

Translated from 'Nordmændene i Amerika' by Martin Ulvestad
History Book Company's Forlag, Minneapolis, MN 1907

Freeborn County, Minnesota p. 91-92

The first Norwegians in this county were Even Nelson from Næs, Hedemarken and Ole Gulbranson, who settled at Albert Lea in 1855.

Next after them came Rollef Thykesen, Gunner Thykesen, Stener Mikkelsen and Ole O. Kleppe, all from Telemarken and Nels Nelson Wangen from Voss. They settled in the area of Manchester, the 15th of June 1856.

Later the same year (1856) came Thor Anderson, Anders Evenson, Ole Kittelson, Ole Petterson Slette and Halvor Petterson Slette, all from Sigdal, O. O. Fossum and Peder Fossum from Telemarken as well as Anders Lybeck from Krødshered. They settled in the area of Manchester, as mentioned, in 1856. At that time this area was a wilderness full of Indians and wild animals* Albert Lea, which is now a large city, then consisted of two log cabins.

Halvor Opsahl from Hjertdal, Telemarken was the first in the area of Bath. He settled there in 1857.

In the same year (1857) came Lars Torkelsen from Sigdal, Torsten Eriksen from Eggedal, Thore Hoff from Hallingdal as well as Lars Nilsen, Nils Nilsen and Isak Johnson, the last three from Hedemarken, to the area of Knatvold, where they settled.

In 1857, the following persons also came to Freeborn Co., but the report does not mention what area they settled in but it looks like they settled in the area of Hayward. Their names are: Guttorm Bottolfsen, Anders Bottolfsen, Joh. Hermundsen and Anders Syversen Sjelve, all from Vik in Sogn, Charley Pedersen from Hakedalen, Anders Olsen from Lyster, Sogn, Christopher Mikkelsen from Nannestad, Peder Lunde and Endre Gulbrandsen from Aadalen, the brothers Ole and Torstein Morheim from Telemarken, Ole Narveson and Ole Varnaas from Sogndal, Ole Styve Sr. and his son O. O. Styve and Ole Mittun from Voss and Bjørn Atlesen Øen, whose birthplace is unknown to the author.

The first Norwegian in the area of Freeborn was Syvert Olsen from Nummedal. And the first in Emmons was H. G. Emmons from Eggedal. The post office bears his name.

Most of Freeborn County's first settlers had lived for a short time in Wisconsin, from where they came in small groups (caravans) and settled in various places, usually near forests. Their nearest marketplaces were Winona and McGregor, Ia., about 100 miles away. Their main articles for sale were butter and meat.

A. N. Teslow of Hayward concludes one of his letters with, "The first years here were full of mosquitoes, snakes and other horrors such that we were in danger of losing our lives, but see, we still live, both my wife and me, and we are 77 years old."

The most travelled man in Freeborn County is Andreas Sandersen of Hayward. He came from Norway to Wisconsin and was there for 3 years. But then came rumours that gold could be found in large nuggets in California. He and a comrade went to New York and took the sea route - around South America,

naturally - to California. How it went with the gold digging is not known but when they were finished, they put their packs on their backs and walked to San Francisco, which was then a little shanty town. From there they went to Sacramento, which was also nothing much. Their walking trip continued through all of Oregon, Washington and a part of British Columbia. Tacoma, Wash. did not exist in those days and the population of Victoria consisted of only 3 fisher families. Sandersen returned to Wisconsin via the Panama peninsula after having been off on his adventure for 4 years and 5 months. He finally ended up in Minnesota.

Ole J. Ellingsen was the first Norwegian to hold public office here. He was elected Co. Treasurer in 1860.

T. G. Johnsrud from Aadalen was the first to be elected to the State Legislature (in 1872).

"Søndre Minnesota Tidende" and "Albert Lea Skandinav" were published for a short time. "Signalet", a Baptist newspaper was also published in Albert Lea.

Luther Academy, a Norwegian school was established in Albert Lea in 1888.

Post offices with Norwegian names: Knatvold, Emmons and Lerdal (Lærdal)

*Newry Township was similarly settled in 1856 - by the brothers Knut, Syver and Bennet Benson from Hemsedal, Helg Olsen Otterdokken from Gol and Jens Amundsen from Næs, Hallingdal. T. A. Halvig, one of the pioneers here writes; "At this time the Indians were numerous in this as well as adjacent areas, and they were a great fear - especially for the women and children when they were home alone. The men had to travel to town now and then and this took two weeks as a rule. That was probably in Winona where they sold their farm produce and make purchases, but when grain was to be ground, they had to go far down to Iowa. When the winters were longer than expected, it could happen that the grain had to be ground in coffee mills."

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