

## 1838 Immigrants

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)

Ansten Nattestad's Return to Norway in 1838. The Year 1839. Immigration Assumes Larger Proportions. The Course of Settlement Changes.

The principal event in Norwegian immigration history for the year, 1838, is Ansten Nattestad's return to Norway. We have seen, above, page 103, that Ole and Ansten Nattestad left the Beaver Creek settlement in the spring of 1838. Ansten went to Norway, as it seems, for the express purpose of promoting emigration from Rollaug, Numedal, while Ole went out to explore new fields. Going north as far as the Wisconsin line he stopped in what is now Clinton Township in Rock County. This place suited his fancy and he decided to settle here.

This was July first.[79] He entered a claim of eighty acres and immediately set to work erecting temporary quarters. For a year he lived alone, rarely coming in contact with a white man, and not seeing anything of his own countrymen during all that time. "Eight Americans," he says, "had settled in the town before me, but these also lived in about as lonely and desolate a condition as I. I found the soil especially fruitful and the melancholy uniformity of the prairie was relieved here by intervening bits of woods. Flocks of deer and other game were to be seen daily, and the uncanny howling of the prairie wolf constantly disturbed my night rest, until the habit fortified my ears against disturbances of this kind." The following summer, Ole built a cabin in which he received, as we shall see below, the first group of immigrants into that country in the early fall of that year.

The year 1838 brought a small contingent of emigrants from Voss. They were Steffen K. Gilderhus, Knud Lydvo, Ole Lydvo and Lars Gjerstad.[80] Gilderhus went to Cleveland, Ohio, being, I believe, the first Norwegian to locate there; he remained there only one year, however, going to Chicago in 1839. We shall later find him among the pioneers of Koshkonong, Dane County, Wisconsin. Knud and Ole Lydvo and Lars Gjerstad went to La Salle County, Illinois, and thence to Shelby County, Missouri, where the restless Kleng Pearson had the year before gone in search of a new locality for a settlement in the southwest (see below).

Before passing on to the emigration of 1839, it will be in order to speak briefly of a small group of emigrants from Numedal in the year 1838. The name of the leader was Ole Aasland, a wealthy farmer of Flesberg Parish. He sold out his farm and, taking with him his family and about twenty other persons, whose passage he paid for, he sailed from Tönsberg, via Gothenburg, and thence to New York. He then went to Orleans County, New York.[81] Here it seems he fell into the hands of speculators, who sold him six hundred acres of marsh land in Noble County, Indiana, for a very high price. He removed to that place soon after, it seems, with most of those whom he had brought from Norway. Sickness set in, brought on by the

swampiness of the region, and many of his party died. He thereupon (next year) abandoned the land, taking with him the survivors. In the Kendall Settlement, Andrew J. Stangeland bought the land of him for a nominal price.[82] Aasland, who changed his name in this country to Orsland, lived on the so-called Norwegian Road in Kendall, till his death, about 1864. In Kendall, he accumulated considerable property. He left a wife and four children, Canute Orsland, and Harry B. Orsland (born 1828 in Kendall), the former occupying the old homestead as late as 1895, and Hallock Orsland living in Detroit, where a daughter is also living. Let us now turn to Ansten Nattestad's journey.

According to Nattestad's own account he went back to Norway in the spring of 1838 via New Orleans and Liverpool. In Drammen he had printed his brother's journal, *En Dagbog*, and Rynning's book was printed in Christiania. He speaks of the great interest that these pamphlets aroused as well as that of his own return. He says:

"The report of my return spread like wild fire throughout the country, and an incredibly large number of people came to me to get news from America. Many even travelled eighteen to twenty Norwegian miles to speak with me. It was impossible to answer all the letters that came with reference to conditions across the ocean. In the spring of 1839 about one hundred persons stood ready to go with me across the ocean. Among these were many farmers with families, all except the children able to work and in their best years."

There were, moreover, a host of people from Telemarken and Numedal, who could not accompany him, as there was no more room in the ship.

In the meantime these people from Telemarken, not to be deterred long in their plans to go to the New World, immediately set about organizing their party and went to Skien to seek passage there. They were all from Tin and Hjertdal parishes in Upper Telemarken. The leaders of the party were the Luraas family, which was represented by four heads of families, in all about twenty persons of the total number of forty, composed almost exclusively of grown men and women. They embarked at Skien, May seventeenth, somewhat earlier than the party from Numedal and arrived in America before, hence it is to this group that we shall now turn our attention, leaving for the time being Nattestad and his party. The Luraas party was in all composed of eleven families, most of them being from Tin Parish. We have already, under *Causes of Emigration*, spoken briefly of John Luraas, who perhaps was the chief promoter of this emigration.

