

## **Milwaukee County, Wisconsin** p. 44-47

The Muskego settlement that was founded in Waukesha and Racine Counties in the beginning of the 40s, also stretched into Milwaukee County – its southwest corner. The settlement's history is found in those counties.

However, there are not many Norwegian farmers in Milwaukee County.

But we find many countrymen in Milwaukee City, but who was the first is difficult to say. It is, however, certain that he or those who first settled in Milwaukee were seafarers. Captain Saveland, the first one we know about, came here about 1840. And of the others that settled here in the beginning of the 40s is mentioned a boarding house host by the name of Nordbo as well as the Kildal family and Mr. John Thoresen (later one of the city's leading businessman). A great part of Milwaukee's Norwegian population is, as suggested above, seafarers and they have therefore won the name as such. Many of them are shipmasters, yes, and a considerable number are owners of the ships they skipper. There are as well many Norwegian tradesmen (with own homes) and not just a few business and professional men of Norwegian origin.

The first Norwegian congregation was established in 1844 by Pastor C. L. Clausen. Now there are 6 Norwegian congregations and churches, 2 of them belonging to The United Church, 1 to The Norwegian Synod, 1 to Hauge's Synod, 1 to The Methodist Church and 1 to The Baptist Church.

For information about 'Fram', 'Templar-Bladet' and other newspaper ventures, see the section 'Norwegian-American newspapers and periodicals.'

A Leif Erickson statue decorates one of Milwaukee's parks; it stands by the lake, naturally, and is an honor for the Norwegians - especially those who raised it, and a reminder to Americans about America's discoverer.

Below is cited part of an article, that Mr. Hjalmar Knud Holand recently wrote in The Norwegian Society's 'Quarterly':

"In 1846, there came to Milwaukee one of the Moravian Brethren by the name of Olsen, who was from Farsund. He was a renowned singer and energetic lay preacher, and since there was little opportunity here in Milwaukee to hear religion proclaimed in their mother tongue, many flocked to him. In 1849 he wrote to the Brethren's Mission Society in Norway to send an ordained priest over. A. M. Iversen, a young student was called and came. Iversen was born in Kristiansand in 1823. He arrived in Milwaukee in the spring of 1849 and was joyously received. There was at that time no congregation in Milwaukee, even though Iversen had an audience of up to four hundred at his meetings, which shows that there was already at that time, many Norwegians in the city.

The next year, 1850, he was ordained in Bethlehem, the sect's headquarters in America.

These were hard times in Milwaukee, little work and poor wages. As well there were many temptations in the city that the newly established congregation wished to save its members from. They decided as a congregation

to move to a place where they could support themselves in a more sure way and at the same time avoid worldly temptations.

Just then - in 1850 - here came to Milwaukee one of the most remarkable Norwegians that ever came to America. His name was Nils Otto Tank and he descended from a powerful old noble family at Fredrikstad. He was the only son of Carsten Tank, one of the most powerful men in the court at Stockholm during three reigns. As a member of Gustav the IV's government, he helped with deposing him from the throne. When Karl the XIII was selected as king and Carsten Tank became his Prime Minister, the ambitious Norwegian began to lay far-reaching plans. King Karl was old and childless and there would soon have to be a royal election. Why then should the powerful Prime Minister's promising son not come into consideration? He was a proud chieftain's descendant, had a royal demeanor, possessed great ability and knowledge and his father stood at the government tiller. In those shaky days with the intrigues and cabals. when kings were quickly deposed and lands traded like horses, it was no daring thought. It was only necessary then to make a marital connection with one or another princess of the old royal house. With this aim, Nils Otto was sent offshore to enter Europe's best circles to put the last smooth coat on his advanced education. This went entirely according to plan. After a long stay in foreign lands, Nils Otto had obtained a polish and a brilliant culture, and was on his way home to play his role in the court intrigues. But it happened that while far up in the German mountains, in a little village called Herrnhut, he stared into a pair of deep, serious and soulful eyes that belonged to a young woman among the pietistic brotherhood that made up the place's population. Forgotten were his father's worldly reminders, the dreams of kingdom, the court's pomp and circumstance and worldly power and glory. Hurriedly, he said yes and went home with his bride.

But his father, the ambitious old statesman, had forgotten all about romance and love. Shattered was his dearest hope, lost was his life's joy. With scorn and reproach, he disowned his son.

Nils Otto Tank's mind had thereafter gone to an altogether different stage. Instead of the happy ballroom, where smiles and witticisms ruled, we now see him among dismal heathens, tolerantly and simply explain the saving gospel.

When he came home to Norway in 1850 after several years stay as a missionary in Surinam, South America, he heard about the new congregation that had just been established among Norwegians in America. He decided to go there to help them. When he came to Milwaukee, he heard that the whole congregation had moved out. He bought 900 acres of superb forest land, that now makes up the southwest part of Green Bay City. It was his intention to build a town in the Herrnhut pattern as well as build a large teaching institution for the children of the Norwegian emigrants. He then invited the whole congregation to move there. He further promised that all the members would get the necessary farmland without paying.

This was the beginning of the large Norwegian colony at Green Bay and the many congregations in the area. The Milwaukee congregation happily accepted the offer and moved there.

