



THE HERITAGE OF POTENCENIA SARIANA ZEIGENBEIN

Heads must have snapped in Waynesville on October 16, 1918, at the arrival in town of a very curious-looking family. The newcomers were, well, *different* from those whom Waynesville natives had ever seen. The 51-year-old man spoke English with a German accent. His wife, Polynesian in appearance and pregnant, spoke only a few words in broken language. The two children—a 14-year old girl and a 12-year-old boy—gazed wide-eyed in amazement at the unfamiliar sights surrounding them.

When the quartet checked into the Black Hotel (now known as the Old Stagecoach Stop), the man signed his name as Louis Zeigenbein. People later learned that he was born in Bremen, Germany, on March 23, 1867, but came to America while still a young child. Around the turn of the century, Louis joined the U. S. Army and was sent as a quartermaster to the Philippines in 1900 after the Spanish-American war.

While stationed at Lucena, some thirty miles from Manila, Louis fell in love with the daughter of a Manila storekeeper, Potencenia, whom he married a couple years later. The couple became proud parents on November 30, 1903, when a healthy daughter, Maria, was born. Potencenia gave birth to a son, John, on June 14, 1906. Two more boys would follow later, Edward and Joe.

The Zeigenbein family stayed only a few days at Black Hotel before moving to a forty-acre piece of property Louis had purchased on Gospel Ridge two-and-a-half miles east of town.

There, a short time later on November 8, Potencenia gave birth to Edward.



Potencenia Sariana Zeigenbein

Happiness reigned for only a short time for this family of five. Louis came down with pneumonia and died Christmas Day, 1908, leaving Potencenia alone on a undeveloped forty-acre farm to care for a new baby and two other growing children. Speaking very little English and completely unfamiliar with our laws and customs, she was truly a "stranger in a strange land."

When kindly neighbors came to help Potencenia bury her departed husband, they found her in a badly frightened state. Somewhere she had obtained the

notion that it was our custom to kill widows so that they could go with their husbands into the great beyond. Townspeople assured her as best they could that this was not true. She would not be harmed.

Potencenia wrote her family back in the Philippines to tell them of her plight. Her brother wrote back and offered to help raise the three children, if she would come back home. His kind offer surely must have been tempting, but the grieving widow was determined to stay and make a go of it in America, her deceased husband's adopted country.

Upon the insistence of some concerned people in Waynesville and with the urgent need to support her children, Potencenia moved her family into town and washed, ironed and cleaned house for several women in the community. Many were the times that she would "wash on a board" all day for fifty cents.

The Zeigenbein family eventually moved back to Gospel Ridge. In 1922, some Waynesville residents were successful in helping Potencenia obtain a modest government pension for being the widow of an Army veteran. It was still necessary for her to supplement that by continuing to work. She often could be seen walking the two and a half miles down into Waynesville to deliver a load of washed and ironed clothing to one of her many clients.

Because money was hard to come by, Potencenia pinched every penny she could. Her frugality allowed her to save up enough money to buy an

adjoining forty acres of land to raise cattle, hogs and chickens. She later traded the hogs for barbed wire when a new state stock law mandated that livestock raisers put in fencing.

The family farm continued to grow in size, as Potencenia took advantage of every opportunity to purchase more land. Once, when she approached banker Sam T. Rollins to help her with a purchase, he told her, "Oh, Potencenia, you don't need any more land." With a twinkle in her eye, she promptly retorted, "Now, Mr. Rollins, you got lots of land, you got a *big* farm."

The banker knew when he had been bested and promptly made out the paperwork for the persistent widow to purchase the land.

Daughter Marie married George Mayor and lived near her mother on Gospel Ridge. Edward eventually moved to Crocker and John moved to Richland. Youngest son Joe stayed in the Waynesville-St. Robert area and started Zeigenbein Sanitation Service.

After almost 56 years living in the country and displaying the finest qualities of a pioneer mother, patriot and patriarch, Potencenia Sariana Zeigenbein died August 19, 1964, departing this life at the age of 82. The road from her farm that she often traveled loaded down with her clients' laundry bears her name in tribute, Zeigenbein Road.

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