

INDIAN UPRISING AT NORWAY LAKE

BY DANIEL C. JORDAHL, Translated from Norwegian by Ole Brethelsen, Edited by Andreas Jordahl Rhude, Copyright 1989 Andreas Jordahl Rhude, 1989
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Should a traveler decide to make a detour approximately 15 miles north of the town Willmar, he will discover a three-legged lake, consisting of numerous bays and promontories and surrounded by woodland. Should the traveler ask:

"What is the name of this lake?", the reply will be: "It is Norway Lake." Should he continue; "That church over there, surrounded by houses, is that a small town?", the reply will again be: "Yes, that is Norway Lake." Should the stranger admire the surrounding area, where lakes and ponds, wood covered hills and waive-like prairie lie scattered; should the stranger ask: "Tell me about this spectacular, apparently affluent area; who lives here, and what is the name of the settlement?", the answer will be: "The people here are genuine Norwegians and the settlement is called Norway Lake."

The stranger will also become aware of three churches within a circle less than a mile. Before he will get around to ask why three Norwegian Lutheran churches are built so close to each other, he is informed of the fact that the Norwegians have a reputation of being a pluralistic people, and that this pluralism is reflected in the fact that each of the three leading congregations live together as close as fingers in two folded hands.

Four or five miles to the northwest there is another township. This too, of course, is called Norway Lake. On an elevated point, a large Norwegian Lutheran church is placed. Its name is also Norway Lake. It is more accurately referred to as Western Norway Lake.

Having mentioned this obscure use of terms, I will say a few words about the settlement of Norway Lake.

It is situated in the northwestern corner of Kandiyohi County, approximately 120 miles west of St. Paul, in a belt where one should think the great poet Johan Ludwig Runeberg

got his inspiration to write his immortal poem, of which one of the lines go:

"Oh Land, the Land of a Thousand Lakes."

Fertile prairie and vast areas of woodland stretch out between a number of greater and smaller lakes. No wonder that an area like this was attractive to the native inhabitants, the Sioux Indians. In their view, undoubtedly, this area represented a beautiful place to wait for the journey to the eternal hunting grounds. Here, the richest opportunities represented themselves for fishing and hunting. It is unfortunate that history contains so few tails of the deeds, the sacrifices and the struggles of this native population.

The Indians dominated the area until the mid~'1800's, when the "white man" arrived and squeezed their beloved hunting grounds and fishing ponds out of their hands. Those whites who first arrived in these remote areas were men with the strength and willpower from the country way up there in the north:

Norway. With determination and steel in their hands, they commenced the task of clearing the ground, and gradually the prairie was transformed to fields of waiving yellow.

There was no prosperity within the walls of the log cabins, but moderation, and one respected and worshipped the legacy of the land of their fathers. It is easy to become sentimental when listening to pioneers claiming they were happier then than under the later more prosperous conditions.

The principal industries of the first settlers were identical to those of the Indians: hunting and fishing. Money was a rare item; hence the temptation many suffer under today to go on a shopping spree was not really considered a problem in those days. A "short trip" to the closest marketplace, St. Cloud, was a 70 miles tour, and the oxen were not exactly galloping.

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The settlers liked to live close to woodland and water. As early as the summer of 1858, Even Railson (Glesne) had visited the area around Norway Lake. Two years later, the following persons could be found along the shores of Norway Lake: the brothers Even and Anders Railson (Glesne) from Krodsherred, John Todtland from Northern Land, Thomas Osmundson from Numedal, the brothers Johannes, Halvor, Andreas, Hans and Ole Halvorsen and Christopher Hansen Engen from Northern Land, the brothers Nils, Hans and Peter Peterson (Grindheim) from Mosteroy. Ole Knudsen (Storebraaten) from Sigdal settled a couple miles further west. Even Olsen Glesne built his home three miles north of Ole Knudsen. All of these people had spent some time at Rock Prairie in Green County, or other places in Wisconsin. Some Swedish families had settled six miles west of Norway Lake, near another chain of lakes, which shores were also woodcovered. These people who settled about the same time as the Norwegians were: Daniel Broberg, Anders Broberg, Sven Aaman and Johannes Lundberg.

Hence, quite a large number of "whites" had settled in an area inhabited by Indians. Although the Indians were peaceful, it was a nuisance to have them around. Their respect for private property was not very well developed. All in all, however, the relationship between the "reds" and the "whites" was a reasonably good one during the first years, but then the situation was reversed. The reasons for the change in attitude towards the whites is not easily found. Some have pointed out that the government had been slow in fulfilling certain promises it made to the Indians, and that this had bred hostile feelings among them, not only against the government, but against the White Man in general. One should not be mistaken about the White Man's intentions; he probably had in mind

to squeeze the Native American out. He, however, was not willing to sell his right to this beautiful land for a few lentils.