Green Bay was at that time just a small settlement in the wilderness encircled by the mighty ancient forest for hundreds of miles around. Fantastic as it sounds, the old man of the world with his rich life settled down here and remained one of Green Bay's and Fox River's significant figures. Even now the old settlers have not overcome their amazement at his princely grace, his perfect dress and his distinguished civility. For his own farm he bought an old French manor, where he lived until his death. It is now the oldest house in the city and one of Green Bay's most remarkable sights.

Here he arranged things with artistic taste that would have given any of the country's palaces honor. Fine furniture chosen from rare French originals, obscure portraits by famous Dutch masters, old silverware with the most perfect engraving and an abundance of Wedgewood porcelain. He also had a book collection as hardly any other private person in the country. Some of it, namely 5000 volumes, consisting of old Dutch books, parchments and letters, was in 1868, donated to the Wisconsin Historical Society. It was information obtained from this book collection with the help of our countryman, James Hansen, now with the Congressional Library in Washington, that in 1898, settled the dispute between England and the United States with regard to Venezuela's borders, and so prevented a war.

But back to the Herrnhut colony at Green Bay. Since there was much to organize at first, it took some time before Tank could divide his property and deed to the colonists. In the meantime, he wished they would work the land without deeds. The fiery Pastor Iversen saw this as a manifestation of the Norwegian manorial system and spoke against what he called the introduction of the Norwegian cotter system. Other discord also came up and he got most of the colony's members convinced to move away. In response, he obtained on his own reputation, a loan of \$50,000 from the head parish in Bethlehem for a colonizing attempt.

Equipped with this money, Pastor Iversen crossed over to Sturgeon Bay. At that time there were only three fishing huts here. There was good land here, but it was difficult to get clear title to it, and besides the mosquitoes were unusually bothersome, so Iversen did not get a favorable impression of it. He went back the next day. Guided by his report, however, several of his company decided to settle there, among whom can be mentioned, Anton Thompson from Farsund, who should be considered to be the first Norwegian in Sturgeon Bay and area.

When Iversen came back to Green Bay, he met a man with the name Ole Larson, who came from to him from and, until now, unknown quarter.

Ole Larson was one of the first to emigrate from Skien and area. He came early in the 40s to Buffalo, N. Y., where for some years he ran a rooming house. Later he came to Green Bay, where he started a bakery but it went poorly. Then he was made aware by some sailors of the hugely rich fishery that later made Green Bay renowned throughout the country. Larson learned that, about 75 miles northeast of Green Bay, there was a pretty little island with an excellent bay, incomparably accessible in all sorts of weather and wind. The island was called Eagle Island but was also known as Horseshoe Island because of its unique shape. Throughout the country I have met hundreds of farmers who had

previously been fishers at Green Bay, who could tell how good it was to enter that peaceful harbor. Larson got some Indians to help and settled there in 1851. And he remained living there for many years and ran a profitable fishery.

When he heard that Iversen and the Herrnhutters were dissatisfied with the conditions at Green Bay, he went there and with his glittering description of the glories of his location, he convinced Pastor Iversen to visit his new home. In February 1852, Iversen went up there over the ice with a Danish guide. With Larson's help, he got a very favorable impression of the land on the little peninsula just in from the little island. It was the middle of winter and the snow in the woods prevented a careful examination of the soil, which was rather stony. But Iversen had heard that where maple, linden and beech grew, there was also a good soil, and here there was enough of such woods. Satisfied with what he had seen, Iversen went back and immediately bought 424 acres at the Government Office at Menasha. The majority of the congregation moved up there immediately and lived for a time with Larson on Horseshoe Island.

Iversen's first task was to survey the land. A part was reserved for a village while the rest was divided into small plots of 10 acres each. All the lots and farms were then, according to Herrnhutter custom, drawn for by lot for which piece each man should have. As a sign of how great their expectations were, the village was called Ephraim, that is, the very fertile.

Even though Ephraim and its area perhaps was not so fertile in a material sense as its hopeful founder expected, it has in a spiritual sense responded to its name. Many who have gone from here, have established Herrnhut congregations in other places, several priests have trained here, and the colony has been a great support for the Society in its many missionary activities.

Pastor Iversen was the first and only Norwegian Herrnhut priest in America. He was a very able man and it is because of his intelligent leadership in all the colony's activities that it made such great progress. Since in the early times it was arduous to travel all the way to Green Bay (75 miles) for supplies, he managed to get a ship captain to take a load of fence posts, in return for bringing foodstuffs, that he had cut himself, even though he was slight and inexperienced, 3000 of them, and carried them on his shoulders to the wharf. He built half the parsonage with his own hands, which is still in good condition. He built a large sailboat that for many years was the bay's best sailer. Several excellent landscapes, that are still preserved, show his proficiency as an artist. In addition, he was for his whole life, the colony's doctor as well as its spiritual adviser. Since his field of activity stretched over many counties, he met many hardships in the conduct of his official duties and many times he had to walk through the snow on the ice from Sturgeon Bay to Ephraim (30 miles). He was the priest here for 38 years but then, when he was about 70, he took a course at a medical school. He practiced as a physician at Sturgeon Bay, and is over 80 years old but is as mentally alert as in his youth."

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