East Main Street. Five of my siblings died at a very young age. My brother Frank became a priest and my sister Martha joined the Sisters of Christian Charity. My three sisters, Mary, Katherine, and Louisa married and my brothers Anthony and William also married. They left Westphalia for Detroit. My brother Joe remained single and lived in Carson City. And you know that I was a bachelor. I had my business, a car, a Ford, my first one was a Model A. I had many good friends. I would say that I was blessed.

I enjoyed my talk about the Bertrams and the drug store and I hope you enjoyed listening to me. So good-bye folks.