

## **Goodhue County, Minnesota** *p. 93-95*

It was in 1854\* when Norwegians first captured Goodhue County, they took it, so to say, by storm and settled in two townships at the same time - in Holden and Wanamingo, yes, and a part of Leon and Mineola Townships as well. As soon as the Norwegians came, the Indian dominion was history, although to the white settlers, the Indians remained a regular nuisance, of which we will later give examples. Here is a list of the first Norwegian settlers: Hans Ovaldsen from Kragerø, Henrik and Tøge Nilsen Talla from Lyster, Sogn, William Rønningen from Sandøkedal, Anders Vaanhus from Søvde, Telemarken, John Strømme, Anders Hesjedalen and Haldor Eide, the last three from Strilelandet, Tosten Aaby from Sigdal, Bernt Sauland from Jæderen, Torbjørn Wraalstad from Drangedal, Nils Fenne and Enver Homedal from Voss, Gunder Hestemyr from Sandøkedal, Ole P. Ness from Vik in Sogn, Guttorm Otternes from Aurland, Mathias Rindal from Faaberg, Christian Lunde and Andreas Erstad from Land, Tosten Gulbrandsen from Gudbrandsdalen, Ole and Aamund Ofteli from Telemarken, Knut, Anders, Ole and H. K. Finseth from Hallingdal as well as Jens Ottum, O. J. Sortedal, Kolben Egtveit, O. O. Huset, Halvor Enersen, Torbjørn Enersen Ole O. Oakland, Ole J. Bakke, Tosten Andersen and Nels Gudbrandsen. As far is known, they all came in 1854 - most from Wisconsin. Next after them came Svend Norgaard from Telemarken, Ole Qvernhus from Krødsherred, Kristian Halvorsen Dokken from Hallingdal, Ragnvald Olmstad from Aurland in Sogn as well as Ole Eriksen, Elling Halgrimsen, Lars By, G. K. Norsving, Ole O. Nesseth, Erick Anderson, Nils Mikkelsen, Mikkell Johnson, P. R. Langemo, Syvert Halvorsen Dokken, Halvor Syvertsen Dokken, Syvert Markussen and Lars Markussen, Helge Gulbrandsen Bakken from Vang, Valdres, who also came about the same time, came by foot from Decorah, Ia.

Mrs. Ole Bakke, the first white woman in Holden tells, that she left her child lying alone in bed when she went out for water, and when she came back, the child was gone. She hurried out and when she heard the child's cry from a nearby grove, where she ran as fast as she could. An Indian woman had stolen the child, but when she heard the mother come, she laid the child down and ran away. Mrs. Torbjørn Enersen delivered the first child in Holden. And Erik Elton died here in the fall of 1855, this was the first death in the county.

The pioneers in Goodhue County were just as poor as they were skilled. The worst was that they did not have the clothing to face the harsh cold. But they got through it quickly. They soon began to grow wheat on a larger scale.

As an example of what the first settlers had to endure, a man who was on his way to Oronoco, Olmstead Co. in the winter of 1855, stayed overnight with Erik Talla and continued his travels the next morning. But three days later he came back. The whole time he had wandered the prairie - in a blinding snowstorm - without knowing where he was, and not finding people.

The following Indian story comes from Mr. Kleng J. Dale, "It was in the year

1862. One evening about 7 o'clock, the warning came that the Indians were on the move and that they had murdered our nearest neighbor and his family. A good solution was not easy. The thought to save some of our possessions, we gave up. We thought it was advisable to flee, as we were. With our year old daughter, my wife and I went eastward to Osmund Wing and found he was in the process of loading his family in a wagon. The decision was that we would proceed in an easterly direction to Torger Rygh, an old faithful countryman with whom people often gathered. There were soon a large group of people there. The women and children found place on the second floor while we men stayed below and armed ourselves as well as we could with clubs and hay forks since we did not own guns. Those of the men who had the most of Viking blood in them were stationed as guards. But the Indians did not come. In the morning we sent out two scouts, who were to see how it was with our homes. They came back with the word that as far as they could see and hear, everything was quiet and our homes were in order, we left and returned home. Further west - in the area of New Ulm - many whites were killed and their homes destroyed by the Indians. At this time B. J. Muus was the priest for the Holden congregation, he fled with his family right to Red Wing." But he came back and worked until he became old.

