

The Settling of Koshkonong by Immigrants from Numedal and Stavanger in 1840. Other Accessions in 1841–1842.

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)

Among the immigrants who came from Rollaug, Numedal, in 1839, was Gunnul Olson Vindeig, though, as we have seen, he did not come in Nattestad's party. Through the illness of a child he was prevented from emigrating with Nattestad, as he had intended. Coming later in the year, he went via Chicago, directly to Jefferson Prairie, where he remained during the winter. In the early spring of 1840, about the time our Vossings, spoken of above, are moving north to locate on their claims, Vindeig built or bought a boat at Beloit, and this being ready, he, with a companion, Gjermund Knudson Sunde, rowed north along the Rock River, up Koshkonong Lake and Koshkonong Creek, into the Town of Christiana.

That the journey should have been made in a boat up Rock River against the stream, may sound like a legend; why not have walked this comparatively short distance (about forty miles), just as Gilderhus and party had walked the much longer distance from La Salle County? The Norwegian pioneers were good walkers and seem to have loved walking. Vindeig evidently did not. That he actually navigated up stream I take, however, not to be merely a local or family legend, for it is vouched for by his subsequent neighbors and comes down to us on good authority. I myself visited Ole Gunnulson, Vindeig's son, who is still residing on the old homestead, last August (1908), and also received his confirmation of the route his father took in the spring of 1840. Lars Lier, a neighbor of Ole Gunnulson, is cited by Prof. R. B. Anderson as having been told by Gjermund Sunde himself, that they had tied the boat a little below the Anikstad ford, where the Funkeli bridge was afterwards built. Evidence comes also from some of the oldest pioneers of the locality, as Halvor Kravik and Jens P. Vehus.

Gunnul Vindeig and Sunde returned soon after to Beloit, as they had come, by way of the Rock River. Thereupon Vindeig, with his wife, Guri, and two sisters, moved from Jefferson Prairie via Milton, to Koshkonong, driving in a covered wagon, and proceeded to take possession of the land he had selected. He soon had erected a cottage of one room, with an attic accessible by ladder.[134] The land which Vindeig located on is the south half of the northwest quarter of section thirty-four. There he lived until his untimely death by accident in October, 1846.[135]

Gjermund Sunde selected forty acres of land directly north of Vindeig's home, which he later, however, sold to Ole Lier. The land which Vindeig purchased was recorded in the land office at Milwaukee on May twenty-second, 1840, just sixteen days after the purchase by Gilderhus and Bolstad was recorded. There has been much discussion as to whether the Vossing party or Vindeig built the first house in the Town of Christiana. Our first group of settlers had selected

their land the fall before and came north in April, 1840. We have seen that the large log-cabin they constructed was hastily and poorly built. I assume that either they all together, erected this immediately upon arriving and taking possession of their claims in 1840; or else, the hewing of timber and the erecting of the cabin was begun by the two who remained, while Gilderhus and his companion went to Milwaukee to file their claims. It might then have been built at the close of April, or more probably, the beginning of May. Now Vindeig's purchase was recorded May twenty-second; but as he seems to have gone direct from Jefferson Prairie to Koshkonong, he evidently had built his cottage and shelter for the family before he started for Milwaukee. There can, therefore, have been very little difference in time between the two. Absolute proof of the priority of either, it is not possible to obtain, it seems to me, but I am inclined to think the cottage erected by Gilderhus, Bolstad, and party, was the first.

Let us now turn to our third group of settlers, most of them immigrants from Stavanger, who were living in La Salle County. These four men were Thorsten Olson Bjaaland, Amund Anderson Hornefeld, Björn Anderson Kvelve, and Lars Olson Dugstad. The first of these—Bjaaland—had come in the sloop in 1825; he is the only sloopster who came to Wisconsin, and the last of that party whom we shall meet in our excursion down through the years of immigration. The second of this group was also from the Province of Stavanger, being born on the Island of Moster in 1806. We have seen that he came to America in 1836, and that he had settled in La Salle County, where he lived for four years. The third member of the party, Björn Kvelve, we have also met with among the arrivals of 1836; he had been living mostly in Chicago and La Salle County. He had come from Vikedal Parish in Ryfylke. Three other men, Erick Johanneson Savik, Lars Scheie, and Amund Anderson Rossaland, intimate friends of Kvelve, were of the party, but these did not settle on Koshkonong.

