

The Table that Tells Stories

Do you ever wonder if furniture could have a life of its own? Well, my grandparent's dining room table has had enough adventures for a lifetime. My grandfather Christian Joachim was born in Bessarabia and eventually became a farmer and businessman in South Dakota. My grandmother Beata Bauer was born in the US but her parents were born in Freudental, South Russia (now Mirnoye/Myrna west of Odessa, Ukraine) and immigrated to the US in 1874. "The Table" started its life with my grandparents in the early 1900s, moved all around South Dakota, possibly North Dakota, and is still going strong, living a new life in Alaska.

The family's background sets the stage for this story. Christian Joachim was born 13 December 1874 in Friedenstal, Bessarabia; the village is now named Myrнопillya, Ukraine, southwest of Odessa. When he was just about two years old, his parents Georg Adam and Dorothea (Kern) Joachim immigrated from Friedenstal to the US with Christ and his one-year old brother Jacob. Their ship from Bremen, Germany to Baltimore, Maryland was named the Berlin and arrived at Baltimore on 13 November 1876. The Joachims settled in the areas of Yankton and Menno, SD after arriving from Bessarabia.

Christ grew up and became a farmer and a businessman, owning a store, land and a real estate company. He moved to Delmont SD. On 14 June 1916 he married Beata Florence Bauer in Aberdeen SD. Beata was born 15 June 1888 in Lesterville SD. Her parents Georg Karl and Elisabeth Christman Bauer settled around Menno and Lesterville after arriving in the US in 1874. Beata owned her own homestead land north of Faith, near Ada SD in 1912; our whole family finds this amazing because she was 24 years old at that time, alone in the "back of beyond," although she did have a rifle and a horse. We really treasure the one picture we have of her on her horse, rifle at her side, in the middle of the empty prairie. Beata was also a school teacher for a period before she married Christ.

This is when The Table first appears. Christ and Beata bought The Table soon after they were married. It was their only dining room table for their married life as far as we know. The Table is solid oak; the legs have curves and ridges, the finish is a warm brown natural stain to let the oak grain show. When I first saw it, The Table had gouges, some short slashes, stains, and much evidence of four boys and one girl having many meals around it. It has at least three original leaves to expand its size. It has a middle leg for support. It also had chairs that we consider small and even short. We all wonder how our relatives fit sitting at the table since they are mostly six feet tall and taller.

To follow The Table around, we have to follow Christ and Beata through their lives. They moved to Venturia ND where Gertrude (1917) and Walter (1919) were born. Christ had a general merchandise store there. We have some tokens like large coins, with "Chris Joachim" inscribed on them from his store that were given to customers for store credit. Then from 1920 to 1923, the family lived in Delmont SD where Herman Victor (1920) and Benjamin (1922) were born. After Delmont the family moved to Agar SD where Paul (1928) was born and where H. Victor (my father) graduated from high school. My Uncle Paul says that this is the only dining room table he remembers in their Agar house. The Joachims also lived in Tolstoy SD, then had a farm formerly owned by a family named Lepke that was located southeast of Wecota SD. They then moved to a farm south of Cresbard SD. Doris Thompson Joachim, wife of my uncle Walter, called this farm "Starvation Knob". Walt and Doris stayed on at Starvation Knob farm after Christ and Beata moved into Cresbard to their last house at the corner of 4th Ave

and Howard Street.

Christ and Beata moved around like this for several reasons. Christ had many land deals going on and traveled extensively to further his real estate/property business. But then my grandparents lived through the Depression and they lost some land and businesses during that time. We know that they lived modestly after that. It must have been hard for Christ after coming to America, building up successful property deals, being a business leader in the Germans From Russia community, and then hit by the Depression.

According to my uncles (my father's brothers) and older sisters, The Table was used for nearly everything – it was the largest flat surface in the house. The family grew up around that table. Whole threshing crews ate meals at The Table. Sadly we don't know how many people were in a threshing crew in those days. Beata used to lay out fabric on The Table for her many sewing and quilting projects. We have some of the lace and edgings that she used, many with labels from Germany. Our family has quilts made by her which means those quilts laid on The Table. Beata used The Table to roll out cookie dough and for the cookie-making process, especially at Christmas time with making endless little balls of German Pfeffernusse (Pepper-Nut cookies) dough. And she made her fantastic spicy, peppery pumpkin Plachendies, a recipe she got from her German-Russian mother-in-law Dorothea Kern Joachim. A lot of dough gets rolled out for that production. Of course, among her many German specialties was kuchen, another dough-intensive process. We can't even imagine the conversations that occurred around The Table, especially during the Depression. I am sure my strict German Lutheran grandparents doled out many punishments to their children at that table, especially when I hear stories of the escapades my father and his brothers got up to when they were young. We looked desperately for their initials carved into the oak but maybe they were not able to carry their shenanigans that far. But perhaps the most alarming is when I learned that the family used to butcher meat on The Table! That knowledge gave new meaning to the deeper gouges and slashes.

So eventually my sister Shirone ended up with this famous table. By this time it was well-worn, a bit wobbly, and a bit warped on top but still beautiful. And no one knew where the leaves were. Shirone did not have room for another table. It is such a precious family heirloom that there was absolutely no question of giving it to someone other than a Joachim. Shirone lives in Twin Brooks SD and at that time we lived near Seattle. So Shirone and her husband Paul loaded up The Table into their van along with some other family heirlooms, and drove it all to Seattle. There, my husband Charles took The Table completely apart, sanded it down, stripped it and refinished the whole thing. I made sure he was careful not to sand away all of the character...to leave some of the gouges. Actually, he had to anyway because some of the slashes on the top surface and edges were so deep. If only we knew what made those slashes and gouges...I am sure that would be another whole story! He also made two new table leaves of solid oak. Of course, the next year, one of my sisters found the original leaves in her garage (no names here to protect the guilty). We had a brass plaque made and put on the end of the table stating: "Christ and Beata Bauer Joachim, Cresbard SD, Circa 1920s". Then we moved to Alaska and certainly took The Table with us. It has too many stories to ever leave the family.

The Table is still beautiful and seems to be whispering memories to us. How many stories were told around it about our ancestors living in Bessarabia, the trip from there to Bremen to the United States, getting settled in southeastern SD, learning English, farming...the list goes on. I like to imagine my uncles and aunt as little children watching their mother Beata make cookies on the table; luckily many of her German-Russian recipes were passed

down to us. And I can just see the kids listening with big eyes to stories about the old days, learning the family's religion, and probably doing schoolwork. We are so grateful to our Germans From Russia grandparents who left us all these stories and memories. They live on through our remembering and cherishing their struggles and successes. Every time we look at, sit at, eat at, do jigsaw puzzles and board games on, and just live around The Table, we see our Grandparents, their family, and their lives.



Left, Beata Bauer Joachim - SD Prairie Days; Right, Christ Joachim & Beata Bauer