Herman Hansen Bakke, who now lives at Spring Valley, Wis., tells that he settled at Belvidere Mills, Goodhue Co. in 1855 and that he had no harvest the first five years. The prairie fires ruined it for him. One time, he also lost his farm equipment and everything else he owned, except for his house. Ole Serumgard, who is now the manager of the US Land Office at Devil's Lake, North Dakota writes (after having referred to Amund Nilsen Opheim - 'Pioneer Nilsen', who we find mentioned in Griggs County, N. Dak.), "Another Norwegian worthy of mention who moved to the Sheyenne Valley (in the aforementioned State) in 1881, was Sven Norgard. He was a veteran of the Civil War and in his youth he had been a boisterous fellow. Norwegian readers know Mr. Janson's story of the 'Bygdekonge' (Community Boss). In this there is an account of the battle between the Boss and his gang and a young pioneer, who with his wife and children, tried to clear a home on land the others had illegally tried to keep free of settlers. Janson's story is a real depiction of the young pioneer who, with his wife and children, tried to clear some land in the woods of Goodhue County, Minn., and eventually won the 'Klubbeslaget' (club battle) and beat the Boss black and blue, was none other than the same Sven Norgard. He was big and strong and a real Viking - in his younger days he would more properly called a berserker.- and there are many old settlers in Goodhue County that can tell about his activities. From there he moved to Yellow Medicine County, Minn. where he was elected as District Attorney. While he was there some Norwegian neighbors were charged with illegal cutting of timber on railroad property. Norgard defended them. The case came to court in New Ulm, Minn. The case lasted a long time and the defendants were almost worn out. One evening when the case was to be handled, the lights in the courtroom went out, and when the lamps were lit, the case documents had disappeared. The most careful search could not find them and the case was dismissed and Norgard's clients went free.

Reliable sources say that Norgard, when the lights went out, got hold of the papers and ate them. This is clearly a lawyer's trick that no one has repeated. That the old one, with his wildness, still had a good heart is shown by the following. Omund Opheim had a daughter who was not always sensible. She was married to a rowdie by the name of Olsen who left her and their five children. Olsen had a fine homestead in the woods at Sheyenne. When he left, he sold a relinquishment to a saloonkeeper in Moorhead, but when the old Governor Austin, who was then the Registrar in the Land Office in Fargo, was advised of the situation, he refused to accept the relinquishment since he thought it was just that the land in this case belonged to the wife and children. The wife went insane and sent to the asylum in Yankton. This was in 1885. The grandfather took in the children but he died and a Swede by the name of Olsen obtained the land as a homestead through underhanded means since the necessary final proof had not been done in the right time. Old Norgard, now a senior, could not stand to see that this injustice should befall his old friend's descendants and took on the case - and the land was granted to the mentally ill wife and her children in 1899, almost 20 years after it was first claimed as a homestead by pioneer Nelson's son-in-law. These two men, Pioneer Nelson and Sven Nordgard, stand out for me as true types of Norwegian pioneers here in the northwest. Without much education but with a surplus of natural talent in a long life on civilizations frontier they have developed a brave, sterling character. It is such as these we can thank for the respect we have won among the population in our new home in the northwest."

Pioneer Peder Langemo tells, "The houses were small, as a rule only 10x12, but small as they were, they housed two-three families and even 'the bailiff'. The first year after Minnesota became a state, came the order that the town treasurer was to collect the taxes. In Holden Township, it happened that the Treasurer and his family lived together with another man in their log cabin, which seemingly was smaller than the others. It happened one day that a Halling, who lived on the west side of the town, came to pay his taxes. But as he approached, he feared he had come to the wrong place. After examining the cabin from all sides, he asked, "Is it here, the bailiff lives?" The treasurer was the honorable Ole Solberg and after a confirming answer, the Halling paid his taxes.

Holden Congregation, that was established in 1856 by Pastor H. A. Stub of The Norwegian Synod, was the first Norwegian congregation in the county. The congregation had no steady services before Pastor B. J. Muus came (in 1859). The church was built in 1861. Now there are 26 Norwegian congregations and 25 churches, 11 to The United Church, 5 to Hauge's Synod, 3 to The Norwegian Synod, 3 to 'Brodersamfunnet', 2 to The Lutheran Free Church and 2 to the Methodist Church.

Hans Hansen Holtan was the first Norwegian to hold an official position in Goodhue County (1857). For information about him and others, see the section 'Norwegians in public positions in America.'

'Budbæreren', Hauge's Synod's organ, that started in Red Wing in 1868 was the county's oldest Norwegian newspaper. Later came 'Børnevennen', 'The Little Messenger' and 'Nordstjernen', all in Red Wing as well as 'Broderbaandet' in

Kenyon. For more information, see the section, 'Norwegian-American newspapers and periodicals.'

For information about the Red Wing Seminary, the Hauge's Synod school and 'Lutheran Ladies' Seminary, supported mostly by the people of The Norwegian Synod, see the section, 'Norwegian-American Teaching Schools.'

The United Church's hospital in Zumbrota one can find information about under the title, 'Norwegian-American Benevolent Institutions.'

Places with Norwegian names in Goodhue County: Holden, Norway, Toten, Eidsvold, Dovre, Sogn, Henning, Vang, Nansen, Aspelund and Stuberg. Only the last three post offices exist now. The free postal service (R.F.D.) has taken the place of the smaller post offices here and in other parts of America.

\* Mathias Pedersen Ringdahl from Hadeland had come to Red Wing in 1851 and stayed there for a year, then he moved away, but came back to the same town in 1853. He was therefore the first Norwegian in Goodhue Co. But he established no settlement.

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Translated by Olaf Kringhaug

Vernon, British Columbia, Canada

Published by Olaf Kringhaug and Margit Bakke at

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~maggiebakke/minnesota.html>

Email: [margit@eot.com](mailto:margit@eot.com)

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