

LaCrosse County, Wisconsin p. 41-42

John Anderson (Bekkemelum) and Christian Ekern, both from Biri were, according to a couple of reports, the first Norwegian settlers in La Crosse County. They came from Dane County and settled in Louis Valley in 1850. Later in the year came Ouden Evenson from Ringsaker.

In 1851 came Mons Anderson, Stengrim Olsen and Lars Knudsen Bye from Valdres, Henry R. Solberg and Charles B. Solberg from Lillehammer, Børre Støen and Ole Støen from Ringsaker as well as John Kjøs, Lars Olstad, Hans Gunderschwein, O. Nelson, Paul Tollefsen, Lars Strand, Christian Hulberg and G. Onrud, whose birthplace in Norway is unknown to the author. All these settled in Bostwick Valley. (The aforementioned Mons Anderson moved later in to La Crosse, where he established himself as a businessman. He founded up and was for a long time the owner of the largest store west of Chicago).

About the first settlers in Bostwick Valley, it is told that when they came driving with their loads to steep hills, they unhooked their oxen and eased the wagons and loads down the hills with strong ropes.

Wheat, oats and potato growing was county's leading source of income. Pay in those times was 50 to 75 cents a day.

Col. A. Knudsen, a Civil War veteran, who now lives in Grand Foiks, N. Dak., but who in his time ran 'the first Norwegian hotel' in La Crosse, tells that among his guests he had such important people as P. Jelm Hansen, Minister Schrøder, Editor Fleischer, Dr. Høeg and Sheriff Solberg.

Engel Thompson Ringøen, one of the old settlers at Beaver Creek, where there are now many Norwegians, tells, "When I emigrated in 1858 on the bark 'Hebe' from Bergen, we had a devil of a time, you can be sure. The ship heeled and rocked so all the joints creaked. From the passengers, most of whom were seasick, one could hear moaning and complaining, some were in absolute despair. In the weak lanterns that lit the cabin, one could see people in various situations, partly or fully flat, clinging to the walls so not to accompany the chests, boxes and milk cans in their wild rattling about in steerage. The lids of some of the milk cans had flown off and the contents pored out. One man who just came in the cabin and saw the mess, exclaimed, "Lord help us, look at all the 'skyr' that has been lost!" This and much else awoke some humour among us who were more healthy and used to the sea. Sadly, the sadness was mixed with the comic. That night, amid all the hullabaloo, the company was increased by an emigrant, a little girl..."

Mr. Thompson, however, wished to forget the 'skyr' as soon as he reached the meat pots in Stoughton (Wis.) But here he was disappointed since the Norwegian farmers had not become that rich yet. He mentions for example that he had to do some construction work for 30 cents a day. But after the teacher (later State Senator) John A. Johnson (Skivnes) had taught him enough English so he could work anywhere, things got better.

In 1856, a Norwegian Lutheran congregation was established in La Crosse Co. This encompassed a large area, namely Half Way Creek, Lewis Valley, La Crosse Valley and Bostwick Valley. Pastor H. A. Stub was its first priest. Now there are 22 congregations and 19 churches, 10 belonging to The Norwegian Synod, 6 to The United Church, 3 to The Lutheran Free Church, 2 to The Methodist Church and 1 to the Baptists.

Henry L. Solberg, La Crosse, was the first Norwegian county official here, since he was elected sheriff in 1859.

The first Norwegian who represented this county in the State Legislature was A. C. Hansen, Mindoro, elected in 1900.

For information about 'Fædrelandet og Emigranten', 'Illustrert Børneblad', 'Amerika', 'Varden', 'Folkevennen', 'Det Udflyttede Norge', 'La Crosse Tidende' and 'Indremissionæren' that all were published in La Crosse for a shorter or longer time, see the section, 'Norwegian-American Newspapers and Periodicals'

For information about Lutheran College that began at Half Way Creek in 1861 and the La Crosse Norwegian Lutheran Hospital, raised in 1902, see the respective institution's sections.

In La Crosse County, where Norwegians are otherwise quite prominent, there is only one Norwegian place name, Holmen, a post office. They should have had more.

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