PICTURE

DES MOINES
SUNDAY REGISTER
November 20, 1977

HARD TIMES
A VIEW OF IOWA IN THE THIRTIES

The front row

By ELIZABETH CLARKSON ZWART

The Maharajah of Indore had the edge on us.

BEFORE the despotic powers of the rajahs were taken from them by the new India, one of them trailed an unmatched collection of titles.

It wasn't endless. But it had quality.

He was the Maharajah of Indore, His Highness the Lord Paramount, King of Kings, Brave Warrior One-Quarter-Better-Than-Anybody-Else, King Shepherd.

And you can't help wondering what they called him for short.

●

ONE good cook says that just before she slides a stuffed turkey into the oven, she can't help tucking a big garlic clove under his wing.

Yes, she's an "Iowa girl;" but she had an Italian grandmother.

●

AND did you ever stuff a turkey with two kinds of dressing?

Say, the popular sage-and-onion goes into the big central space and the richer chestnut dressing is stuffed into the neck cavity.

Use two serving spoons.

—

The fanciest turkey cook I know bastes the seasoned, buttered, but *unstuffed* bird first with a cup of consomme, then with a pint of champagne.

She swears she doesn't drink the gravy — she carries it all the way to the table in the gravy boat.

●

WORD'S WORTH: I always want to re-write the dictionary and spell it with two "l"s — *chillblains.*

●

THE INDIANS called it the ibimi — the bitter berry.

We call it the cranberry.

—

And Aunt Mary suggests stewing the cranberries in cider instead of water.

●

PLAN carefully! When Pope Pius XII was growing up as Eugene Pacelli he told his mother that he wanted to be a missionary.

"But without the martyrdom!" the boy added.

●

YOU CAN do anything, really. When I found myself in possession of a box of green Kleenex, I set my teeth and used it up.

At night.

In the dark.

●

FRIGHT SIGHT: The little fur paws are left on every dressed rabbit offered for sale in France.

It's the law.

When the customer sees *those,* she can be sure it's not a cat she's buying.

●

WHILE waiting to see the doctor, a couple identified themselves to a woman waiting in an adjoining chair — me.

The woman complained that it hadn't been easy to get up so early and drive into Des Moines from their Poweshiek County farm and then have this long wait, all without her breakfast.

Her husband shook his head.

"I told her to go ahead and eat her breakfast and tell Doc she had a late supper," he said.

●

WHEN it still had to be done in their own kitchens, ingenious women discovered that the best tool with which to remove the pin feathers was a crochet hook.

●

NO PUMPKIN PIE? When that tragedy occurs, a Mills County man forks a dot of mustard with every bite of a slice of custard pie.

A reasonable facsimile, he claims.

●

SEASONAL WARNING: Every November we remind you of the woman in Dubuque County who hobbled around the kitchen as the holiday cook, whimpering with two smashed toes.

The turkey did it.

When she dropped its 25 pounds before she'd thawed it.

●

THEY asked 4-year-old Susie if she had enjoyed her Thanksgiving dinner.

"I loved the turkey, but I didn't like the bread he ate," said Susie.

●

MANY a Yorkshireman says this grace at table:

God Bless us all
And make us able
To eat t' stuff
What's on this table.

He says it.

Then he runs.

Elizabeth Clarkson Zwart's column appears Monday through Friday in The Des Moines Tribune.

PICTURE
DES MOINES SUNDAY REGISTER ■ NOV. 20, 1977

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Picture magazine welcomes contributions from its readers, but The Register will assume no responsibility for such contributions. If return of material is desired, a stamped self-addressed envelope must be enclosed. Mailing address is 715 Locust, Des Moines, Iowa 50304.

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Cover photo by RUSSELL LEE

The tale of the Depression and drought in Iowa during the 1930s is told in the famous picture on today's cover. The hands of Theresia Ostermeyer were just a part of the story captured on film by photographer Russell Lee in his 1936 trip to Iowa. More pictures and John Karras' story of Andrew and Theresia Ostermeyer begin on page 13. This is the first in a series of photographs and stories concerning hard times in Iowa.

Theresia Ostermeyer, Woodbury County, 1936

By JOHN KARRAS

They knew pain, toil, drudgery, these hands. They knew the feel of rough cloth, of cornstalks, of hay fork handles and ropes and reins. They knew the feeling of cold rain and frost and sunshine and newly turned soil. They knew the softness of a baby's skin.

They were the hands of Theresia Ostermeyer. She was 76 and her husband, Andrew, was 81 when the Farm Security Administration photographer, Russell Lee, came to northwest Iowa in 1936 to record the ravages of the Depression on rural life.

The Ostermeyers had just lost their farm when these pictures were taken. The farm was about 2½ miles northeast of Oto along the Little Sioux River in western Woodbury County.

The photo of Mrs. Ostermeyer's hands was included in a famous photographic display, "The Family of Man," assembled by Edward Steichen and exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City beginning Jan. 19, 1955. The display later was reproduced as a book.

The Ostermeyers had five children, none of whom is now living. They were Andrew, John, Joseph (who died at age 3), George and Mary (who died at age 15).

Andrew, jr., and his wife had 11 children: Margaret Hiller of Pierson; Leo of Sioux City; Celia DeGoosh, who lives in Vermont; Clara Worrell of Smithland; Hilda Kirkpatrick of Hornick, who died in 1975; Helen Fellman, who lives in California; Lawrence of Westfield; Ernest of Sioux City; Marcella Hand of Green Bay, Wis.; Evelyn Van Meter of Kansas City, Mo.; and Irene Nystrup of Akron.

