

History of Hensel

May 1967

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Hensel (Pembina) This was a rural post office established November 1, 1887 with Joseph Erwin pm. who named it for his hometown of Hensel, Ontario, Canada. It was located three miles NW of CANTON until it moved to that townsite in 1889, retaining its name. The townsite is now generally called HENSEL, although its legal name remains CANTON. The elevation is 929, the zip code is 58241, and a peak population of 139 was reported in 1950.

Since all records of Hensel were destroyed in a fire many years ago, I have been asked by several citizens, I being one of the oldest residents of this community, to write some kind of a history of Hensel. Will have to say Hensel was founded long before I came into this world. I am sure this is the only town in Pembina County that has two names. Canton Village is the legal name and I guess, Hensel is more or less a nickname. No one knows for sure how either name came about, but one old timer wrote that he thought Jim Hill had named it Canton Village. There was another Canton in Dakota Territory to the south of us, so some one unknown to me came up with the name Hensel. Many of the early settlers came from Ontario and there is a Hensel there, so we would guess the name came from there.

The first post office was located about three fourths of a mile southwest of the present Hensel. Joe Erwin was the first postmaster. William Conlan built the first building in Hensel, a general store. The front part of the store was new and Mr. Conlan moved a building from St. Thomas and attached it to the new part. The Conlan family lived over the store. Minnie Conlan was the first child born in Hensel on February 1892 and she has passed away.

After the railroad was build through Hensel in the year 1891, Hensel grew very fast, and at one time had two hotels, drug store, harness shop, bakery, jewelry store, butcher shop, creamery, four grain elevators, three machine shops, blacksmith shop, bank, lumber yard, community hall, barber and pool hall together, two livery barns, two general stores, a hardware, furniture and general store with undertaking parlor in the rear, mens and boys store, the Methodist church, school, and later a curling rink. We had three doctors, the first being Dr. Halldorson, the next name unknown, and a Dr. Johnson. In both hotels you could get meals and also in one private home, Mrs. John Wilker.

The first Hensel school was opened around 1889 and was located one mile west and one-half mile north of Hensel, just north of the old Coldmire Slew. My mother, Mrs. W. N. Husband was the first teacher. They only had school during the summer months. My mother used to walk with my oldest sister and brothers and pulled the youngest one in a little wagon. Einar Eiriksson, Sr., founder of the Eriksson Drug Co. in Cavalier, was one of the students. Wages for the teacher were thirty five dollars per month.

I would like to make a few comments about each place as each business, church and school played a large part in the early history. As you came into town from the east, on the south side was the ball ground. which was a big attraction in summer. At one time, Hensel was considered to have the best ball team in the county, all home talent. The team consisted of Harry and Bill Kennedy, Herb Erwin, John Gillies, John Mills Basel Ralston, Bill Luns, Ben Warmer, Tim Sheedy, Will, Norman and Gordon Husband, and the manager, Herb Hawley. Harry Kennedy, John Gillies, Basel Ralston, Norman and Gordon Husband are living and all in their eighties. Just across the road was the old A.O.U.W. Hall, which was long and narrow with a little lean-to on the south end. Of course, this was the entertainment center housing all dances, card parties, box socials, home talent plays, all school activities, farm meetings and all the farm gatherings on debates and lectures by agricultural men. We kids were always let out from school to listen or learn, but we got out of school, which was most important. The little shanty on the back was used as a kitchen and a place to store and change clothes during a play. When you came out of this cold spot, you could hardly remember your line. However, some good suppers came out of this kitchen.

Mike Swords livery barn was next in line. This barn could house about 50 horses. The front part of the barn was used to store buggies, sleighs, etc. He had several driving horses for hire. The little office was used to store your lap robe so it would not be stolen. In this smoke filled room, there was much card playing and some gambling. Next was a jewelry store, but I have no comment. Black Jack Rodgers bakery was next which had a sign in the store which read "Credit, don't ask it, to trust is to bust, to bust is hell, no trust, no bust, no hell." He was killed when a steam threshing machine had the misfortune to blow up also killing another man. This happened southwest of Hensel. Another small store followed but no record.

