

Probably nothing has had as strong an influence at Norway Lake as the famous Homestead Act of 1862, passed during the Lincoln administration. Designed to promote and encourage a western expansion of the U.S., it would profoundly affect the Norway Lake settlements. Probably even today the majority of families at Norway Lake can trace their origin back to some "homesteader" who set forth for the New World from places like Bergen and Stavanger well over a Century ago.

By 1865 a different appearance was in evidence at Norway Lake. There were the returning members of that historic First Settlement with its turbulent conclusion of August, 1862. But they were now being joined by a growing tide of the new homestead group and now combining to form what could be referred to as the Second Settlement. The long debilitating American Civil war was over. The Homestead law was in effect. Norway Lake, along with the entire country stood on the threshold of that great westward expansion.

Also returning back to Norway Lake at this time was a man Haavel Haavelson, charter member of the early settlement and former displaced person at St. Francis. No one mentions it but it was possible that Haavel was making note of the fact that he and his wife, Berti, were both growing older, being born in 1797 and 1804. It is hard to say for sure but Haavel seems to have the distinction of being the only one ever to appear at Norway Lake who was born in the 1700's (Died about 1875, buried ENL).

Also finding his way back to Norway Lake was frontiersman, Thomas Osmundson, who with his young indomitable wife, Bergit, were to play such leading roles on the early Norway Lake frontier.

A CHURCH IS PLANTED

Virtually nothing would return back to Norway Lake in quite the same way as it was left back in those turbulent days of August, 1862. It was to mark the end of that loosely knit parish of New Sweden with its five congregations. It was to mark the end of Norway Lake as a frontier. And no longer would Swen Borgen and Thomas Osmundson barter corn meal for leather goods with the roving Sioux hunters as

they appeared around their cabins. The new Norway Lake was in many ways very different from the one that had left almost three years before.

Worship services were held in the homes and during nice weather they were held outside. But there was a growing sentiment that they should organize themselves into a congregation and build a church. Among the very first to take advantage of the Homestead law was Andrew Hedin arriving in 1865. It was in his home that several services were held, and it was there on November 19, 1865, that the Norway Lake Lutheran Church came into being. Nothing official remains from the meeting, but Hedin decided he would donate land for the new church building.

Then on January 6, 1866, also at Hedin's the following resolution was passed:

"We, Norwegian settlers at Norway Lake, have today come to the conclusion that our church and cemetery shall be located on A. Hedin's land in Section 13, Township 121, R 36 (Arctander). All of us who are present here today are satisfied with the action taken."

The Norway Lake Evangelical Lutheran Church was officially in place. Its organization had come off smoothly but the site of the proposed new church was an entirely different matter and would cause perplexing problems in the months ahead. Norway Lake was expanding rapidly, and it was difficult to determine where its center would be. The Hedin property (site of present ENL) would soon be considered by many to be too far from the center. By 1867 this great western migration was on in earnest.

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NEW BEGINNINGS IN A NEW WORLD

by Orlynn Hankell

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The Norway Lake congregation continued to expand rapidly in the 1860's. Henrik Larson was here from Sigdal; Elling Storrus from Halingdal; Hans Henjum from Sogn; Anders Halvorson from Landstorpen; Christopher Lesteberg from Krodsherrod; Anders Henjum from Sogn; Martin Gjelhaug from Land.

The three Thorson brothers, Nels, Reier and Thor were here from Sigdal; Erik Negaard from Osterdalen; Even Lurdemoer from Trondheim. One bond was common to all of them. They were all Homesteaders seeking new beginnings under the provisions of the famous 1862 Homestead Act, passed by Congress during the Lincoln Administration.

But this Homestead adventure would prove to be remarkably brief for Homesteader, Nels Thorson. After years of planning, preparation, traveling, waiting, etc., he would catch only a quick glimpse of his part of the New World in Lake Andrew Township before it was already done. Seriously ill when he arrived in 1867, he was dead almost within hours.

Twenty-six by Thirty in Knudson's Grove

It was becoming almost impossible to hold worship services in the homes. A church was sorely needed and the decision as to one or two churches could no longer be put off. It was decided eventually that there should be but one church, and it would be located in the grove bordering Knudson Lake on land donated by Ole Knudson.

The Crow River congregation joined to form a two point parish. A bond of friendship existed between the two groups that went back to the St. Francis day of 1863-1864.

The new church would be built of logs and the logs would be furnished by the members. The builders would occasionally run short of logs, but work continued and the structure was completed in 1868. Very little is known about the "Old Log Church." There are no known photos. It seemed to be built as something of a compromise, and by the time it was completed it was already too small and obsolete. But, nevertheless, it does stand out as being the mother church of all future Norway Lake churches.

There was a succession of Pastors that served the Norway Lake congregation during its first years. There were at times long intervals between services that would cause complaints among the members. If the interval was long, there was one thing a pastor could be sure of when he arrived in the parish. Rev. Thomas Johnson would be good example. He arrived at Crow River to hold services on June 1, 1867, and right away was to find his work all waiting for him. The record states that he performed 22 baptisms. The next day he proceeded down to Norway Lake where he baptized 18 more. Among these early pastors there are always these constant, endless baptisms--especially if it had been a while since his last visit.

A pastor, Rev. A. Jacobson would also make visits. Back in his home state of Illinois he had been a friend and college classmate of Pres. Lincoln's oldest son, Robert.

On October 17, 1869, Rev. Lars Johnson Markhus was installed as the first full-time resident pastor of the Norway Lake-Crow River Parish. There was still this continuous westward migration, and the Norway Lake congregation reached beyond Sunburg. It was soon noticed that the new church was inadequate and now far out of center. It was then that the congregation decided to build a church on the first proposed site (site of present East Norway Lake) after many meetings on the matter.

Rev. Markhus soon had a parish that was immense--to say the very least. Big Grove joined Crow River. He organized and served the Foot Lake (later Vinje) congregation. He organized Solomon Lake. In the 1870's there were two big changes. Norway Lake was divided into East and West Norway Lake in 1876, and Crow River dropped out in 1879. East Norway Lake had finished its new church in 1875. The record would state that Markhus was well liked--but it would soon all change. Storm clouds were gathering.

Out of Storm and Turbulence

In the late 70's and early 80's the Norwegian Lutheran Synod was caught up on the question of "Predestination." It then reached down into the congregations--Norway Lake was no exception. Meetings were held repeatedly on the matter. In many churches the issue seems to come and then leave, but at Norway Lake it hung on and on. It simply would not go away. Caught squarely in the middle of this on-going controversy was the unfortunate Rev. Markhus.

The pastor would have known something was wrong at this congregation meeting of July 8, 1885, when he was immediately voted down as moderator for the meeting. The pastor was always president of the congregation and conducted business meetings. Now was this drastic change from normal procedure. He then listened, when by a vote of 40-11, he was dismissed from all duties. It would be right here--centering on the 11 votes supporting him--that a new congregation had just been born, and which we refer to today as First Lutheran of Norway Lake.
