

Charlie Lowke A Dry Land Cotton Farmer

Charlie and his young wife Mathilda sputtered down the dirt road in their Star touring car, a sleek vehicle with a silver radiator and a convertible top. Arriving at his uncle's farm house in the dark of the night, it was the end of their trip and the beginning of a new life in Midland County, Texas. Mathilda later recalled that the next morning when she stepped out of the house and saw the countryside, she wished they had come to this place during daylight so she could find her way back.

Charlie Lowke, the son of German immigrants and the oldest of eight children, was born January 15, 1896 in Winchester, Fayette County, Texas and moved with his family to Wilbarger County in 1908. A World War I veteran, he shod horses for the 303rd Cavalry Division at Camp Stanley and later as a cannon inspector for the 52nd Texas Field Artillery at Ft. Sam Houston.

In 1923 he married Mathilda Zoch, a pretty young lady, he had known since childhood. In fact, she and Charlie happened to have been born in the same house. Three years later they moved to Midland to farm cotton. Beginning with land rented from an uncle, they later bought 150 acres of their own in the Greenwood area, but 1927 was a year of no rain. "During the entire year until May 3, 1928 not one drop fell", Charlie recalled, so he could neither plow nor plant. How did they live?

Some chickens, a couple of milk cows and a little garden provided enough for their needs plus some extra to take to town and trade for staples such as flour, sugar and coffee and some ammunition for the pesky jackrabbits. With no electricity, preserving what little they had was always a problem. In the cool months milk was bottled and hung in buckets from tree branches. In the summer it was kept cool in a sluice with running well water. There was no cellar, but sweet potatoes and turnips were kept from spoiling by burying them in the ground and meat was either salted down or smoked.

Genealogical Notes: Charlie Lowke is the son of John Lowke and Katherine nee Riedel. See "The Parents and Siblings of Annie Marie Lowke Synatschk", p.47.

Their land was unbroken land—hard as a rock, but when the rain finally came, Charlie went out with two mules and a single planter and streaked some seed into the wet soil. "Lo and behold", he remembers, "a crop came up. And it was a good crop!" But after that came "failure after failure". Sometimes he had a dime to put in the collection plate on Sunday morning. Usually he didn't.

But whether he had offering money or not, he and Mathilda, both devout Lutherans, met in homes with other German descendants for weekly worship conducted by a visiting minister. The most frequent site was the Lowke home because Mathilda had a pump organ and could accompany the hymn singing. It was usually an all day affair, with a big dinner and visiting following the service and ending with supper and evening devotions. Later, when the group organized what is now Grace Lutheran Church they met on Sunday afternoon's at Holy Trinity which was then located in the old library building on Wall Street. Mathilda's organ was loaded on a trailer and hauled to the church to share with the Episcopalians in return for their hospitality.

Charlie says it was their faith in God that got them through not only the crop failures but the loss of three children who died in infancy. "They were hard times." But better times were to come. Some years crops were good and prices were high and eventually drilling rigs and pump jacks sprouted up in the cotton fields. The Lowkes had more to put in the offering plates on Sunday morning, but their lifestyle never changed. When Mathilda died in 1980, Charlie continued living in their first house and farmed until 1986 when he moved into town. He is now 102 and his goal is to live to the year 2000 so that he will have seen three centuries.

Charlie Lowke interviewed by Betty K. Edgar, 10 January 1990 and 17 April 1998.

MIDLAND MAN IS MAKING MONEY BY CHICKENS, GARDEN

His garden and chickens are making money for C. J. Lowke, Midland county farmer who lives six miles east of the city. Lowke makes between \$12 and \$15 a week from beans, peas, cucumbers, peppers, okra, radishes and other vegetable.

"On my poultry, I am more scientific. Whereas in my gardening I do not try to irrigate or take any special course of procedure in poultry work I am very careful as to detail.

"First of all I conducted tests between two breeds of chicken to see which I wanted to handle. I found that Rhode Island Reds were preferable to White Leghorns.

"This done I began improving my stock. The finest cock I could find I bought. I sent away to a distance. It cost me \$38 to raise 350 chickens this year. I have made \$50 off these and have 200 of the chickens left."

The Midland-Reporter, 9 July 1929

Annie Marie Lowke Synatschk A Farmer's Wife

The 1920s local news included daily reports about the bridge parties of city women, but life was very different for women who lived on the farms and ranches. Annie Synatschk was a farmer's wife.