The Frank Gillies, Sr. McCormick machine line followed. This shop was very successful and lasted many years. Frank, Jr. took over and operated it until selling and moving to California. The town well was next, enclosed which also had a little fire equipment and also the light plant. Mr. Norman looked after the plant and was instructed by the towns dads to shut down at eleven o'clock, so had to be in bed early. There were two rows of hitching rails to tie up your horses while shopping and back by the alley was the town jail, which was not used much.

Harrison Garnett started a general store, but sold out to Frank Halliday, who operated it a short time and sold it to B. J. Austfjord and Fred Johnson. Fred Johnson was appointed postmaster. When mailing parcels those early days, you were always told the cost, paper, string, and all.

The large Frank Gillies, Sr. home and boarding house was a gathering place for many citizens. This large family along with the large Conlan Family played a large part in the early history of Hensel. In fact, you could write a book about them. Mr. Gillies was the mayor of Hensel when Governor Burke, a Democrat, made a speech standing in a car on the main street of Hensel. I have a real good picture of Governor Burke speaking taken on October 10, 1910.

Across the road was the Robertson Lumber Company with John Thordinson, Mr. Felt, John Schroeder, Carl Afftudahl and Sig Johnson as managers. Then came the McCabe elevator with Al Halliday as the first manager. Later the farmers bought this elevator. On the north side on the east end of Hensel is located the Methodist Church. Before the church was built, they held services at the Alliance Hall four and one-half miles southwest of Hensel. The first pastor was Rev. Jephcost, who also held services at Crystal, West Point and Hamilton. His home was in Crystal. At this time there was much talk about building a church in Hensel. A ladies Aid was formed and acres of wheat were started for the church with good crops both in 1894 and 1895. Ladies had lawn socials without lawns and at one they made \$27.00. The people deposited \$2700.00 in a bank in St. Thomas, which was the cost of the building. The church was dedicated on January 16, 1896. Sleighing was good and the church was full for both the morning and afternoon services. Rev. Dr. Knox, president of Wesley College, then located at Wahpeton, was the speaker. Mr. John Norman worked everyday on the building for no wages. The first organist was and is still living at Joliette. Her name is Chella Armstrong Sparling. She still loves to visit and run her hands over the keys. Mr. Armstrong was the choir leader. He was a large man with a powerful voice. There also was a large shed built on the lot to house the horses that people drove to church. A book could be written about the church.

John Mills was the cashier of our bank. This bank was robbed and the safe blown up. I have a picture of the destroyed safe. In 1923 this bank went broke and yours truly lost his life savings.

Herb Hawley founded the drug store. Dr. Halldorson had a small office in the store. Later this same building housed the phone office. Lots of good stories could be told about this office by Miss Carrie Mitchell of Crystal. Mr. Bill Hartje built the large Hartje department store which is still operated by Irvin Hartje. This store was once taken over by John Hartje and Bill Conlan. Later Mr. Conlan moved part of the store to Scobey, Montana. After the department store came the Dr. office, phone office and a meat market operated by Harry Mortimore. He was the man who shot a moose out of season on the Husband farm. Next was the blacksmith shop which was the busiest place in Hensel. Jack McKenzie and later his brother, Rod, and then Ed Ault were the operators.

The large path, which was well worn, took you to the curling rink. This rink had two sheets of ice with a three foot sidewalk between where you could walk down and view the far end. On this sidewalk, the game was won or lost, just as today. This game is a lot of fun even with a wrong turn, wrong shot called too much sweeping or not enough sweeping, which is also true today.

George Ault and Graber had a barber shop and pool room where they also sold candy and soft drinks. This was the town chatter box and many bets were won and lost here. Later George Ball of Cavalier owned this business and George tells me this was a happy time in his life. Fred Radke purchased the George Ball business and it later burned. Next came a shoe and harness shop operated by William Conlan. This was a great place for kids to hang out and watch Mr. Conlan work in his shirt sleeves. The smell of new leather was good too. Next was Fred Johnson's men and boys store. With Mr. Johnson being post master, the office was at the front of the store. After his death, Miss Sarah Gillies was appointed post mistress and she moved the post office to the Frank Gillies machine shop. Later she built a small post office and when she retired, the office was moved to the Hartje Store and Irvin Hartje is the present post master. John Wilker was the first mail carrier and had around 27 miles to drive every day. He always had three or four horses on hand and his buggy and sleigh was well equipped for the winter months. To help the budget, Mrs. Wilker always had a roomer or two and was always ready with extra meals. I had many there. When Mr. Wilker retired, he had become modern and delivered mail from a car. Their son, Louis, was druggist in Hensel for many years before moving to Detroit. Elias Stefanson was the second mail carrier and his route was enlarged to the east of Hensel. After his death, our present carrier, Clifford Olson, took over. The post office at Hensel had several different homes.

