(Written text and photographs provided by William John Krause II and John Arvid Fransen). **Anna Katarina Johannesson/Nelson (Annie)** was born on July 27, 1873, in Värmland, Sweden and was the daughter of Nils Oster Johannesson and Maria Mathilda (Setterberg) Johannesson. She grew up in the Värmland community (Sweden) before immigrating with her parents to Detroit Lakes, Minnesota, in 1890. In 1907 Anna Johannesson/Nelson together with her two brothers, Andrew Gustav Nelson (Gus) and Axel Nelson left Minnesota with some of their neighbors and friends to seek land in McLean County, North Dakota. Anna Katarina Johannesson/Nelson homesteaded in Snow Township, of McLean County of North Dakota. Anna homesteaded on a quarter section of land 148 -N. Range 83 W., Section 4, in Snow Township. She, together her brothers, spent the spring, summer, and fall working their homesteads and making improvements. Each winter they would go back to their home in Minnesota to work for the winter months. Anna, together with Gus and Axel, would then return to their homesteads in North Dakota each spring. Farming was difficult with everything being done by hand and horse power. They picked rocks which continued to rise to the surface, broke sod, planted grain crops, and built fences. Trees were also planted. Anna Katarina Johannesson/Nelson and married **John August Fransen (originally: Fransson)** in Washburn, North Dakota on May 6, 1908. John August Fransen was born in March 11, 1871, in Hovmantorp, Sweden, and was the son of Frans and Gustava Peterson Johanson. John Fransson attended school in Sweden. He was left an orphan at age 13 when his parents died. Life was difficult for John working in Stockholm. He left for North Dakota to join his brother, Axel Fransen, who had already immigrated to this region of the United States. John August Fransen immigrated from Sweden arriving on July 4, 1898, in Quebec, Canada. He then traveled by railroad to Bismarck, North Dakota, where he met and worked for Charley Staley, a rancher from McLean County. He also worked for several other ranchers in the area. John Fransen homesteaded on a quarter section of land -147N. Range 83, Section 10, located Northwest of Coleharbor, North Dakota, and this land remains in the Fransen family to date. Following her marriage to John August Fransen, Anna Katarina (Johannesson/Nelson) Fransen sold the land of her homestead and deposited the money from its sale in a local bank for her retirement.

John August and Anna Katarina (Johannesson/Nelson) Fransen had three children: **Victoria D. Fransen** born on April 27, 1909, at the homestead near Coleharbor, North Dakota; **Anne Marie Fransen** born on December 12, 1912, at the homestead near Coleharbor, North Dakota; and **Arvid Fransen** born on July 12, 1914, at the homestead near Coleharbor, North Dakota.

In 1944 John August and Anna Katarina (Johannesson/Nelson) Fransen retired from farming and purchased a home in Bismarck, North Dakota.

Anna Katarina (Johannesson/Nelson) Fransen died January 19, 1949, in Bismarck, North Dakota, at age 75 due to complications with her gall bladder. Internment was at the Fairview Cemetery in Bismarck, North Dakota.

John August Fransen died December 14, 1960, in Bismarck, North Dakota, at age 89. Internment was at the Fairview Cemetery in Bismarck, North Dakota.
A photograph of John August Fransen. Date: unknown.

A photograph of Anna Katarina Johannesson/Nelson. Date: unknown.

A photograph of John August Fransen with his wife, Anna Katarina (Johannesson/Nelson) Fransen. Date unknown.

John August and Anna Katarina (Johannesson/Nelson) Fransen photographed by their residence on the homestead near Coleharbor, North Dakota. Date: unknown.
John August and Anna Katarina (Johannesson/Nelson) Fransen photographed on their homestead near Coleharbor, North Dakota. Date thought to be 1941.

The children of John August and Anna Katarina (Johannesson/Nelson) Fransen. From left to right are: Anne Marie Fransen, Victoria D. Fransen, and Arvid Fransen. Coleharbor, North Dakota. Date: about 1918.

Anna Katarina (Johannesson/Nelson) Fransen (right) photographed with her youngest sister, Mary Elizabeth (Johannesson/Nelson) Nelson, at the Nelson Buggy Creek Homestead located near Tampico, Montana. Date thought to be the 1940s.

John August and Anna Katarina (Johannesson/Nelson) Fransen (in front) photographed with their on children Annie's 71st birthday. In back left to right are: Arvid Fransen, Anne Marie Fransen, and Victoria D. Fransen. Coleharbor, North Dakota. Date: July 27, 1944.
The Twelfth Census of the United States (1900) for McLean County, North Dakota, shows John August Fransen as living with William A. Staley and his family and worked as a stock herder at this time. (Line 20).

