

Florence Arlene Wilmarth May



Lifespan: 59 years, 1921-1981. Born in Firesteel Twp, 6/18/1921. Died in Mitchell, SD, 1/24/1981, of complications from kidney transplant. Buried in Silver Ridge Cemetery, Stickney.

Locations: Firesteel Twp (1921), Pleasant Valley Twp (1930), White Lake (1935), Mt. Vernon, SD (1939), Dudley Twp (1948).

Spouse: Hans Wayne May, 1916-1995. Born near Mt. Vernon, in Davison County, SD. Married 03/04/1941 in Mt. Vernon. Farmer, enlisted for 18 months in Civilian Conservation Core (CCC) in the Black Hills, employed at Stickney Elevator from 1968 until 1970, then SD State Highway Dept. until 1981. Assistant at the Aurora County Achievement Days for many years, school bus driver.

Florence May Profile: Overcoming the breakup of her family unit as a child, Florence matured into a loving wife and mother, dedicated to her family, her friends and her community. She took great pride in her own family, loved living the farm life, and felt a satisfying sense of accomplishment, even as she struggled with severe health issues leading to a kidney transplant. Florence, the second oldest of four, was only fourteen years old when her mother died during the Depression years, forcing her father, two years later, to split the family so he could obtain work, sometimes in Minnesota. Florence and her sister Lula resided with and worked for a widowed farmer in Mt. Vernon, while the two youngest lived with their mother's father and brother. About a year after high school, Florence met Hans May in Mitchell, SD, at a nightclub called the "Chicken Shack." One year later, in 1941, they married in Mt. Vernon, SD. They started their family right away and welcomed the youngest of their five children more than twenty years later. Florence's father and Hans farmed together for many years near Mt. Vernon, but then moved to a farm east of Stickney in 1948. Her love of children and community found expression in numerous civic and volunteer activities, including a 25-year leadership role in 4-H. At the age of 48, Florence sought a career in politics, serving as County Auditor for four years, at which time kidney issues caused her to resign. In 1974, her daughter Elaine donated a kidney for a transplant operation that extended her life another seven years.

Reflecting upon her life shortly before she died, Florence expressed great joy in her life and Christian acceptance of her circumstances, "We love our families so much and get along famously...When we get together we have a real fun time...I know that since my transplant my faith in God has strengthened me because He let me live to enjoy the rest of my life however long that may be and enjoying our families, friends, and neighbors."

Roles/Talent: Farmwife, mother, grandmother, gardener, seamstress, great cook and baker, crocheting afghans, 4-H leader, church volunteer, school board member, social club member, good neighbor and friend.

Parents(Ethnicity): Henry Fredine Wilmarth, English and Irish heritage; Margaret Staller, German and Dutch heritage.

Children: 5 children born 1941-1962. **Sandra** (Richard Dyson), **Donna** (Gary Goldammer), **Elaine** (Darrel Wetzler, div, Burton Elliott), **Marlin** (Ruth Hansum, div, Erin Quinn, div), **Lorri** (Wayne Kinstad, div). By 1980, all the children had moved away from Aurora County.

Sisters: Lula Kretschmer, Mabel Koehler.

Brothers: Henry Junior Wilmarth, (Junior was his actual middle name).

Education: 7-10th grades at White Lake; 11th-12th grades, Mt. Vernon, SD. High School diploma.

Work Experience: Household helper during high school, farm wife, clerk for Dudley Twp School Board, Aurora County Auditor 1969-1973.

Church, Clubs and Organizations: St. Paul Lutheran Church, Stickney: Parish Education Committee, Sunday School Teacher, Volunteer for Luther League activities, Leadership positions for Ladies Aid

25 year 4-H leader, Member, hostess and officer of Two-Four Extension Club (Dudley Twp) and The Friendly Club (Aurora and Davison Counties), wrote column "East News" for Stickney Argus Leader for over 25 years, visits to shut-ins and sending cheer cards.

Family Connections/Occupations: Florence's grandfather, George Charles Hopper, moved to Aurora County in 1905. Hopper Twp and Hopper School were named after him. The Wilmarth Dam north of Plankinton, built as a WAP project in 1936, was named for Florence's grandfather, Frederik Wilmarth, who arrived in Aurora County in 1902. Several of Florence's Staller relatives lived and worked in Plankinton throughout the years: Uncles Harvey and Arnold Staller, and cousin Edwin Staller. Edwin's wife, Arlene was the Assistant County Treasurer for many years. Their son, John Joseph (Joey) is currently the mayor of Plankinton. Until spring 2020, Florence's niece, Ruth Koehler Larson lived on a farm 8 miles north of the original Wilmarth farm. Annie Wilmarth Sauvage, Florence's cousin, was the first woman to run a gas/service station in South Dakota. She lived all 101 years of her life in Aurora County. Hans lived out his life in Stickney.

The four oldest May children attended the Page School, grades 1-8, in Dudley Twp. Lorri attended Page School until it closed and then graduated 8th grade and high school in Stickney.

Time in Aurora County: 14+33 years

Physical Appearance: A bit above average height and of broad stature

Date of Submission: June 2021

Latest Update: June 2021

Submitter: Donna May Goldammer, daughter



Florence and Hans May Family, Mother's Day 1980. Back row are Sandra Dyson, Donna Goldammer and Elaine Elliott. Front Row, Lorri May, Hans and Florence, and Marlin May.