

The Earliest Immigrants from Norway, 1620 to 1825.

Source: History of Norwegian Immigration to The United States From the Earliest Beginning down to the Year 1848 By GEORGE T. FLOM, Ph. D. (Columbia)

Our data regarding Norwegian emigration to America prior to 1825 are very fragmentary, but it is possible to trace that emigration as far back as 1624.[18] In that year a small colony of Norwegians was established in New Jersey on the site of the present city of Bergen.[19] While it is not known that the names of any of these first colonists have come down to us, we do have the name of one Norwegian, who visited the American coast on a voyage of exploration in the year 1619, that is, the year before the landing of the Mayflower. In the early part of 1619 King Christian IV of Denmark fitted out two ships for the purpose of finding a northwest passage to Asia. The names of the ships were Eenhjörningen and Lampreren, and the commander was a Norwegian, Jens Munk, who was born at Barby, Norway, in 1579. With sixty-six men Jens Munk sailed from Copenhagen, May ninth, 1619. During the autumn of that year and the early part of the following year he explored Hudson Bay and took possession of the surrounding country in the name of King Christian, calling it Nova Dania. The expedition was, however, a failure, and all but three of the party perished from disease and exposure to cold in the winter of 1620. The three survivors, among whom was the commander, Jens Munk, returned to Norway in September, 1620.[20]

In the early days of the New Netherlands colony, Norwegians sometimes came across in Dutch ships and settled among the Dutch. The names of at least two such have been preserved in the Dutch colonial records. They are Hans Hansen and Claes Carstensen (possibly originally Klaus Kristenson). The former emigrated in a Dutch ship in 1633 and joined the Dutch colony in New Amsterdam. His name appears in the colonial records variously as Hans Noorman, Hans Hansen de Noorman, Hans Bergen, Hans Hansen von Bergen, and Hans Hansen von Bergen in Norwegen. Hans Bergen became the ancestor of a large American family by that name.[21] Claes Carstensen's name appears variously as Claes Noorman, Claes Carstensen Noorman and Claes Van Sant, the latter being the Norwegian name Sande in Jarlsberg, where Claes Carstenson was born, 1607. He came to America about 1640 and settled a few years later on fifty-eight acres of land on the site of the present Williamsburg. The ministerial records of the old Dutch Reformed Church in New York state that Claes Carstensen was married April 15, 1646, to Helletje Hendricks. The latter was, it seems, a sister of Annecken Hendricks, who was there married on February first, 1650, to Jan Arentzen van der Bilt, the colonial ancestor of Commodore Vanderbilt. Annecken Hendricks is further designated as being from Bergen, Norway, the names "Helletje" and "Annecken" being Dutch diminutive forms of the Norwegian Helen and Anne. Claes Carstensen died November sixth, 1679.

About the year 1700 there were a number of families of Norwegian and Danish descent living in New York. In 1704 a stone church was erected by them on the corner of Broadway and Rector

Streets. The property was later sold to Trinity Church, the present churchyard occupying the site of the original church.[22] Prof. R. B. Anderson, speaking of these people, says, that they were probably mostly Norwegians and not Danes, for those of their descendants with whom he has spoken have all claimed Norwegian descent. The pastor who ministered to the spiritual wants of this first Scandinavian Lutheran congregation in America was a Dane by the name of Rasmus Jensen Aarhus. He died on the southwest coast of Hudson Bay, February twentieth, 1720.

In 1740 Norwegian Moravians took part in the founding of a Moravian colony at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and in 1747 of one at Bethabara, North Carolina. At Bethlehem these Norwegian (and Swedish and Danish) Moravians came in contact with their kinsmen, the Swedish Lutherans of Delaware and adjoining parts of New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The Swedes on the Delaware had lost their independence in 1656. New Sweden as a political state existed but sixteen years. Ecclesiastically, however, the Lutherans of New Sweden remained subject to the state church at home for one hundred and fifty years more, and linguistically the colony was Swedish nearly as long. In the church records of this colony there appear not a few Norwegian names, particularly in the later period. We know that Norwegians in considerable numbers came to America and joined the Delaware Swedes in the eighteenth century. Gothenburg, which lies not far distant from the province of Smaalenene, was at the time, and has continued to be, the regular Swedish sailing port for America-bound ships.

One of the most prominent members of the Bethabara Colony was Dr. John M. Calberlane, born 1722 in Trondhjem, Norway. He came to New York in 1753, having sailed from London on the ship Irene, June thirteenth, arriving on September ninth. Dr. Calberlane's name occupies a foremost place among the old colonial physicians; he was a man of much ability, noble in character and untiring in his devotion to the welfare of his fellow colonists. On July twenty-eighth, 1759, he himself succumbed to a contagious fever that visited the settlement. In a sermon delivered on Easter Sunday, 1760, Bishop Spangenberg gave public recognition of Calberlane's service in his short life of six years in the colony.[23]

Other Norwegians among these Moravian colonists were: Susanna Stokkeberg, from Söndmøre, Norway, born 1715, who came to America in 1744 with her husband, Abraham Reinke, a Swede, to whom she had been married that year in Stockholm. Reinke is reputed to have been an able preacher of the gospel, the two laboring together in the congregations of Bethlehem, Nazareth, Philadelphia, and Lancaster. She died in 1758, he in 1760, leaving a son, Abraham Reinke. Peter Peterson, who was born in Norway in 1728, and had joined the church in London, came to America as a sailor on the ship Irene in 1749. He died in 1750. Jens Wittenberg, a tanner from