The Marriage License of John Fransen (age 26) and Miss Anna Nelson (age 30), both of Coleharbor, McClean County, North Dakota, issued on May 6, 1908. The marriage took place in Washburn, North Dakota. Note that Anna Katarina Johannesson/Nelson listed her maiden name as Anna Nelson. (Courtesy of Dennis Lyle Krause).
The Fifteenth Census of the United States (1930) for McLean County, North Dakota, shows John August Fransen as the head of the household (line 41) living with his wife, Anna Katarina (Johannesson/Nelson) Fransen and their three children: Victoria D., Anna M., and Arvid N. Fransen.
JOHN FRANSEN

It was a blazing hot day on July 4, 1898, when John Fransen arrived in Quebec, Canada, after several long dreary weeks over the ocean. After traveling a few days by rail he arrived in Bismarck, North Dakota. Here he was met by Mr. Charley Staley, a rancher, from McLean County. Here he found work immediately where his brother who arrived a few years earlier was working. He worked for several ranchers as time went on, the hours were from sun-up to sun-down, a very long day. He was used to hard heavy work. His parents died, at an early age, and he was left an orphan, at the age of thirteen (13). Work in Sweden had been difficult and working in a big city such as Stockholm.

After working for a short time Dad homesteaded on a quarter of land — 147 N, Range 83, Section 10, located Northwest of Coleharbor which is still the Fransen’s home place. He bought a team of horses and a Sulky Plow. Each year a few acres of prairie sod was broken and planted to Flax and Wheat. As time went on more land was added to the farm. Each farmer had a few cows, a few chickens, a patch of potatoes, and corn to help supply food. The first home on the homestead was a log house.

In 1908, Dad was married to Annie Nelson, a young lady, who had arrived from Minnesota. She too had come to McLean County to homestead on a quarter of land — 148 N, Range 83, W., Section 4, in Snow Township. To this couple three children were born — Victoria and Anne living in Bismarck, and Arvid and his family living on the home place.

Weather was one of the Pioneer’s worst foes, with the threat of drought, hail, parchy winds. A beautiful crop could be destroyed in a few minutes by hail. Winters were extremely cold and a storm would sometimes come up that would last several days. Many times the blizzards were so severe binder twine had to be tied between the house and barn to be able to go out and feed the livestock.

In the fall the coal bin had to be filled for the winter supply of fuel. Coal was dug near the river banks of the Missouri River. A trip to get a load of coal was from three o’clock in the morning until late at night when we would take turns to go out-doors and listen to the sound of the Wagon Wheels coming over the rough icy hills when Dad would be returning. We would have the Kerosene Lantern lit so the horses could be unhitched and watered and fed.

Grain was hauled to Velva, North Dakota. This trip would take several days. Taking food along and sleeping under the wagon at night. Often they would freight back merchandise for the store at Coal Harbor. Grain was also exchanged for the winter supply of flour and ground cereal. Grain was hauled in June for there was little time in the fall before the roads were impassable.

Mother would bake all our bread on a coal stove. Water for the family use and washing was carried by buckets from a well. For lights we used Kerosene Lamps.

There were no washers or dryers and hanging clothes out to dry in winter was a difficult task.

Butter was churned in a big wooden churn, and Mother would supply the neighbors with fresh butter at ten cents (10¢) a pound, and eggs for five cents (.05¢) per dozen. Very few groceries were bought at the stores, as most of the food came from the gardens. In the fall Mother would can fruit, make jelly from the wild berries and our supply of ham and bacon was cured and smoked.

Life was not always easy for our parents. In 1914 lightning struck our house. Dad had gone to town with a load of grain and Mother was home alone with her two little girls when a terrible storm came up. Lightning struck and flames spread over the room. It was saved by Mother’s quick thinking. She carried her children out in the shed, grabbed the water pails and poured water over the flames and saved the house. Then, again in the fall of 1920, lightning struck and burned the barn, some livestock, and the winter’s supply of grain and hay.

As time passed on living conditions improved, farms became larger and all the modern methods of living improved, so life became much easier. Modern homes were built and better machinery came to ease the working conditions of the pioneers.

In the late 1940’s Mr. and Mrs. Fransen purchased a house in Bismarck. Their retirement days together were short. Mrs. Fransen passed away in 1949, at the age of 75. Mr. Fransen passed away in 1960, at the age of 89.

by Victoria Ann Fransen

Bismarck

The Government has cut the McLean County Farms into many small plats, which in many cases has changed the farming for the farmers. The farmer has bought land in neighboring areas to keep up the acreage. Arvid Fransen and family still live on the original Fransen homestead. Most of the land is covered by water. During hunting season people come from all over the state to hunt ducks and geese. This area is happy hunting ground for many friends and neighbors of the Fransens.

Arvid is married to Bernice Larson of New Rockford. They have three children: John is a partner in farming with his father. Mary is a graduate of Ann Arbor, Mich. and Robert a graduate of University of North Dakota.

by Victoria Ann Fransen


Note: The text was written for John Fransen by his daughters, Victoria D. Fransen and Anne Marie Fransen.
A photograph of one of the "Original Homestead Shacks" lived in by homesteaders to North Dakota. Shacks similar to this one at one time dotted the plains of North Dakota near Coleharbor. The law required that they build a house, measuring at least 10 by 12 feet, and have at least 10 acres under cultivation. John Arvid Fransen rescued this shack and moved it to his farm to help preserve this artifact of history.