Born 1899 in Fayette County, Texas to German immigrant parents, she was one of eight children. Her family moved to Wilbarger County in 1908 and rented a farm near Vernon. There she met Gerhard Synatschk who had come to the county to help with the harvest. They married December 26, 1924, and three days later arrived in Midland County. The young couple lived with relatives, Gus and Alma Meissner, for three months before moving to their new farm—160 acres of unbroken land with nothing but mesquites. It was to be the birthplace of their five children and their home for the rest of their lives.

They settled into a two room building which had been used for grain storage, and Gerhard set out with his mules and walking plow to prepare the land for planting. Annie's life revolved around the traditional priorities of a German homemaker—*kinder*, *kirche*, and *kueche* (children, church, and kitchen)—a full time job that left little time for leisure.

As was usual in those days, the first permanent building constructed was the barn. Four years later they built the house where Annie still lives. There was no electricity in the area until the early 1940s, and she carried windmill water by the bucketful for household use. Although they had a vegetable garden, she was never allowed to have flowers around the house. Gerhard forbade it because of the rattlesnakes. The countryside was crawling with snakes, and he did not want any hiding near the house.

Crops were good, better than now, and migrant farm workers were always part of their lives during the harvest seasons. Annie recalls the cotton picking season that came shortly after they moved into their new house. Twenty-two cotton pickers

lived in the two-room building the Synatschk's had formerly occupied.

They led a self sufficient life that few could do today. The farm was the source of all their food. Meat was preserved by smoking or packing it in salt in wooden barrels. Hams, bacon, and, of course, German sausage hung in the smoke house year round. They also had an orchard. Annie remembers one year when she canned more than two thousand jars of peaches, apples, pears, and plums. With five children to feed, they never sold any of their produce. Other than the field crops, butter was the only commodity taken to market.

Annie, a Lutheran, remembers the first church service she attended shortly after arriving. It was held in a home and conducted in German by a visiting minister who came to the area about once a month. She never went into town until the Lutheran church was established in 1930, and then only on Sundays. She and her husband were charter members of Grace Lutheran Church, which she continues to attend faithfully.

Annie, who will celebrate her one hundredth birthday in February of 1999 attributes her long life to God's blessings, hard work, and the fact that she was always needed. The "being needed" came in batches of five—helping her mother with her five siblings, rearing her own five children, and helping her son and daughter bring up their five children. And now she has a passel of great grandchildren. Her grandchildren love to hear her stories—stories of a time gone by when life was very different and much harder. Yet she laughs as she recalls those days. A woman of great strength and character who has always had her priorities in order, she is indeed a very special lady. And, by the way, she is still in the kitchen every morning cooking breakfast.

Annie Synatschk, Midland, Texas interviewed by Betty K. Edgar, 1 November 1998.

The Parents and Siblings of Annie Marie Lowke Synatschk

John Lowke b. 4 Jan 1859, Nostitz Sachsen, Germany—d. 1950, Wilbarger Co, TX; immigrated 1880. He was the son of Andrew and Henrietta Daerlich Lowke.

m. 5 Jan 1888 Bastrop Co, TX to Katherine Riedel b. 19 Feb 1866, Hardingheim, Germany—d. 1928, Wilbarger Co, TX; immigrated. 1881. She was the dtr. of Carl Riedel.

CHILDREN

1. Charlie Lowke b. 15 Jan 1896, Winchester, Fayette Co, TX

m. 16 Dec 1923, Wilbarger Co, TX to Mathilde Zoch b. 7 Dec 1899 — d. 30 Jun 1978

2. Therese Lowke b. 29 Dec 1896, Winchester, Fayette Co, TX—d. 6 Jul 1985, Vernon, Wilbarger Co, TX

3. Annie Marie Lowke b. 18 Feb 1899, Paige, Bastrop Co, TX

m. 26 Dec 1924, Wilbarger Co, TX to Gerhard Paul Synatschk b. 18 Feb 1894, Giddings, Lee Co, TX
d. 9 Dec 1966, Midland Co, TX

