

Henschien Lake Schottische

The Henschien Lake Schottische
BY E. WICK

I heard my Grandfather and The Henschien brothers
From near Sibley State Park, Play This Tune on The
Hardanger Fiddles
Way back in 1929

ELMO WICK
BOOTEN, Minn.

Elmo wrote beneath this tune:

"I heard my grandfather and the Henschien brothers from near Sibley State Park play this tune on their Hardanger fiddles way back in 1929."

Elmo must have been either five or six years old when he first heard this tune. It must have made quite the impression on the young child. Sibley State Park had been created in 1919 from land which was unsuitable for farming, and it is a unique environment.

About 30,000 years ago an ice sheet referred to as the Wadena Lobe ground to a halt at where Sibley State Park is today. A great pile of debris had been pushed in front of that glacier, and the land before it all was wrinkled by the force of the ice. A subsequent ice sheet, a few thousand years later, flowed over the top of the Wadena Lobe and its debris field, and began grinding the landscape flat for the next few hundred miles south of Sibley State Park.

So, while most of northern and central Minnesota is flat prairie with black loamy soil, there is a thin stretch of rocky hills and valleys, called the Alexandria Moraine which runs across the state. Sibley State Park exemplifies this rugged terrain. Sibley State Park's Mount Tom at 185 feet above the prairie is the highest spot within a fifty-mile radius.

Peter and Anna Henschien were late in coming to Kandiyohi county. As such they got the least favorable farmland. Most of their forty acres was low land between Lake Andrew and Swan Lake, which susceptible to flooding. Peter had immigrated from Norway in 1883 where he had previously worked as a policeman for five years. Anna Noren immigrated with her parents from Sweden. Peter and Anna had met in Minneapolis, Minnesota where they married in 1885. They

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moved to Kandiyohi County in 1890 and bought some remaining land that was available at the edge of a forest.

It's unclear how much Peter Henschien knew about farming, but they did well enough because Peter and Anna had five children: Jenna (born 1887), Hilma (1889), Otto (1891), Vernie (1893), Leslie (1895).

Something bad happened to Peter Henschien in 1902. Whether it was a stroke or a spine injury it is unclear. What is clear was that for seven years, from 1902 to 1909, Anna and her children had to care for their paralyzed head of the household. This was an area where there was no electrification, no running water, no paved roads and only wood stoves for heat.

Anna had to care for her husband and children alone, cook meals on a wood burning stove, tend the garden and can food for the winter. Jenna and Hilma were responsible for helping with the cooking, washing and hauling of water. From the age of eleven Otto, assisted with his nine-year-old brother Vernie, and seven-year-old Leslie, was responsible for cutting and splitting firewood, caring for the livestock and perhaps, during the long winter evenings, it was the boy's job to entertain the family with their fathers hardanger.

Peter Henschien died in July 1909. It came as a relief after years of caregiving in harsh conditions. The 1915 Kandiyohi Farmers Directory does not list the Henschien homestead, which may indicate that the farm was unable to produce a marketable crop. Forget profitability, life on that idyllic looking Henschien farm was all about survival. Indeed, forty acres of their eighty-acre farm would often flood and become, as they called it, Henschien Lake.

In 1917 the three Henschien brothers were required to register for the draft. All three brothers requested an exemption from the war office citing "weak back", "rheumatism" and "to care for my mother" as reasons not to go Over There. I suppose some may have thought the boys were shirking their patriotic duty, but I believe it was an indication of how hard life was on that farm.

In 1919 the land adjacent to the Henschien homestead was sold to the state of Minnesota to be made into a state park.

Leslie Henschien became a barber and moved off to Minneapolis during the 1920's so it was probably Otto and Vernie Henschien that young Elmo Wick saw playing hardangers with his grandfather.

Elmo was clear in his writing that Otto and Vern played this tune on "Hardangers". However, this tune as written is not a hardanger tune. The B part is simply too high. We believe that Elmo took some artistic license in writing down this piece and at the very least he moved the B part up an octave. If you play the B part of Elmo's version down one octave there are some convenient double stops which become available when you play this on a hardanger. More likely than not Elmo was trying to make this piece more interesting and challenging so that it would make a good contest piece. He did not document what he heard, but rather he documented what he remembered.

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Otto and Vernie lived out their years working as farm laborers in the area around New London and Sunburg, MN. The old farmhouse and its surrounding land was donated to the State of Minnesota by a descendent in the 1990s and the site of the Henschein farmhouse, overlooking Henschein Lake, where Elmo heard his grandfather play with the Henschein brothers is now a part of Sibley State Park.

HENSCHIEN HOMESTEAD

This site was homesteaded by Peter and Anna Henschien in 1890. They came to Minnesota from Norway and Sweden, and had five children; Jennie, Hilma (Erickson), Otto, Vernie, and Leslie. The homestead was deeded in 1972 to a granddaughter of Peter and Anna, Phyllis Erickson Bakke and her husband Edwin Bakke.

Phyllis, together with Edwin, desired to make the site a part of Sibley State Park to be enjoyed by present and future generations.



The Henschien Home as it appeared in Spring 1999.

A plaque marking the site of the Henschein homestead.

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Henschien Lake today as viewed from the site of the Henschien farmhouse.