

JULIA'S (GUNHILD)JOURNEY TO IOWA

Neither the HOLTAN HISTORY book nor the THORVILSON HISTORY book gives an adequate account of Julia (Gunhild) Aslaksdotter Thorvilson Holtan's life (1865-1937).

Julia is the main reason the children and descendants of Halvor and Julia Holtan were born in Iowa and not in North Dakota. Halvor had planted a tree claim near Washburn, ND, in 1885 when he went there with his dad, Hans. He also taught school while he acquired the land presently owned by Orlen Sheldon. But since Julia wanted to stay in Iowa and Halvor wanted to live with her, he came back to farm in Mt. Valley township and sold his homestead in North Dakota.

Julia's parents Aslak and Turi Thorvilson were early settlers in Center Township near Lake Mills. They were charter members of Winnebago Church. It was her mother Turi who chose the site of land in Iowa where she felt at home, near a stream and a wooded plot. This farm is still in the Thorvilson family and was near the farm of her sister and husband, Aaslaug and Halvor Jorgenson.

In those first years Turi and her three small children, Sarah, Ashild and Julia managed at home while Aslak helped build the railroad some distance away to earn cash. Aslak walked to Des Moines 160 miles away for the deed to his 160 acres of fine land. This deed is signed by President Ulysses S. Grant.

Soon Turi and Aslak had seven more children in this hard-working family and they had built a comfortable farm home. These children were Aaste, Thorvil, Gilbert, Lena, Malla, Dr. Ole and Albert. These children were fortunate to receive more education than most of their peers.

Their third daughter Julia was tall, lean and 22 when she married Halvor Hansson Holtan, a handsome young acquaintance from Winnebago Church. He had traveled to Decorah where he attended Breckenridge Academy for his further education and to prepare to teach school. He had also spent considerable time in North Dakota, homesteading with his father and brothers, and teaching school.

At first Halvor and Julia farmed with his brother Tom Holtan and wife Aaste and shared the two-story log house where Horace, Marie and George were born. The children in this home were double cousins, as their mothers were sisters and their dads were brothers. In 1892 Halvor built a fine house and buildings on a 120-acre site one-quarter-mile northwest of the log house site. Elmer was the first child born in this new home, followed by Arthur, William, Rev. Walter, Emma, Nora, Stella and Gilman. The schoolhouse was east of Tom Holtan's so the children for two generations walked to school through the Tom Holtan farmyard, as did the cream hauler and the public road. The present road layout gives no clue as to how close these two families were, as were the Harris Olson's and the Cleveland's to the west. No doubt Anne Harris Olson was the



Figure 1 The Julia and Halvor Holtan family, about 1916. Front, l to r, Nora, Father Halvor, Gilman, Mother Julia, Stella, second row, Walter, Arthur, Horace, Marie, George, Emma, Elmer

Holtan was in the early class at Waldorf and all of their children were good students and received more education than any of their cousins. This education and training gave them leadership and skills for the rest of their life.

Their mother Julia was very supportive of their career choices. Four of them became teachers, Walter became a pastor, Horace was a steam engine expert, Elmer was a self-taught civil engineer, George was a dairy tester, and Marie was an acclaimed garden and flower expert.



Figure 2 At Carlson's, about 1933. Front, l to r, Ardith Holtan, Mildred Carlson holding Rolfe Holtan, Dean Anderson, Norma and Arvid Holtan, Wayne Holtan; Row 2, Stanford Holtan, Clarence Carlson, Herbert and Mavis Holtan, Juliet Carlson, Joel Holtan; standing

midwife for all the babies in this close community, and they were all members of Dahl's church, Winnebago. Rev. Dahl was also a trained physician so there were times for his medical expertise also. Dahl is credited with saving Clarence Foss's leg when another doctor wanted to amputate it. This Halvor Holtan family supported further education and Waldorf Academy. Marie

Grief touched this mother early as young William died, only 17 months old. On January 2, 1917, her husband Halvor died of a heart attack and from complications of the flu epidemic. Later in January daughter Emma, 16, died from mastoid complication. Several of her different sons farmed her farm until she passed away in 1937 at the age of 71. Amazingly, each child continued their education in spite of the loss of their father.

Her son Elmer purchased the farm in the estate settlement in 1939 and moved there on March 1 of that year. Rolfe purchased this Holtan farm in 1959 and continues to own and

operate this farm, in the family for over a century.

Gunhild was a classic Norwegian heritage mother, strong and firm, not given to show emotions, and with great self-discipline, deep faith and pride in her family. Hers was a second generation of Holtan children in America and her strength was their strength. Much honor is due this family of outstanding citizens and to their honorable mother.

Faith of our Mothers, Christian faith,
In truth beyond our man-made creeds,
Still serve the home and save the church,
And breathe thy spirit through our deeds.
Faith of our mothers, Christian faith,
We will be true to thee till death.