The first attack carried out by redskins did not take place at Norway Lake, but at Acton, a place six miles south east of the small town of Atwater. One must assume that this attack was carried out without the knowledge and consent of Little Crow, the tribe's chief. But the Indian's were not ignorant of what the consequences would be, however, for those who had spilled blood of the whites in Acton: they would be hunted down and hanged! Should one accept this, just like that? Should one let these whites, who had stolen their land, treat fellow tribesmen like that or should one defend one's brothers and launch counterattacks? They chose the last alternative. The white man should be expelled and die!

The Acton incident occurred Sunday, 17 August 1862. Before the next morning, councils of war had been held, and the day after, several settlements along the Minnesota River were attacked, and hundreds of settlers were killed.

The story goes that Little Crow made two grooves in the soil; one

representing the Mississippi, the other the Minnesota River. Then he said:

"The land between these rivers is mine, and the white man must be expelled from here."

But we want to go back to the settlement at Norway Lake.

In the above mentioned Johannes Lundberg's log cabin, Swedish families from the surrounding area had gathered for mass on Wednesday, 20 August 1862. The minister on the visit this time to preach the Gospel was Pastor Andrew Jackson, a Lutheran. After the first psalm was sung, a seven year old boy from Broberg, where some children had been left alone at home, came. He said that several Indians had come

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to the house and that they seemed to be bidding their time there. The news did not shock anyone, but the mass was put to an end so that people could get home earlier, to prevent the "Indi'en" from stealing too much.

One of Lundberg's sons, Lars, suggested that they should bring guns and go against the Indians. Pastor Jackson denounced the idea, stating that such actions would only provoke the savages. He was aware of the killings that had taken place in Acton three days previous, but he chose not to mention them since there were women present. The Lundberg brothers, however, who were both excellent shooters, grabbed their guns and took off in the direction of Broberg's cabin two miles away, a short mile west of the county line between Kandiyohi and Swift counties. The Broberg families also got ready to take their ox wagons home. In the meantime, old Lundberg got Sven Aman and went to see how the boys were getting along. They had not come far when a shot was heard from the Broberg place. Shortly after, Lars came running, pursued by two Indians. Just as he was jumping a fence a bullet struck him. He continued a few steps but he was hit by another bullet and fell dead to the ground. Now the redskins ran towards the dead man's father. He, who possibly carried a gun, decided to pull back into the woods. Samuel, one of his other sons, was hit in the hip. Wisely, he threw himself to the ground and played dead. The enemy struck him once with a gun barrel, turned his pocket inside out and left him, thinking he was dead. Samuel lost a great deal of blood, but recovered (from what I know, he lives in Carver, Minnesota).

Ole Lundberg now tried to reach home but the redskins spotted him and sent six bullets after him. None of them hit him, however. He soon encountered the Broberg families, who were on their way home from the same mass. Now they became targets. Mrs.

Anders Broberg jumped out of the wagon. She spotted the enemy and tried to escape, but was caught and killed. Daniel Broberg died in the wagon. His wife sat by his side with an infant son on her knee. She barely got out of the wagon before she and her child were slain.

Seven year old Peter Broberg (now a merchant in New London, Minnesota) who had come to mass with them earlier, saved his life by hiding in Sven Aman's cellar. A daughter of Anders Broberg also barely saved her life.

It is easier to imagine than describe the impact it had on the rest of the family when old Lundberg came home and told them that Lars had been killed and that the rest of the people at the Broberg place most probably were dead also.

Now there was only one thing left to do, escape! Old Lundberg and his friend Sven Aman took their guns and headed eastwards. Soon, however, they were too exhausted to continue, and they lay down in the tall grass in the middle of a marsh. They had not escaped the keen eyes of the redskins. Old

Lundberg was now prepared to dare the last fight of his life. He took aim and wanted to fire but the gun failed him. Water had entered the barrels of both his and his companions weapons. Lundberg placed his soul in the hands of God, waiting for death while the bullets were flying around him. Suddenly, however, the shooting stopped. Lundberg then stood up, took aim, and shouted at the top of his lungs: "I will teach you how to shoot!" Strangely enough, the redskins ran away and Lundberg and his friend survived. Most probably, the Indians had run out of ammunition.

A couple of stones thrown away, the Indians spotted a white man with a wagon and a team of horses. They asked him if they could "try" the horses. The man, Mikkel Olsen, let them, but they would not let go

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afterwards, and pointed their guns at the owner. They did not fire on him, another sign that they had run out of ammunition.

