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Rock County, Wisconsin p. 19-21

The first Norwegian settlement in Wisconsin was established at Jefferson Prairie, Rock County by Ole Knudsen Nattestad, who built his cabin there, at Clinton in 1838.

Ole Nattestad emigrated with his brother Ansten from Vægli, Nummedal in 1837 and went first to Beaver Creek, Illinois, where they stayed a few months together with Ole Rynning and other countrymen. From there, they went to Davis, Stephenson County, Ill., where they also stayed for several months. The Ansten went back to Norway to deal with some private business and also to get Rynning's book as well as his brother's diary printed. Both dealt with America. During Ansten's stay in Norway, Ole moved to Wisconsin, as stated above. Ansten soon came back, bringing many of his fellow parishioners, who temporarily stayed in Illinois with the exception of Christopher Nyhus, who Ansten led up to Wisconsin, where they settled near the latter's brother - 1839.* Later in the year (1839) came one of the Nattestad brothers' fellow parishioner Gullick Olsen Gravdal and settled at Rock Prairie. Thus he became the founder of the Norwegian settlement there. Lars Skavlem, Gullick Laugen and many others (mainly from Nummedal) settled down near him in short time, so the Indians found it advisable to disappear as fast as possible. Wheat growing was this settlements main source of income, they also harvested a little oats, rye and other things that they took to market with the wheat. Chicago and Milwaukee, ca. 100 miles away were the nearest marketplaces in the first time. They had to drive their farm products here by oxen. They had to be careful not to stay in hotels and other places, where it cost money and since one could not get more than 15 cents for a bushel of wheat - and the trip lasted one to two weeks. In other words, one could fall into debt if one went to such luxury. Therefore they brought food from home with them and slept under the wagon. Thereby they were capable of bringing home provisions and other necessary articles from the city.

For farm labour and cutting timber, they were paid 25 cents per day plus board. I shall now cite something of a letter from Mrs. T. G. Myhre, a pioneer woman in Orfordville, Wis. She says, "My now deceased husband, Thor G. Myhre emigrated from Hallingdal on the 16th May 1846 together with his brother, Erik Kaalsrud, Tollef Rakansby, Halvor Næs and Knud Lostuen. From Drammen they sailed to Havre, France, where they had to live under open skies a whole month to await a sailing ship that was to take them across the sea. Here their chests were stacked together with hundreds of others and to open those chests, where they had their food, was forbidden. What they needed to eat and drink, they had to buy in the city. Then finally, the ship in question arrived and the trip continued to New York and from there partly by rail and partly by canal boat to Milwaukee. From Milwaukee they had to travel by foot all the way to Luther Valley, Rock Co., where they finally arrived in the middle of September. Cholera broke out soon

after. Many died, sometimes whole families. It happened that they had to bury two to a grave.

Typhus and swamp fever also took many." Swamp fever occurred especially in swampy areas - and also during plowing of raw land. After the land had been cultivated and dried out, one was seldom the victim of such illness. Dr. J. S. Johnson, now living in St. Paul, Minn., writes about, "Grandfather's trip to America: The women had spun and weaved and sewn all winter, linsey-woolsey, wadmals, linen and fine kerchiefs, dresses, jackets and coats without end, as if there would never be clothes to be found. And when there was a full dozen in the family, this was no small matter.

Then the carpenters began, they measured and sawed and planed and hammered until at least a dozen travel chests of various sizes and shapes were finished. Some were flat, others with an arch, but all had solid homemade iron bands and fittings, and locks with large keys. Then came the painter and painted them bright red with blue edges, and on each chest could be read in large, neat letters, 'Enver Guttormsen, Inmansville, Rock County, Wisconsin, U.S.A.' Besides the rectangular chest for clothes and ordinary use, there was a large round one, a bread box, for flatbread and lefse, and a smaller round one for butter, that could easily hold a hundred pounds of butter, probably not of the poorest sort, either.

Then, when everything was packed and ready, the chests were loaded on carts and on each load a child with food in their hands, and everything went with Norwegian horsepower down to Randsfjorden, then down Randsfjorden in rowboats. And at the end of the fjord, the chests were loaded on carts again and so to Drammen. The smallest children could ride on the loads, but the others for the most part had to walk. One did not think much of that in those days. It was in that way one was accustomed to go if one wanted to get somewhere and so it was now, they were going to America, the Promised Land and they would certainly have to do some walking. Mari Rud once declared, 'to America go I, even if I have to do somersaults all the way!' In Drammen they waited over two weeks for the ship to get ready to sail. At a hotel? No, never! They lived for the most on the dock and there they ate cured meat, herring, flatbread and butter, with coffee when there was an opportunity to cook.

The Norwegian emigrant was not used to much more in the 40s. But, were they not just poor people, anyway? No, not really just that either. Grandfather was one of the community's worthy men and had neither 'gone up or down' and had bought tickets for twenty persons, who made up his company. But they were used to thriftiness and moderation to the utmost, and these were especially good characteristics for immigrant in Wisconsin's new settlements at that time. Then finally the ship came, a small one and then they got their chests 'tween decks and organized their bedclothes and other travel items. They were sixteen weeks on the sea. Sixteen weeks on the Atlantic, sailing without seeing land in those days, without any conversation other than, 'see how the waves foam on the prow' or 'hear how the wind whistles in the sails', an is a little taste of what is meant by 'eternity'. But, like all other earthly things, this sailing trip also came to an end. At

the end was New York, where they waited again for a couple of days for the steamship got ready to go up the Hudson River to Troy, New York, where the Erie Canal had its start. Arriving there, the chests were transferred onto the canal boat with its horse teams as power, and then began its furious speed of perhaps two and a half miles per hour, when it was not moored. The baggage and passenger's place was on the deck and since it became monotonous to sit there on a chest, they often got off and walked ahead along the canal. When the boat caught up, they readied themselves on the first convenient bridge and then hopped down on the deck as the boat passed under. On one occasion some were preparing for such an embarkation, but since the bridge was higher than the usual, they found it advisable to hang down over the edge of the bridge so the jump would not be too far. It went well with all except the last, a large, heavy woman. When the 'psychological moment' came for her to let go, she lost her courage and remained hanging as the boat slipped slowly by. Her cries immediately brought the boat's men to their feet, and they first had get ashore and then back to the bridge where she still hung desperately, where they with much effort got her back up again.