Christiania, born 1719, came on the Irene in 1754; he died in the colony, 1788. Martha Mans (probably Monsdatter), from Bergen, born 1716, came on the Irene in 1749. She lived in Bethabara as a teacher and religious adviser until 1773. At the same time, also, came Enert Enerson, a carpenter, while in 1759 came Catherine Kalberlahn, and in 1762 Christian Christensen, a shoemaker, from Christiana. The latter was born in 1718; he had lived some years in Holland before coming to America. The year of his death is 1777. Erik Ingebretsen came over June twenty-second, 1750, via Dover, having been on the ocean six weeks, a remarkably short passage for that time.[24]

The names of several Norwegians are recorded who served in the War of the Revolution. Thus under John Paul Jones served Thomas Johnson, who was born 1758, the son of a pilot in Mandal, Norway. The New England Historical Register, Volume XXVIII, pages 18–21, gives an account of Johnson's career in the American marine, from which we learn that he was among those who served on board the Bon Homme Richard in her cruise in 1779, having been transferred by Paul Jones from the Ranger. Later he went with Paul Jones to the Serapis and the Alliance and finally to the Ariel. With the last ship he arrived in Philadelphia February eighteenth, 1781. For a fuller account of Johnson's career the interested reader is referred to the source of which mention has already been made.

Thomas Johnson lived to the good old age of ninety-three, dying July twelfth, 1807, in the United States Naval Hospital in Philadelphia. He had been a pensionist here for a number of years, being known generally by the nickname "Paul Jones." A biography of Johnson written by John Henry Sherburne was published at Washington in 1825, to which I have, however, not had access. Another Norwegian by the name of Lewis Brown (Lars Bruun) also served under John Paul Jones. I lack further particulars, however, regarding Brown, except that he is spoken of in Sherburne's book, Life of Thomas Johnson.

A Norwegian sailor, Captain Iverson, settled in Georgia some time about the close of the eighteenth century. United States Senator Iverson from Georgia was a grandson of this Norwegian sailor pioneer in Georgia.[25] About 1805 another sailor, Torgus Torkelson Gromstu, from Gjerpen, near Skien, Norway, settled in New York.

In my article on "The Danish Contingent in the Population of Early Iowa," Iowa Journal of History and Politics, 1906, I spoke of a society, styling itself Scandinavia, as having been organized in New York City on June twenty-seventh, 1844. I there designated this as the earliest organization of the kind in this country. This I find now to be incorrect. As early as 1769 the Societas Scandinaviensis was founded in Philadelphia. The membership of this society was made up of Swedes, Norwegians and Danes, the first of these presumably being in the majority. The first president of the society was Abraham Markoe (Markö), a Norwegian. One of the memorable events in the history of the society was a farewell reception given in "City Tavern"

on December eleventh, 1782, in honor of Baron Axel Ferson, hero of the Battle of Yorktown. The committee of seven appointed to present the invitation and also to wait upon General George Washington at Hasbrouck House, Newburg, with a view of securing his presence consisted of the following: Captain Abraham Markoe, Sakarias Paulsen, Andreasen Taasinge, Rev. Andrew Goeranson, Jacob Van der Weer, John Stille and Andrew Keen. Says the chronicler of the event:

“This event was one of the most glorious in the Society’s history. The reception was held at the City Tavern, Wednesday evening, December eleventh, 1782. The President of the St. Andrew’s Society, Rev. Wm. Smith, D. D., lauded the bravery of the Baron and his men at the Battle of Yorktown, whereupon General Washington in thanking the members of the Society for their forethought in tendering the reception to the noble officer (he subsequently decorated Ferson with the “Order of the Cincinnati” for valor displayed) expressed his pleasure at being present among the people of his forefathers’ blood, as he claimed descent from the family of Wass, who emigrated from Denmark in the year A. D. 970, and settled in the County Durham, England, where they built a small town, calling it Wass-in-ga-tun (town of Wass.)”[26]

In January, 1783, General George Washington was elected honorary member of the Society on account of his Norse ancestry. On the twenty-sixth of August, that year, a banquet was given at the City Tavern under the auspices of the Society, in celebration of the recognition by Sweden, Norway, and Denmark of the independence of the United States of America. John Stille was for many years secretary of the Society; after his death in 1802 all traces of it seem to have vanished. Just when the Societies Scandinaviensis ceased to exist, the Historian cannot say. On February twentieth, 1868, eighteen gentlemen, all of Scandinavian birth and residents of Philadelphia, met together for the purpose of forming a society, and The Scandinavian Society of Philadelphia was founded, an organization which regards itself a continuation of the original society. The chief object of the Society is benevolence.

The name of at least one Norwegian who fell in the early wars against the Indians has come down to us. Frank Peterson, who had enlisted on the fifteenth of June, 1808, was among those who fell at Fort Dearborn in 1812, among the “first martyrs of the West,” in an attack by five hundred Pottawattamie Indians. In this battle two-thirds of the whites were killed and the rest taken prisoners.

At a later date some other names also appear, but those given are the only ones of which we have any record. I shall mention here that of Ole Haugen, who probably was the first Norwegian to settle in the State of Massachusetts. Haugen was from Bergen, Norway, and located in Middlesex County, that state, in 1815. Alexander Paaske, himself an early immigrant from Bergen, living in Lowell, Mass., and who was present at Haugen’s deathbed, is the source of the above fact. Though going beyond the scope of our brief survey of this earliest immigration, it may be of interest here to know that as early as 1817, a girl from Voss, Norway, Anna

Vetlahuso, emigrated to America with her husband, a German sailor in Bergen, and settled somewhere in South America. The next recorded names in the order of emigration to the United States are Kleng Peerson and Knud Olson Eide, who in 1821 became the advance guard of a group of fifty-two emigrants that in 1825 founded the first Norwegian settlement in this country. It is of this sailing and the leaders of this group that I now wish to speak; of Peerson I shall give a brief account below.