

LeRoy M. Nayes

Sons of Norway Park Tree Dedication 2004

By Audrey Solheim

LeRoy's grandparents were pioneers that came into North Dakota before it was a state. His Norwegian great-grandparents came to the USA from the Telemark area in 1845, settling in the Winnebaggo area as farmers. Lars Ness and a brother volunteered to serve the North in the civil War. His grandfather, Charles, was born in 1856 and came to the Dakota Territory in 1883 to work on the Dalrymple Bonanza farm in the Red River Valley, later going back and forth to Minnesota during the winters to work in lumber camps. He encouraged his family to come to the Fingal area a few years later. LeRoy was born on the Nayes family farm. That farm remains in the family and was recently transferred to a nephew from his 102 year old mother's estate.



LeRoy's mother's parents, John Deedes, were Germans from Russia that came to North Dakota in 1888. They settled in the Manfred area and later moved to Woodworth when his mother was 11 years old. His mother lived there until 1920 when she met and married Lawrence Nayes, who was farming his father's land near Woodworth. After their marriage they moved to the Nayes family farm near Fingal.

The Nayes School, one-quarter mile from the family farmstead was where the five children went to school the first eight years. They attended the Fingal High School the next 4 years. LeRoy received scholarships to North Dakota Agriculture College, Jamestown, and Concordia. As he was interested in agriculture, he started NDAC in the fall of 1940.

When war was declared in December of 1941, many male students were drafted or enlisted in the armed services. During his Junior year he and 11 others in his social fraternity enlisted. LeRoy was selected for Navigator-Bombardier training and received his wings and commission June 1944.

He became a crew member of a B-24 heavy bomber and arrived in southern Italy in October. On his 3rd mission to Linz, Austria, his plane was disabled by anti-aircraft flak and it was only able to make it back to northern Yugoslavia on the remaining two motors before the crew had to parachute from the plane. Four of the crew that landed in the Sava river and evaded capture or drowning were brought together by Tito Partisan in the next two days. After hiding in various places until the river froze over, a partisan was able to lead them into the safer mountains to a partisan camp;. On the 35th day, the four survivors of LeRoy's crew and another crew of ten were able to reach an emergency airfield and be airlifted back to Italy.

After six weeks of recovery in Italian hospitals, LeRoy was returned to his air base and volunteered to continue flying 12 more missions, to the end of the war. All his personal

effects and clothing, except what he had been wearing, were shipped back to the USA while he was missing in action.

LeRoy was discharged from the Air Force as First Lieutenant three years to the day when he enlisted. He returned to NDAC in January of 1946 and graduated in June of 1946.

He met Lillian Nydahl in April, when she was a Junior in Home Economics Education. LeRoy went to the University of Minnesota to obtain his Master's degree and Lillian finished her Bachelors degree. Lillian insisted on teaching two years before they were married, and did so at Devils Lake. LeRoy taught at Jamestown one year, and spent one year doing construction of buildings on the home farm. In June of 1949 LeRoy and Lillian were married and under contracts to teach two years at Casselton, where LeRoy had been teaching since February. He also bought an old house and was remodeling it before their marriage in June.

In February of 1951, LeRoy became a partner in a two-section grain-livestock farm operation in the McClusky area. Lillian finished her teaching at Casselton and began teaching at McClusky. The 3 year farming arrangement ended at McClusky when the owners of a section farm in the Fingal area were both killed in an auto accident. LeRoy took over that operation, where he could also assist his father. Again, Lillian has to finish out her teaching year in 1954. LeRoy and their first born, Larry, had moved to the Fingal farm with Lillian's mother doing the housekeeping and caring for Larry. They farmed there until the end of the lease period, when the farm heir wanted to sell that property and buy a drugstore. The opportunity was available to buy the farm or become a Federal employee of USDA-Farmers Home Administration. They chose to sell out and began the climb up the ladder of federal employment. Assistant, move to supervisor, move to State Office as Loan Officer, move to Washington, DC as Specialist, move back to Bismarck as Chief of farm loans until retirement in August of 1983. During that time two more children were born, Linda and Lee.

Lillian's parents were 100% Norwegian and her father and brothers more recent emigrants from Norway. Five brothers, all carpenters came to the Fargo area of North Dakota after World War I. Lillian spoke only Norwegian until she was 5 years old. Lillian's mother was an excellent cook and enjoyed making the Norwegian foods. Lillian carried on most of the Norwegian traditions. She was very interested in visiting her relatives in Norway and they joined the Sverdrup Lodge in 1977. In 1979, they took a charter flight with Brekke Travel to Norway where they visited three uncles, an aunt and many cousins, mostly in western Norway.

Lillian copied ladies and men's bunads from cousins in the Sognfjord area, purchased materials and made the bunads when they got home. LeRoy still wears the original with a few modifications. Lillian was disabled by a cartilage disease in 1974, but was able to do handcrafts. She continued to do Hardanger until the last few months of her life. LeRoy and Lillian had many contacts with Sons of Norway members before and after they joined the lodge. Lillian recommended Ella Nordby to LeRoy as a suitable replacement for her, saying he deserved an active person after taking care of an invalid for 22 years.

In June of 1997, LeRoy and Ella were married and they continue to be active members in our lodge.

LeRoy assisted in the building and maintaining the original stabbur, park grounds and the new stabbur. He has been on the auditing committee, served as trustee, vice-president, president and is currently counselor of the lodge. He is a member of the Sons of Norway chorus and dancers, is a member of Bok Møte, has served as a delegate to district conventions, helped with floats, ethnic events, and Meals on Wheels. LeRoy has certainly earned this honor, dedication of a Sons of Norway Park tree in his name.