Arriving at Buffalo, they were obliged to rest for a couple of days, they caught a steamboat that fairly rapidly brought them through the Great Lakes to Milwaukee. Here, all public transport, either by land or by water, was at an end, and here they had to supply themselves with horse or ox wagon, as one best could obtain. Grandfather, who had gotten sick from an injury he received when he fell through a deck hatch on the steamboat, had to get a room in a so-called hotel, while the rest of the company lodged as best they could. They still had to look after their meals and the hotel workers would not let them cook on their stove, so this became a difficult affair. One day it looked like they would not be able to cook coffee. But the eldest son Thore's newly married wife was one of those who was never without a solution, and since they would not permit her to make coffee on the hotel stove, she went and found a smithy and a smith, who found it amusing, filled up with charcoal, blew in the bellows and cooked her coffee well, and she came back triumphantly with a pot of good coffee. Eventually, they found an American with a pair of horses and a wagon who lived near their destination and they went on their way the last 70 miles that remained. On the evening of the second day they reached Jamesville, Wis. The driver took into a tavern, while his passengers sat out on the load and dipped flatbread into the butter that had melted in the warm weather. The next evening, weary of the long trip, they came to the Luther Valley parsonage and were well received by Pastor C. L. Clausen. After a couple of day's search, they found an uncompleted log cabin that they could use temporarily. The cabin had neither window or door, the roof was not great and no floor other than the bare earth.. They stayed here for a time while grandfather searched for land. However, fall had already begun and it was getting cold mornings and evenings. Since there was no stove nor a fireplace, grandmother set the breadbox in the middle of the floor and put the cover on it, and then lit a fire on top. Grandfather came home one day with a cow he had bought, and later with a pig he had obtained in his daily search for land. Finally he bought some land, about twenty miles to the northwest and there we were to

move. The chests and equipment were again loaded up on a wagon with oxen; the people went on foot, one leading the cow, another driving the pig who had a rope attached to a hind leg. So the parade was marshalled and in this magnificent style they arrived in the late fall in Albany, Wis., where their future home would be, and where grandfather and grandmother lived out their days. The accommodation improved bit by bit. The children ringed around them and the grandchildren grew up, comfort and prosperity smiled on them and the trying emigrant days fell back as a dream, and one could laugh at. All honour and respect the old pioneers deserve. It is important for us to remember them." Luther Valley congregation that was founded at Inmanville (now Orfordville) in 1844 with Pastor C. L. Clausen as its priest, was the first Norwegian congregation in Rock County. The first Norwegian church in the county was built by the aforementioned congregation in 1847-48. Now there are 9 Norwegian churches and 8 congregations, 5 belong to The Norwegian Synod and 3 to The United Church.

Rock County is of great church historical significance for us since 3 - three - of out church societies were formed here, namely Elling Eielsen's Society in 1846, The Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Amarica (actually The Norwegian Synod) in 1851 and the Augustana Synod (now a part of The United Church) in 1860.

For an account of 'Emigranten' and 'Maanedstidende for den norsk ev. luth. kirke i Amerika' that were both published in Inmanville for a short time in the beginning of the 50s and 'Vort Blad' (later 'For Kirke og Hjemmet') published in Beloit 1890-94, see the section 'Norwegian newspapers and periodicals'. For information of a political nature, see the section 'Norwegians in public office in America.'

In Rock County there is a post office with the good Norwegian name, Bergen. This however, the only Norwegian place name that author has been able to find.

*About the Nattestad brothers (Ole and Ansten), who as mentioned, were the first settlers in Wisconsin, it can be added that they were the first who emigrated from Nummedal. Yes, that they were the ones who actually started the emigration from Norway's upland. And now they began emigrating from other areas in Norway also, which for a great part was due to Ole Rynning's and Ole Nattestad's books, that became much sought after. Until 1838 the emigration was, with few exceptions, limited to the coastal areas between Bergen and Kristiansand.

Footnotes: *Rock County is shown first, next Waukesha, Racine and Dane, since the Norwegian immigration to the State began here. The other counties are listed alphabetically so the readers can easily find what they seek. It may, however be of interest to see which direction and order the immigration occurred, therefore the years are added:: Rock '38, Wakesha, Racine and Dane '39, Green and Milwaukee '40, Iowa and La Fayette '41, Walworth '42, Dodge '43, Columbia and Fond du Lac '45, Brown, Jackson, Jefferson, Manitowoc and Winnebago '48, Monroe, Vernon, Trempeleau, Pierce, Portage and Richland '49, Door, Crawford, Juneau, La Cross, Waupaca and Waushara '50, Adams '51, Burnett '52, Kewaunee and St. Croix '54, Buffalo '56, Chippewa '57, Dunn and Polk '59, Eau Claire ca. '60, Warren '63, Shawano '68,*

Outagamie '69, Clark '70, Ashland '72, Oconto and Wood '73, Marinette '75 etc. If one also takes the accompanying map, one will be able to see a quick but certain grasp of the course of the pioneer path.

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