Next followed a rooming house and cafe run by the Sheedy family. I can't find out anything about this Dan Sheedy family. The Mrs. William Conlan general store was next. She was not the best storekeeper in the world, but had everything if she could find it. She had a heart of gold. Brown sugar at that time came in a big barrel, and after it was opened for a few days, the sugar became hard, but never too hard or time consuming to always have a lump for us kids after school.

The Deering Machine Shop was owned by my father, W. N. Husband. He had a good business, but was a poor collector, so I would have to say non-profit. I can't place the Champion Machine business except it was run by a Mr. O. Houhe.

Back of the Husband Machine Shop was the Gillies lively stable. They kept some fine driving horses for hire. There was a creamery on the south edge of town which had good business for a number of years but went broke. Later it was remodeled into a home but was burned down.

There are a few events that I must mention, as any community had its history built around its loyalty, religion, and education. I will start with education. As I said before, my Mother was the first teacher and she could not have had to worry much as she attained the record age of 106, 2 months and 23 days. I have to mention this, although she lived in Canada for many years, she was a citizen of the United States and voted in every election even to the last one before her death. The first teacher in the L-shaped two room school that was built on the north edge of Hensel was Mr. Coulter. The first year he had 67 students. This must have been around 1892. I understand when Mr. Coulter went uptown, there was some lively times in the room. Mrs. Coulter took over the second room the next year. The old school west of Hensel was moved to the school ground and remodeled into a horse barn. This L-shaped school wasted for a number of years. I am sure there are only three people still living in the Hensel community that attended classes in this and the school that is still in use. They are Ray Greenwood, Albert Widme and myself. I am sorry to report that I went in the front door and out the back of both schools. I was an exceedingly poor student, but had a lot of fun.

Yes, we had physical education without any room inside and no teacher to direct us, so we just made our own. In the fall it was baseball with a home made ball and plenty of broken bats. After it became too cold on the hands before the snow came, we had the great game of pum, pum, pollaway. We called the one that started the game, it, and always a boy. The idea was to not let him catch you as you run from side to side. He or it always picked out his favorite girl to catch and sometimes without too much resistance and she in turn caught her boy friend, and maybe with less resistance. After the weather got real cold, we moved inside. Some days in the winter, we sat with our overcoats on inside for a couple of hours and at times a trot around the room to get warm. When warm weather came in the spring, as soon as there was a dry spot, we played horse shoes. The teacher always seem to ring the bell just when the score was a tie. We were then sent to the tin basin to wash our hands. Hope the students in 1967 will be able to look back in 2020 and wonder how they could stand the hardships of the '60s. Time marches on for the good. The present school was built in 1911 and Mike Swords bought the old school. Half of it is still used as the Ralph Hillier Hartz Store. The other half was moved to the south edge of town and went up in smoke. The first year of the present school, three teachers were employed for the 8 grades. After three years, or the fall of 1914, a two year high school was started and later grew into a four year high school. One high school basketball team came third in State Class C basketball. In 1967, we only have the first six grades. We joined the Cavalier District, No. 6, in 1960. Things are moving fast.