John and his wife had a daughter, Mae Ann Meredith, now living in Westside.

George and his wife had ▷▷▷

Establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.

—Psalms 90:17

HARD TIMES
A VIEW OF IOWA IN THE THIRTIES

(This is the first in a series on "Hard Times" in Iowa in the 1930s. Other photos and stories will appear in Picture magazine in coming months.)

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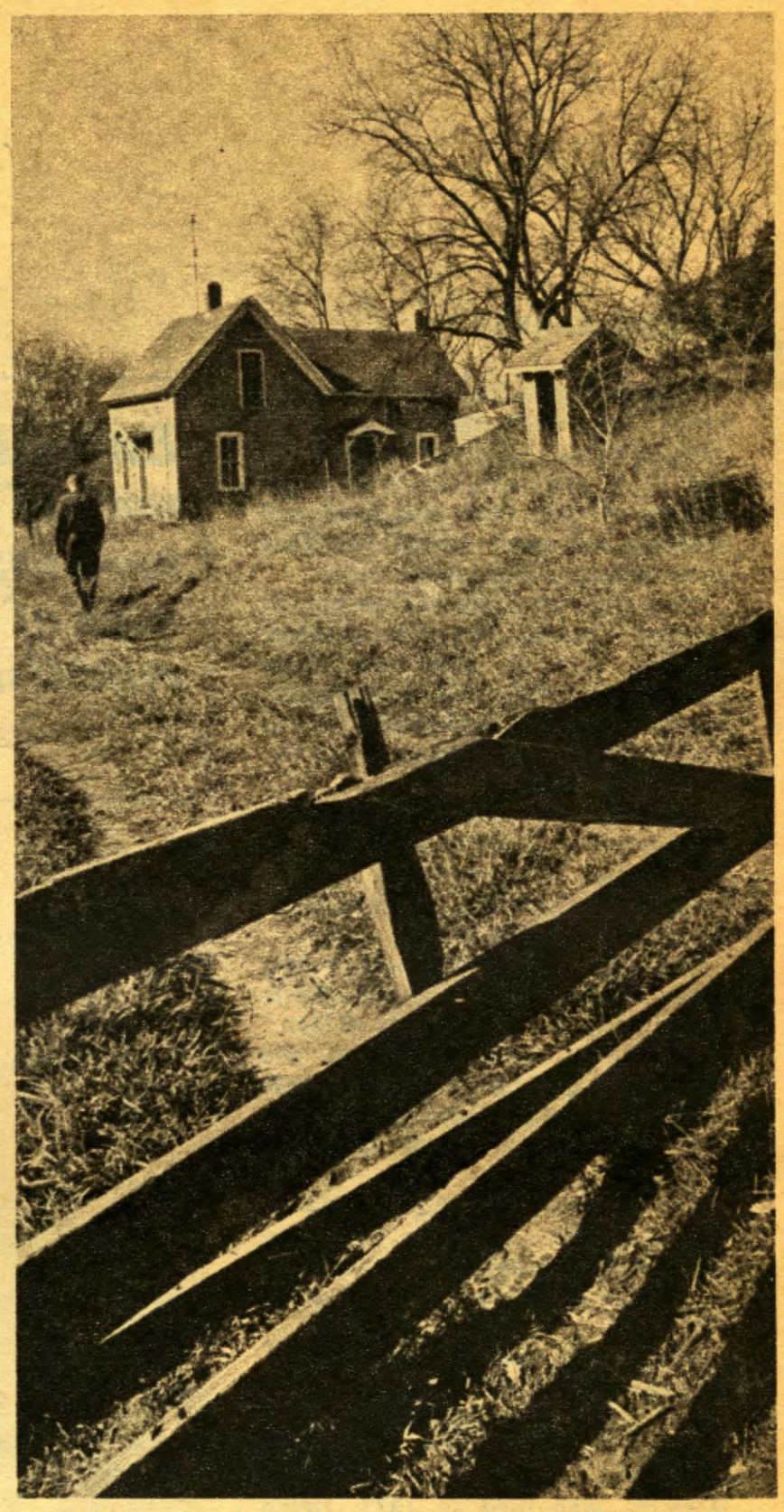
Hands

◁◁◁

PHOTO BY DAVID PETERSON



The Ostermeyer's now abandoned farm house near Oto.

a son, LeRoy, who lives in Albia.

There are 14 great-grandchildren.

Margaret Hiller of Pierson said the year that her grandparents, the Ostermeyers, lost their farm "was the year we dried out. We didn't raise any crop at all." It was 1936.

She said her grandparents were natives of Germany and immigrated to this country in the great European emigration wave near the turn of the century.

They got off the train from New York in Harlan, which "was as far as the train went then," Hiller said.

They worked around Harlan for a while, farmed around Panama and Earling, then homesteaded near Woodbine in Harrison County. They lost that farm after World War I, then rented until they bought the farm near Oto, which they lost in the 1930s.

After that, their son, George, with whom they lived, bought 80 acres near Albia, and the old folks lived the rest of their lives there. Andrew died on Sept. 20, 1940. Theresia died Oct. 28, 1948, without knowing her hands were destined for fame.

Are any of the descendants farming now?

"Only Irene," said Hiller. "Her husband is a farmer." □