The party consisted of John Nelson Luraas, Knut Nelson Luraas, Halvor Östenson Luraas, Torger Östenson Luraas, Halvor T. Lönflok, Halvor Nelson Lohner, Helge Mathieson, Ole Hellikson Kroken, Östen Möllerflaten, Ole Kjonaas, Nils Johnson Kaasa, and the latter's brother, Gjermund Johnson Kaasa, all of whom had families, besides three unmarried men, namely, Nils, Ole and John Tollefsjord. The Kaasa brothers were from Hiterdal; the rest I believe were all from Tin Parish. In Gothenburg they met another small company of Norwegian emigrants, who had just

arrived there from Stavanger, bound for America. This party included Gitle Danielson, the leader of the party, from the island of Rennesö, a little north of Stavanger, and who had a large family, Halvor Jellarviken, with family, and Peder Rosöino, both with families, Erik Svinalie and sister; the party also included John Evenson Molee from Tin in Telemarken, who was at that time in the service of Gitle Danielson. In all there were now about sixty. The journey across the Atlantic took nine weeks and the journey from Boston to Milwaukee took another three weeks. The latter led by way of New York and then by canal boats, pulled by horses, to Buffalo; thence by way of the Great Lakes to Milwaukee, the most common westward route for the early immigrants. This was at the close of August. It was the intention of the emigrants to settle in La Salle County, Illinois; but in Milwaukee they were induced to remain in Wisconsin, and a site for a settlement was selected near Lake Muskego in the southeastern part of Waukesha County, about twenty miles southwest from Milwaukee.

A story is told how it came about that they did not go to Illinois as originally intended. A good-natured fat man is said to have been pointed out to them as the product of Wisconsin. On the other hand Illinois was described as a hot and unhealthy region in substantiation of which a pale, sickly man was presented as the result of life in that state. Whether this was done or not I do not know; but the story may serve as an illustration of frontier humor and immigrant credulity both.

Suffice it to say that the people of Milwaukee succeeded in diverting the immigrants from Telemarken from going any farther, but selected a site for a settlement, as we have said, near Lake Muskego in Waukesha County. Then they returned to Milwaukee to perfect their purchase of land there, the price paid being the usual one of a dollar and twenty-five cents per acre.

Before reciting further the fortunes of this group of immigrants, the first to enter the State of Wisconsin, let us turn for a moment to a consideration of the larger movement. With the year 1839, emigration from Norway begins to assume larger proportions, and certain districts, which hitherto had sent very few, now begin to contribute the larger share of the number of emigrants to America. This year may very properly be said to have inaugurated the second period in Norwegian immigration history. Down to 1839 the immigration movement in Norway had not really gone beyond the provinces of Stavanger and South Bergenhus in southwestern and western Norway. Indeed, nearly all of the emigrants had come from these sections. In fact, before 1836 the movement was almost confined to Stavanger and Ryfylke. In that year it reaches Hardanger, and in 1837, Bergen. It does not reach Voss properly before 1838, although Nils Røthe and wife had emigrated from there in 1836. In 1837, as we have seen, the first emigrant ship, the Aegir, left Bergen with eighty-four passengers. Before 1839 we meet with occasional individual emigration from provinces to the east and northeast. Thus Ole Rynning and Snaasen in Trondhjem Diocese emigrated in the Aegir in 1837. The first emigrants from Telemarken also came in 1837. As we have seen above, 1837 is also the year which records the first immigration from Numedal. Among the emigrants from other parts of Norway prior to

1837 must be mentioned also Johan Nordboe, from Ringebo in Guldbrandsdalen, who came in 1832 and resided for some time in Kendall, New York, later going to Texas, and Hans Barlien from Trondhjem County, who came to La Salle County in 1837. Neither of these two men, however, were instrumental in bringing about any emigration movement in Gudbrandsdalen and Trondhjem. It is not until a much later period that these two districts are represented in considerable numbers among emigrants.

It is the year 1839 in which emigration on a larger scale takes its beginnings. Similarly, the year 1839 marks a change also in the movement of the course of settlement. Down to this time all emigration from Norway stands in direct relation to the movement which began in Stavanger in 1825, and which in the years 1834–36 resulted in the formation of the Fox River Settlement in La Salle County, Illinois. This settlement then became the center of dispersion for what may be called the southern line of settlements. All through the forties and the fifties the southern course of migration westward, which includes southern and central Iowa, stands in direct relation to early Norwegian colonization in New York and Illinois,—that is the first period of Norwegian emigration from the provinces of Stavanger and South Bergenhus (and this province only as far north as Bergen, Voss being excluded) in Southwestern Norway. In 1839 the first settlements are formed in Wisconsin on the shores of Lake Muskego in Waukesha County, and in Rock County; and in 1839–40 that of Koshkonong in Dane and Jefferson Counties. These settlements then became a northern point of dispersion. From here we have a second northern line of settlement westward and northwestward into Northern Iowa, Minnesota, and the more northerly localities of Wisconsin.