

Home Away from Home

In the upheaval of the Sioux Indian Outbreak of August, 1862, the Norway Lake congregation had scattered to the winds. The families had fled into Wisconsin and one group had joined the Lake Prairie congregation along the St. Francis River east of St. Cloud, where they were now war time refugees of sorts. It was a perplexing existence, to say the very least, a time of seeming to belong neither here nor there.

Norway Lake Revisited

Swen Gunderson Borgen, charter member of the Norway Lake settlement, council member, and now a displaced person of the St. Francis refugee community, was finding his St. Francis existence just a little wearing. He had been gone now for almost two years and he, along with everybody else, was wondering when they might return. He wondered what things were like back on his quarter section claim along the quiet shores of Lake Mary. He decided that he would make a visit back to the farm. In so doing he would leave about the only known record for Norway Lake for 1863.

Monongalia County had been sealed off by the State and only military traffic was permitted. At Norway Lake abandoned cattle and a few hogs wandered across deserted farm yards and down to the lakes for water. A soldiers' patrol had noticed them in May, 1863, while proceeding through the abandoned settlement. They also noticed some wheat still standing in shocks from the year before. "Still in good condition," a soldier noted.

Swen had two reasons for making this trip back to Norway Lake. First, he would make any needed repairs to the cabin and secondly, he would put up a small stack of hay at the farm, feed for his cattle if the family should return out of the grazing season. Accompanying him on this 70 odd mile trip would be his 18 yr old son, Gunder.

Taking a few provisions with them and spending nights in buildings vacated during the Outbreak, Swen and Gunder headed west for Lake Mary. They crossed the military patrol line at Paynesville and then entered the empty and depopulated Monongalia County.

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It was also a time of severe drought in Western Minnesota, but it remains obscure and little known as it affected virtually no one. As Swen and Gunder headed west, drought conditions seemed to get progressively worse. Their route was such that it would take them along the north shore of Green Lake, and it was here the drought was highly apparent. The lake was at an extremely low level and the bars that cross the lake were all now fully out of the water giving the impression that the lake had divided itself into three parts. There is no record of such a condition of the lake since.

When they reached Lake Mary they found the lake dry. As far as putting up some hay, the native prairie grass was short, dry and stunted. Nowhere could they find grass of sufficient length that could be cut with a scythe. Cabins stood empty and silent in the deserted Norway Lake settlement. Any thought right now of an organized Norway Lake Church would seem like many years away. After staying at the cabin for two or three days the two returned back to St. Francis where its inhabitants were reading accounts of the recent Civil War battle of Gettysburg.

'Rebirth at Norway Lake

In the summer of 1864, the patrol lines were extended west and a military post was established at Norway Lake. The Norway Lake settler families were now free to return, and the very first to do so was Swen Borgen, doing so late in the fall of 1864. The long exile was over. By 1865, the Norway Lake settlement was expanding rapidly. Once again religious services were being held. There was, in fact, talk of building a church.

FROM THEN TO NOW (Cont.)

Kristina is her Name

As Rev. Andrew Jackson was beginning his work as pastor in the wilds of Monongalia County in the summer of 1861, he was soon to notice something that was a little unusual. There happened to be a group of young men and women around who had not yet been confirmed. Moreover, they were now up in their late teens and early twenties. His church was strict in such matters so Andrew was to round up a group of 19 of them into what could best be called a "catch up" confirmation class. The record would state that all his congregations, including Norway Lake, were represented in it.

But while this group was getting a little late in being confirmed, Andrew was getting just a little late in certain areas himself. He was 33 and as of yet, not married. Andrew, of course, was not talking about it, but it was an important area. An unmarried Lutheran pastor was almost unheard of and Andrew had no intentions of being some notable exception. And it would be with this confirmation class that he was to inadvertently design for himself a highly rich area in which these glaring deficiencies might easily be corrected. There would, in fact, be ten of them.

There was Johanna and Sophia and Anna. And there would be Chersti and Pernilla and Hedda. And one could certainly not overlook Annastina, Ella and Martha. All would make a good wife for the preacher. Besides, some of them were up in their twenties and that awful state of spinsterhood (the expression of the times) was not that far away. And to be referred to as a spinster was not something to look forward to. Hedda and Ella would certainly agree. And so would Pernilla and Anna. To be the wife of an up and coming preacher would not be the worst that could happen to them. Chersti and Johanna would go along with that. And so would Martha and Sophia.

And then there was Kristina. She was certainly in the running. Andrew could simply not overlook her. But Andrew had to play it all very carefully. After all, he probably realized, pastors usually did not find their wives in a confirmation class. There would even be talk. But then, this was the frontier. One had to be practical.

This subtle little contest, as it all appears to be, would continue throughout the summer and into the fall of 1861. Andrew

would come to class with his horses, either driving or riding. And Annastina and Martha liked horses. They tried to picture themselves sitting in the buggy with Andrew. And for that matter, also very probably did Pernilla and Sophia.