A photograph of Axel Fransen's house. Axel Fransen was the brother of John August Fransen. Axel Fransen came to the Coleharbor area from Sweden in 1893. This house was built in 1902. Lumber for the house was hauled by a team and wagon from a saw mill near Washburn, North Dakota, on the Missouri River. The first story was made from hewed logs set on end and covered with regular wood siding. The inside was finished with a grooved wood wainscotting. It appears that the lower level to the right was an addition added a few years later. The house still stands today but in much disrepair. It is locate three mile straight south of the current Fransen Farm. (Description by John Arvid Fransen). Date photograph was taken: July, 2005.
Mrs. John Fransen Dies
In Bismarck Tuesday

Mrs. John Fransen, 76, 405 First
St., died Tuesday at 10:15 p.m.,
at a hospital in Bismarck. Mrs.
Fransen entered the hospital, Dec.
16, 1948 and had been in poor
health for about five months prior to her
death.

Funeral services will be held
at the First Lutheran church at 2 p.
m., Sunday, with the Rev. G. Adolph
Johns officiating.

The family has requested that no
flowers be sent but if friends desire
they may contribute to a
memorial fund.

Mrs. Fransen was born July 27,
1873 in Sweden and came to this
country with her parents when she
was 16-years-old. The family lived
at Detroit Lakes, Minn., until 1906
when they moved to McLean county
and homesteaded near Coleharbor.
In 1906 she married John Fransen
at Washburn and since then Mr.
and Mrs. Fransen have lived at
Coleharbor and Bismarck.

She was a member of the First
Lutheran church in Bismarck.

Besides her husband, Mrs. Fran-
sen leaves two daughters, Miss Anne
Fransen and Miss Victoria Fran-
sen, both of Bismarck, and a son,
Arvid, Coleharbor.

Other survivors include three
brothers and sisters. They are:
Gust Nelson, Detroit Lakes; Miss
Amanda Nelson, Minneapolis, Minn.,
and Mrs. Mary Nelson, Glasgow,
Mont.

The body will lie in state at the
Boelter funeral home until the time
of the services Friday.

Brothers Die
Just Day Apart

Two Bismarck brothers pioneers in
this area, died within 24 hours of each other.

John A. Fransen, 89, 405 First
St. died in a local hospital at 9:15
p.m. in Wednesday. He had been ill
for one year and admitted to the hospital
Nov 20.

Axel Fransen, 87, 223 North St.
died Tuesday at 1:15 p.m. after a
three hour illness. He had been ill
about a week and at the state sanitarium
the past six months.

Funeral services for John Fran-
sen will be held at 4 p.m. at the
First Lutheran Church, Rev. Warren K. Johnson
officiating. Interment will be made in
Evergreen Cemetery. The family in
memorial will be sent to the First
Lutheran Church or the Crippled
Children’s Home at Jamestown.

Funeral services for Axel Fran-
sen will be held at 2 p.m. Elazzer
from the chapel of the Hall Fun-
eral Home, Rev. George Olson of
Sitting. Interment will be made in
the Coleharbor Cemetery.

Pallbearers will be the other
Fransen and Frederick Reiman,
both of Garrison, Donald Knust,
Underwood, Harold Holberg, Cole-
harbor and Floyd Reiman and
Wayne Falkenberg, all of Washburn.
Retired farmers, they were members of the First Lutheran
Church.

The brothers were born in Swede
land. John in March, 1872 and Axel
in June 1873, the sons of Fransen
and Gertrude Peterson Johansen.
Their parents came from Sweden and came to Coleharbor in
the early 1900’s.

A John Fransen homesteaded at
Coleharbor in 1896. He was married
in January 1905 to Katherine Nelson at
Washburn. They had two daughters,
Mrs. Frank Sass, San Francisco,
Cali, and three grandchildren.

His body will lie in state at the
Hall Funeral Home Thursday and
Friday.

Axel Fransen came to the United
States in 1903, homesteading in the pro-
ceeds of Coleharbor area. He was married
in 1910 to Ada Peterson at Coleharbor.

March 9, 1964. In 1944, he
married and his brothers.

Two sisters and one daughter all
preceeded him in death.

He leaves his wife, Mrs. Per
Reiman, Redfield, South Dakota;
Mrs. Wilbur, Wayne, Nebraska;
Mrs. Grace Peterson, Bismarck;
Vera, Coleharbor, and one sister,
seven grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren.

The Hall Funeral Home is in
charge of arrangements.

The obituary for Anna Katarina (Johannesson/Nelson)
Fransen published in the Bismarck Tribune, Bismarck,
(Microfilm no. 11808).

The obituary for John August Fransen and his brother, Axel
Fransen, published in the Bismarck Tribune, Bismarck, North
Dakota, on December 14, 1960. Page 26, column 6. (Microfilm
no. 2338).