4. Ernst Lowke b. 8 Dec 1901, Bastrop Co, TX — d. 5 Apr 1965

5. Mary Lowke b. 7 Feb 1905, Bastrop Co, TX — d. 6 Dec 1993

m. 15 Mar 1925 to John Reithmeyer b. 15 Sep 1897 — d. 4 Oct 1957

6. Louise Lowke b. 1907, Bastrop Co, TX — d. 1908

7. Frieda Lowke b. 9 Mar 1910, Wilbarger Co, TX — d. 29 Nov 1986, Hardeman Co, TX

m. 3 Jul 1946 to Albert Guggisberg b. 11 Mar 1911 — d. 25 Jun 1961

8. Edward Paul Lowke b. 7 Apr 1912, Wilbarger Co, TX — d. Jul 1912, Wilbarger Co, TX

The Descendants of Gerhard Paul Synatschk* and Annie Marie Lowke

Gerhard Paul Synatschk b. 18 Feb 1894, Giddings, Lee Co, TX—d. 9 Dec 1966, Midland Co, TX
m. 26 Dec 1924, Wilbarger Co, TX to **Annie Marie Lowke** b. 18 Feb 1899, Paige, Bastrop Co, TX

1. **Edward Gerhard Synatschk** b. 4 Oct 1925, Midland Co, TX
m. 23 Dec 1950, Midland, TX to **Annie Katherine Tuggle** b. 27 Sep 1927, Ranger, Eastland Co, TX

Linda Mae Synatschk b. 17 Sep 1952, Midland, Midland Co, TX
m. to Mike Patrick

2. **Martin Ernest Synatschk** b. 30 Jul 1927, Midland Co, TX
m. 19 Aug 1950 to **Bertina Imgina Ramsey** b. 23 Feb 1927, Binford, ND

Martin Earnest Synatschk Jr. b. 10 Jun 1951, Midland Co, TX
m. 28 Nov 1974 to **Katherine Jeanne Ozmun** b. 3 May 1952, Topeka, KS

Matthew Kramer Synatschk b. 10 Jun 1979, Austin, Travis Co, TX
Joseph Martin Synatschk b. 8 May 1984, Austin, Travis Co, TX

Stephen Paul Synatschk b. 9 Jun 1953, Midland Co, TX

Bruce Eric Synatschk b. 15 Dec 1955, Midland Co, TX
m. to **Debra Lynn Tyler** b. 17 Sep 1957, Whittier, CA

Eric Giovanni Synatschk b. 8 May 1981, Midland, Midland Co, TX
Christine Renee Synatschk b. 27 Apr 1984, Midland, Midland Co, TX

Kenneth Neil Synatschk b. 16 May 1960, Midland Co, TX
1m. 26 May 1979 to **Pamela Lee Price** b. Midland Co, TX, div. 1982
2m. 18 May 1985 to **Helen Louise Lynne Rucker** b. Midland, TX

Kelyn James Synatschk b. 17 Dec 1986, Midland, Midland Co, TX
Kelsey Lynne Synatschk b. 5 Mar 1989, Midland, Midland Co, TX

Sara Ann Synatschk b. 18 Dec 1965, Midland Co, TX
m. 4 Sep 1981, Midland Co, TX to **David Ray Johnson** b. 21 Jun 1959, Edmond, OK

Jennifer Dawn Johnson b. 15 Apr 1982, Midland, Midland Co, TX
Jeremy Daniel Johnson b. 12 Mar 1986, Midland, Midland Co, TX

3. **Louise Marie Synatschk** b. 17 Jun 1929, Midland Co, TX — d. 4 Apr 1946, Midland Co, TX

4. **Walter John Synatschk** b. 25 Aug 1930, Midland Co, TX — d. 28 Aug 1988
m. to **Helen Lydia Petzoldt** b. 10 Aug 1929, Frohna, MO — d. 30 Apr 1989

Deborah Jean Synatschk b. 15 Nov 1956, Polk, NB

Jana Kay Synatschk b. 28 Apr 1958, Malden, MO
m. 1 Sep 1991 to **Michael Dean Blaker**

Joni Sue Synatschk b. 19 Jun 1963, Talahassee, FL
m. to ____ O'Bryne

Logan Andrew O'Byrne b. 7 Sep 1993, Lakeland, FL
Dakota Taylor O'Byrne b. 28 Aug 1995, Lakeland FL

5. **Herbert Carl Synatschk** b. 30 Dec 1932, Midland Co, TX

* Parents of Gerhard Paul Synatschk:

Ernest Synatschk b. 11 Jun 1861 Louske, Germany — d. 10 Jun 1931
m. Jan 1892 to **Maria Tienert** b. 28 Sep 1867 Serbin, Lee Co, TX — 4 Dec 1940

Genealogical information gathered by Betty (Mrs. Martin) Synatschk, Midland, TX