Also mentioned as being members of the class were nine young men, or as the record refers to them, "Strapping young men". But nothing is heard from Erick, Gustaf, Goran and the others. They hardly seem to realize that Johanna and Anna were even existing.

Just how it all came about that Kristina would be the wife of Andrew is not entirely clear. Confirmation was Nov. 17, 1861 in a log cabin near Nest Lake - and what the seating arrangements were like for parents and friends after the 19 class members were in the building, there is unfortunately no record. But the record shows clearly that Kristina was a member of the class and shortly after confirmation she and Andrew were married. And as for Chersti, Annastina, Martha, Hedda and all the others, they would all be married within a couple of years. None of them would have to contend with that dreaded spinsterhood.

A Last Visit to Norway Lake

There comes a time for just about every pastor that he must leave a congregation for a last and final time and is hardly ever seen again. And Andrew Jackson would certainly be no exception, although it was to be under conditions that he probably could never have dreamed of. On this strange and fateful afternoon of Aug. 20, 1862, in and around the cabin of Bergit and Thomas Osmondson, the end of the world had suddenly seemed to be just minutes away. Rampaging M'dwekanton Sioux warriors could be on the scene at most any minute. No one was realizing it at the time but it was in this turbulent setting that Andrew was about to conclude a last and final visit to his Norway Lake congregation.

The records that come from it make it seem like something out of an old Hollywood Western - and the dark-clad Andrew by himself always seems to fit naturally into it. As far as these western scenes would go, probably the best one would be right now as Andrew is seen leaving this cabin along Norway Lake's south shore and hurrying out to his horse tied in the trees and then to watch him untie it in the quick and easy way in which it always seems to be done.

To enhance this western scene further, it could almost safely be assumed that

would be wearing a broad rimmed hat of some kind (and black, of course). This was a time when no man (and probably especially a pastor) would be caught dead outdoors without his hat - end of the world at hand or not.

But it was now a time to leave, a time to warn his other congregations to the east. Accounts differ just a little bit in describing this somewhat momentous departure in that he "drove off" or "rode off", but in whichever way he was leaving, time was now of the essence, lest all of New Sweden - and he along with it - should soon be extinct. There is no record of him appearing at Norway Lake again. After almost exactly one year, this "Swedish Connection" had come to an end.

Bergit Into Exile

It was a trait of these early Norwegians to organize themselves into their cohesive settlements and during times of upheaval there seemed to be no exceptions. East of St. Cloud is the St. Francis River and it is here that several of these uprooted and now displaced Norwegian settler families from Norway Lake and Lake Prairie were to assemble during those climactic days of August, 1862. Here they would remain until Monongalia County was again declared safe - and a few were wondering if this frontier adventure was over entirely.

It was a frustrating and perplexing existence, a time of belonging neither here nor there. Most of these people - now war-time refugees of sorts - were from the Lake Prairie congregation, but there were several from Norway Lake. It is probably not unusual that the first names mentioned as being from Norway Lake would be Thomas and Bergit Osmundson - and in their continuing policy of always seeming to be caught up in those notable events. Several from Norway Lake, however, were to disperse into southeastern Minnesota and Wisconsin.

This early Norway Lake church, as it existed at this time, had also scattered, but along the St. Francis a certain small, viable spark still remained. It seems to center around Thomas and also two of these early council members, Swen Bergen and Johannes Haavelson.

Life went on. On July 17, 1864, the child Sophious Christian, son of Nels and Marthe Petterson (Peterson) from Norway Lake was baptized by layman Torris Tyse of the Lake Prairie group. A few days later Nels would reciprocate in kind by baptizing young

Anthor from Lake Prairie.

This St. Francis experience would occur entirely within the times of the American Civil war. This War Between the States would be strongly noticed at St. Francis when young Halvor, son of Jorgen and Jyri Postmyr of the Lake Prairie congregation, enlisted in the Union Army and was later killed at the Siege of Atlanta.

Rev. Muus at St. Francis

Norwegian pastor, Bernt J. Muus was at times to visit this displaced colony along the St. Francis and around a small community with that name. On Oct. 23, 1864 he had arrived at St. Francis to conduct services and soon was to find his work all waiting for him. First of all there was a backlog of four baptisms to perform and for (all boys): Johan Peder, Andreas, Knud and Jorgen. This done, he then acknowledged the two baptisms as previously performed by laymen Tyse and Peterson. Then came the service itself and Rev. Muus preached a sermon.

The service was not done, however, as it was also Confirmation Sunday, and for Anna Fjeldhaugen who had been instructed by layman Tyse. Then, as a conclusion, Rev. Muus served Communion. He warmly greeted them all, offering encouragement for these peculiar times.

It was another day in the busy life of Rev. Muus - and where the record would state that he was serving 28 congregations at this time, scattered between Northfield and St. Cloud, Muus always had a full schedule - to say the very least. And it was here, along the St. Francis, beginning with Rev. Muus, that Norway Lake would be served by Norwegian pastors for a hundred years.