In the meantime, Lundberg and his friend were heading eastwards in the direction of Ole Knudsen Storebraaten, their closest neighbor. The wounded Samuel Lundberg and his thirteen year old sister Johanna were also heading in the same direction. However, there was no one in sight at the Knudsen place. It was obvious that there had been someone there until recently. A pan stood simmering on the stove, containing the material for whey-cheese. They continued eastwards in the direction of Norway Lake. On their way they met Ole Knudsen. He had been down to Even Railson's to warn of the bloody drama that had taken place among the Swedish brothers "in the west." Lundberg joined Knudsen whereas Samuel and Johanna continued down to Norway Lake. From a little island in the southern part of the lake, someone had spotted them. They were taken over to the island in something resembling a tiny boat. Ole Knudsen found the rest of his family in the woods behind his cabin. Then they all, including old Lundberg continued down towards the lake. They finally came over to the tiny island which officially is named "Isle of Refuge" but in daily life is referred to as "Indi Island."

Here they spent three days and three nights. The "residents" consisted for the most part of women and children. "They had the blue sky as their tent" but the sky was not always blue, but heavy and black with white sharp lightning, thunder and pouring rain most of the time. Most of the men were out to look for missing settlers or were keeping guard.

Old Mrs. Lundberg was among the missing persons. They feared she had been killed by the redskins. On the third day, however, there came reports of her being alive and that she had ended up in Paynesville, 25 miles northeast of the lake. She too had hid

herself in a marsh. Eventually she had dared leaving her hiding place and had started out in the direction of Even Olsen Glesne. She reached the place in the evening but the cabin was deserted. She peeped through the window and thought she saw Mrs. Glesne in bed, stretched out like a corpse. She dared not enter the cabin. Being barefooted, she started looking around for a pair of shoes, but could not find any. Then she went down to the stable to see if anyone was around there, but the only ones answering her calls were cows that were waiting to be milked. Then she went into the woods, in the pouring rain, and spent the night there all alone. The situation was double critical for her, since she was expecting a child any time. The next morning she found tracks from a wagon and by following them, she reached Lake Prairie, six or seven miles further east (close to the Crow River Church). Here, to her delight, she met the Glesne family and accompanied them to Paynesville. No wonder that old Lundberg cried tears of relief when he heard that his "gumma" was alive.

A small group of men left Indi Island, heading west to bury their dead at the bloody battlefield. They found thirteen bodies, all of them members of the Broberg and Lundberg families. Some of them were badly mutilated. While some of the men dug graves, the others kept watch. It is said that those who stood by these graves and participated in the burial ceremony this Friday 22 August 1862, never forgot.

The following day the people on Indi Island prepared to break up. Then came an unfavorable message. As Thomas Osmundsen and Sven Borgen were loading chests and trunks onto a wagon at Osmundsen's cabin, an Indian had popped his head up and fired a shot at them from the thicket. The bullet penetrated the sideboard of the wagon without hitting any of the men. Osmundsen grabbed his gun and took aim at

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the aggressive redskin. If the redskin was not hit, at least he got scared and fled. When news of the incident reached Indi Island, a group of men immediately were sent out after the redskin. And indeed, they found a group of nine with three ponies. Each pony carried two men while a third walked behind holding on to the tail of the animal. They were pursued southwards a couple of miles without success. The settlers returned to their camp on Indi Island.

They had just made it back when more news came, this time of something depressingly similar to a new gang of savages a mile south of the lake. With Even Railson as their leader, some of the bravest of the settlers armed themselves and went to find out what was going on. "If you are white people, say so! If you do not, we are going to shoot you!" they shouted at the strangers. "Don't shoot us, we are white people!", answered Mr. Blakely, leader of a small contingent of settlers who had come all the way from Paynesville to offer their assistance to the settlers of Norway Lake.

Then the Norway Lake people said goodbye to their beloved cabins. Few of them had any expectations of ever returning. Bringing with them all they could, which was not much, they headed out for Paynesville. Here they rested a couple days, before they continued to St. Cloud where they split into several small groups. Some left for Benton,

others for Rice, others again to Goodhue county in Minnesota, while some traveled all the way to the southern parts of Wisconsin.

After four years of involuntary exile, many, but not all of them returned to the settlements. Most of the cabins had been burned by the redskins, but the settlers started the task of rebuilding with renewed courage.

The dead were not allowed to rest. in their graves for more than a few years. Approximately 25 years ago, the State of Minnesota committed the well meaning but tasteless act of moving the graves to the Swedish-Norwegian cemetery in New London, 18 miles from their original place of burial. There a statue was raised in memory of the dead. What the State should have done, however, was to fence in the original graves and raise a monument there instead.

This has been a compilation of what eyewitnesses* to the Indian Uprising at Norway Lake told me. Many of them now lie buried in the earth but some are still among us. Even if my part in the history of Norway Lake is a little dry, it is still "the truth and nothing but the truth."

<p>*I mention: Even Railson, Christopher H. Engen, Nils Peterson, Ole Knudsen, Even O. Glesne, Johannes Halvosen and Mrs. Erik Paulson</p>