Now I come to the old community life around Hensel. It all started in the old A.O.U.W. Hall which was bought from Joe Erwin and moved in. If you or someone in your family were not a member of the old AOUEW Lodge, you were and outsider. Inside of these walls, the first community picnic plans were made. For a week or two before the big day, everyone forgot

their difference in religion, work aches and pains, and all joined hands as one big family. The first thing was to buy a park and build a playground. The Community Club bought 7 acres from Alex Rodgers on May 4, 1915, and they started to build the ball field right away and to clean up the park. The first picnic was not too big, as many still walked or drove horses. Most people had cars by this time, but only one car to a family. There were always 2 or 3 ball games with races and games for the youngsters. The ladies served both dinner and supper for 50 cents a plate. After the first year or so, we had a merry-go-round, soft drink stand and a pop corn stand. The music was furnished from the towns that had bands. To start the show, we always had a speaker, and it started promptly at eleven. There was one speech given that had a lasting impression on me. It was given by Rev. J. G. Moore of Bowesmont and entitled "Never let your wants run away with your needs." It still fits us today, although spoken some 50 years ago. The big attraction was the bowery dance in the evening with the cost of ten cents a dance. It was in the early hours of the morning before all went home, and of course, there were always a few small fights. Next day all turned out to clean up, tear up the bowery and made plans for next year. The first cars came to Hensel in 1911 and by 1915 most people had cars. The picnics then were a great success with people coming from as far away as Grand Forks. In the mid 20s, the first jealousy crept into the community and the great picnic was laid to rest.

I have left the religious life till the last because it is the most important part of any community. Hensel, as I remember, was a very religious town. There were the Kennedys, Gillies, Conlans, Delaneys, Rodgers, and Ryans, all with fairly large families who were without a question devout Catholics. They had to drive with horse and buggies to Crystal, some making from 14 to 16 miles a trip, but they made it every Sunday that was fit to be outside. There may have been others too. Hats off to those fine pioneers. Almost all the other people around Hensel attended the Hensel Methodist Church. I am getting on familiar ground now. The church was filled most Sundays. With every church, you must have a good Ladies Aid or some organization of woman or no church can keep going for long. They are the ones that make it go, so it was with the Hensel Church. The Aid was formed two years before the church was built and raised most of the money. I must speak of this one great event and not too many left around Hensel that can remember the fowl suppers that the aid put on. All the good eats that were connected with a good fowl supper. One old timer asked me this winter if I could not still taste those wonderful tarts, apple and pumpkin pies served with good old farmers whipped cream and not mixed with an electric mixer, but beat up with a spoon in a large bowl. One piece of pie was allowed to a person but if you looked real nice at your waiter, she would say and what kind of pie would you like? All this was served for 50 cents, so easy to make change. There was always so much food left over that the next day you were invited back to pick the bones for your noon meal for 25 cents. Did we have fun! I recall two little funny things that happened. One night Rev. Newlove was holding a pray meeting in the R.W. Rose home with twelve in attendance. Five of the twelve were hard of hearing and no hearing aids were used in those days. One of the five knelt by his chair while Rev. Newlove was reading from the bible by a dim kerosene lamp and the other four followed, as the rest burst into laughter. Rev. Newlove looked up and smiled and said, "I guess we better all pray." The other event was when my Mother was holding Ladies Aid one afternoon. One member spoke up and said, "Do you know we have two blind pigs in Hensel." My Mother spoke up and said, "I saw some pigs running around town, but didn't know any were blind."

I should mention the old A.O.U.W. Hall was torn down with the contents and \$1200.00 given to the town to build a new hall. Park and Lodema townships both helped in the new building. This fine hall was only used 2 years when it caught fire early one December morning and was burned to the ground. This fire was a severe blow to the community and the church. The community spirit of Hensel was laid to rest in its ashes.

The first Ladies Aid was formed in Hensel in 1890. Those present were Mmes. Donald Thomson, R. W. Ross, Switzer Armstrong, Joe Erwin, John West, W. N. Husband, Taylor and Church. These old timers started the ball rolling in the church life. Later came the John Normans, John Wilkers, Mike Aults, Richard Shephards, Josiah Greenwoods, A. Hallidays, Herb Erwins, George Aults, John Hartjes, B. J. Austfjords, Nellie Sproule, Harold Massey, Mrs. Ray Greenwood, Mrs. Bernard Aasen, and John Sproules. Mrs. Sproule was organist for many years and is still living in California. With a background like this, all I can say is "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." We are still carrying on in the church but that is not history.

Memory can play tricks so hope I haven't missed anyone or some event. I have received help from John Kennedy of Crystal, Sarah Gillies of California and Norman Husband of Oregon. Forgive me for using I so much, but Hensel has always been a part of me, and I a part of Hensel.

Written the first week of May 1967.

T. W. Husband.