In the spring of 1840, these seven men decided to go north in search of homesteads.[136] From Gilderhus and Bolstad they had received information of Koshkonong and they decided also to go there and inspect the locality. About the middle of May, I take it, they started on foot for Wisconsin. The way led by Shabbona Grove, in De Kalb County, through Rockford, Beloit, Janesville, and Milton. They crossed the Rock River at Goodrich's Ferry, now Newville, then pushed on until they reached the southern line of Dane County, stopping in the Town of Albion, near Koshkonong Creek,[137] and about four miles north, slightly by east, of Lake Koshkonong. Here they found country that suited them in every way. Björn Kvelve is said to have exclaimed: "This is indeed the Land of Canaan!" Here woods were plentiful, the soil was rich, a vigorous winding stream teeming with fish, ran near by, and not far off there was a large lake.

We see that the Stavangerings, as the Vossings, looked for wood and water; they did not realize the superior advantages of the prairie, and that it would yield much quicker returns for their labor. And yet there was good reason for their choice, and we shall find that quite often the early Norwegian pioneers located in a woodland tract near a stream or a lake. It was undoubtedly an inducement to build near a wood, where the timber for the usual log-cabin was

near at hand, and it was highly desirable to locate within access of that primary necessity of life, water. In this region, then, our party selected land. Amund Hornefeld chose the east half of the southeast quarter of section one,[138] and Björn Kvelve, the west half of the same quarter section.

Thorsten Bjaaland chose eighty acres immediately north of Kvelve's, consequently in section two, while Lars Dugstad took the east half of the southwest quarter of section one. Having made these selections,[139] they walked to Milwaukee to file their claims and perfect their purchase.[140] This is recorded at the land office under date of June twenty-second, 1840, just one month, therefore, after entry was made of Vindeig's claim in section thirty-four in Christiana, the next township and section north. Amund Rossaland selected a piece of land near that of Björn Kvelve, but he was later informed that it had already been taken;[141] so Rossaland did not settle on Koshkonong, but went to Jefferson Prairie, as did also Lars Scheie, thence again elsewhere.

The whole party then returned to La Salle County, Illinois, and did not move to Albion Township and take possession of their land before the spring of 1841. Erik Savik became ill upon their return to La Salle County when he was asked if he, too, didn't wish to go along to Milwaukee and purchase land, he answered: "I think I can get a bit of ground here from Ole Middlepeint." [142] His prophecy proved true, for he died there in June, 1840. Erik Johanneson Savik and wife, Ingeborg, had emigrated from Kvindherred in 1836, locating in Rochester, New York. A son, John, was born to them there in December, 1836. The following year they seem to have removed to La Salle County, Illinois. Their daughter, Anne Berthe, was born there in November, 1838.

Early in the spring, Kvelve and Bjaaland moved to Koshkonong with their families, following the same route they had taken before. Bjaaland drove a yoke of oxen, and Kvelve a yoke of black steers, which were not yet broke, says Arnold A. Anderson, oldest son of Kvelve, and who was in the party; both teams were hitched to a wagon owned by Kvelve. Kvelve's family consisted, at the time, of wife and four children, two daughters having been born since the arrival in America in 1836.[143] Thorsten Bjaaland (born in 1795 in Haa Parish, about thirty [American] miles south of Stavanger, Norway) was still unmarried when he came to Dane County, as was also Lars Dugstad. The latter evidently came north from La Salle County about the same time as Kvelve and Bjaaland. Amund Hornefeld married Ingeborg Johnson, widow of Erik Savik, in La Salle County, in June, 1841, and he, with wife and her two children, came north to Albion a few weeks later.

It was, therefore, just twelve persons who located in northeastern Albion Township that spring. The Hornefeld family moved directly into the shanty Amund had built before leaving in 1840. Dugstad made a dugout on the side of a hill near the creek, in which he continued to live till 1855, when he married and moved into a large log-house. Björn Kvelve erected a log-house on

his farm immediately upon arriving in 1841, the logs having been cut by men engaged to do so, during the winter of 1840–41. These men were Lars Kvendalen and Knut Olson Vindeig. We shall now pass to the account of their arrival, and that of others who came in 1840–41.