



ALLIS-CHALMERS TRACTORS, (above) which were sold by Donald Anderson, are lined up south of the former Foster Lumber Company building, which he purchased in 1972.

Four generations choose Kansas as home

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As Kansas prepares to celebrate its 150th year of statehood Saturday, Donald Anderson, 86, of Oberlin takes pride in being the third of four generations in his family who've chosen to make the state their home.

He said that his grandparents, Jonas "Tall" and Augusta (Zacrison) Anderson homesteaded a place on the Rawlins-Decatur county line in 1890. Among their sons was Francis Anderson, well-known for many years for his implement dealership a 213 S. Penn in Oberlin.

The business remains in the family with the fourth generation, Kary Anderson, now the owner.

"My grandparents came from Smolan, Sweden," he said, "and their first home was a dugout, later replaced by a sod house, then a showy two-story house which later burned."

The couple had six other children.

"My father was the oldest son, and built a home about 1 1/2 miles southeast of the homestead on a branch of the Sappa called Lamb's Draw," Mr. Anderson said.

Francis Anderson met his wife, the former Lucy Farrel, a piano teacher in Denver, at a Baptist Church service in Denver. They were married May 16, 1921, and Donald was born May 16, 1924.

"When I was 5 years old, I got scarlet fever with the flu and developed heart trouble and spent over three months in St. Luke's Hospital in Kansas City," he said. "Heart trouble persisted all through my school years, which kept me out of sports and band."

"My parents were told that I might live to be 40!"

"Country school was over two miles away, so my parents decided to move to Oberlin to be closer to school in 1930. My father built the 30-by-110-foot store at 213 S. Penn, sharing a common wall with a 25-by-60-foot shop building owned by John Siegenthaler.

"The store was named Francis A. Anderson Hardware. Along with hardware, he started selling J.I. Case farm equipment, trading tractors for horses and whatever else he thought he could sell. In 1937, he added the Minneapolis equipment line, and in 1941, Chrysler cars. In 1942, after World War II started and Case and Chrysler stopped production of civilian products, dealerships were canceled."

Donald graduated from Decatur Community High School in 1942, then went to Wheaton College in Wheaton, Ill., for a year. Realizing he would soon be drafted into the Army, he enlisted in the Navy V2 program.

"It was quite an interesting choice," he said, "since I couldn't even swim. However, I learned while spending a year at Central Michigan College at Mount Pleasant, Mich. From there, I was sent to Asbury Park, N.J. After rigorous physical activity, I was found to have heart trouble — enlargement, murmur, etc. After three months in the Brooklyn Naval Hospital, I was offered the choice of being discharged or continuing, but I chose to stay."

He went to midshipman school at Northwestern University and was commissioned as ensign in March 1945.

"While on leave, I dated Nadine Alstrom, a third-grade teacher at Oberlin Elementary School," he said. "I was sent to naval gunnery school in Washington, and Nadine came to visit, staying with an aunt. We became engaged and planned a big church wedding while on my next leave, which was only two



D. Anderson



K. Anderson



F. Anderson



J. Anderson

weeks away. "Many said it could not be done, but on June 23, 1945, the wedding took place, the first in the new Lund Covenant Church."

After completing aviation ordnance school in Jacksonville, Fla., the couple bought an old Hudson and made it home just before he was sent to the Pacific. The war ended as he was heading west, but he was kept on Ford Island, in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, for over two weeks before being sent to Eby, a four-acre island in the Kwajelin atoll.

Fast promotions were offered to entice some to stay for upcoming atomic bomb tests at a neighboring atoll, but he said he wanted out as soon as possible. Two months later he was told he was free to get to the Chicago Navy Pier for his discharge any way he could.

"What a place to go hitchhiking, and me with no orders," he recalled. "After a ride in a war-weary B-29 to Hawaii and a six-day ride on an escort carrier to San Francisco and a train ride to Chicago, I was discharged on March 30, 1946."

"I wanted to take advantage of the government college program and go to the University of Colorado, so we moved to Boulder," Mr. Anderson said.

There was no housing available, so he decided to build, but there was no lumber available after the war. He bought a lot near the campus, built a two-bedroom home of concrete, cinder blocks and lumber from an old barn while the couple lived six weeks in a tent and three months in a lean-to on a chicken house full of chickens.

Their daughter, Marilee, was born July 10, 1947, and Mr. Anderson graduated in 1948 with a degree in engineering. Their house was sold for \$12,700 in 1948, he said, and sold again in 2004 for \$276,500 with very few changes.

Don joined his father in the fall of 1948 and they called the business Anderson and Son, selling hardware, Minneapolis machinery and Allis-Chalmers equipment. They later sold Studebaker cars, then Versatile tractors were added. Don bought the former Foster Lumber yard from Gordon Hamit in 1972.

As machines grew bigger and business expanded, he said, there was a need for a new shop. From his schooling he was able to make detailed plans for a new 66-by-120-foot addition. In 1975, the store incorporated with the name Anderson's Farm and Home Center. True Value Hardware had been added in 1970.

The business grew to 16 employees and 37 new combines were sold in 1981. He won sales trips to U.S. resorts, Canada, Mexico, Europe and Hawaii.

In the mid-1980s, the economy went down and combine sales contracts started coming back with



THE SPACIOUS FIVE-BEDROOM HOME (above) was built by Jonas "John" and Augusta (Zacrison) Anderson, grandparents of Donald Anderson, and replaced the sod house on their homestead just west of the Decatur-Rawlins County

line. It was later destroyed in a fire. Shown at their sod house (below) at the Jonas and Augusta Anderson homestead are the couple and their children: (from left) Emma, Hulda, Edward, Augusta, Ella, Francis, Carl and Jonas.



DONALD AND NADINE ANDERSON (above) are shown on one of the many trips he won for outstanding machinery sales.

a 20 percent interest charge. Sales stopped and companies dumped inventory at half price, leaving dealers with more money in used equipment than new could be bought for. Walmart was taking the sales from hardware, so the store lost True Value and the major equipment lines.

In 1996 his son, Kary, purchased the store and renamed it Decatur County Implement LLC, servicing equipment which his father had sold. He and his wife, Jackie, have a son, Dane, Topeka.

"Although I am no longer in the store, I still have a business, 'Store on Wheels,' and sell shop supplies." But, he quickly added,

"It has to be really nice and I really have to feel like going before I take to the road."

Donald and Nadine had seven children: Marilee, Centennial, Colo.; Roland "Rollie," Topeka; Alan, Allentown, Pa.; Kary, Oberlin; Kent, San Diego; Dr. Roger, Overland Park, and Jeffrey, Council Grove. His wife died March 26, 2010.

"Though there have been many good and bad times since my ancestors moved to Kansas from Sweden," he said, "overall Kansas has been a very good place to call home."