

The Fox River Settlement in Illinois

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)

The Founding of the Fox River Settlement. Personal Notes on Some of the Founders.

In the spring of 1834 Jacob Anderson Slogvig, Knud Anderson Slogvig, Gudmund Haugaas, Thorsten Olson Bjaaland, Nels Thompson,[31] Andrew (Endre) Dahl, and Kleng Peerson left for La Salle County; they became, therefore, as far as we know, the first Norwegian settlers in Illinois, and indeed in the Northwest, barring Ingebret Narvig, who had located in Michigan the year before. These men selected their land and perfected their purchase as soon as it came into market the following spring. The first two to buy land were Jacob Slogvig and Gudmund Haugaas, whose purchase is recorded under June fifteenth, 1835, the former of eighty acres, the latter one hundred and sixty acres, both in that part of what was then called Mission Township, but later came to be Rutland. On June seventeenth, Kleng Peerson's purchase of eighty acres is recorded, as also that of his sister, Carrie Nelson, widow of Cornelius Nelson Hersdal, namely, eighty acres of land bought for her by Peerson. For this date are also recorded the purchases of Thorsten Olson Bjaaland, eighty acres, Nels Thompson, one hundred and sixty acres, in what later became Miller Township.

In 1835 Daniel Rossadal and family, Nels Nelson Hersdal, George Johnson, and Carrie Nelson Hersdal with family of seven children moved to La Salle County. Nels Hersdal secured six hundred and forty acres in exchange for one hundred acres he owned in Orleans County, New York. The sloop *Thomas Madland*, as we have seen, died in 1826; his widow and family of seven also moved to Illinois in 1831. Gjert Hovland came in 1835, and on June seventeenth purchased one hundred and sixty acres of land in Miller Township. Nels Hersdal purchased on September fifth Thorsten Bjaaland's eighty acres in the same township; the latter, however, bought a hundred and sixty acres again on January sixteenth, 1836, in the same locality. The record of these purchases was copied by R. B. Anderson and printed in his book, First Chapter, etc., cited above and also in Strand's History of the Norwegians of Illinois, page 75.

Knud Slogvig, who, as we see, came in 1834, did not buy land but somewhat later returned east and in 1835 went back to Norway. There he married a sister of the sloop *Ole Olson Hetletvedt* and, as we shall have occasion to note under causes of emigration, became largely instrumental in bringing about the emigration of 1836. Baldwin's History of La Salle County also states, page 74, that Oliver Canuteson,[32] Oliver Knutson,[32] Christian Olson, and Ole Olson Hetletvedt came to the county in 1834, but the date seems to be uncertain. With regard to Christian Olson the fact seems rather to be that he came in 1836 or possibly not till 1837, while also Hetletvedt seems to be dated about two years too early here. Among those who came in 1836 according to apparently reliable records are: Ole Olson Hetletvedt and Gudmund

Sandsberg.

Relative to the founders of the Fox River Settlement, as that of La Salle County came to be called, I wish to add here the following facts of personal history: Gudmund Haugaas, one of the two first to record the purchase of land, had married Julia, the daughter of Thomas Madland, in Orleans County in 1827. She died in Rutland Township, La Salle County, in 1846 and he later married Caroline Hervig, a sister of Henrik Hervig (Harwick). He had ten children by his first wife. In Illinois he joined the Mormon Church and became an elder in that church, practicing medicine at the same time, and, it is said, with much success. He died of the cholera on the homestead near Norway in July, 1849; his widow, Caroline, survived him three years.[33]

Jacob Slogvig married Serena, daughter of Thomas Madland, in March, 1831. He became one of the founders of the Norwegian settlement in Lee County, Iowa, in 1840 (see below), later went to California, where he died in May, 1864. The widow lived until about 1897. Some time before her death she had been living at the home of her son, Andrew J. Anderson, at San Diego, California.

Mrs. Carrie Nelson had seven children, of whom Anne, Nels, Inger, and Martha were born in Norway; Sarah, Peter, and Amelia were born at Kendall, New York. Carrie Nelson died in 1848. The son, Nels Nelson, born 1816, married Catherine Iverson about 1840; he died in Sheridan, Illinois, in August, 1893, as the last male member of the sloop party, being survived by his widow and four of twelve children. The daughter Inger was in 1836 married to John S. Mitchell, of Ottawa, Illinois; Martha married Beach Fallows, a settler of 1835, and Sarah married in 1849 Canute Marsett, an immigrant of 1837, who some years later became a Mormon bishop at Ephraim, Utah. Their oldest son, Peter Cornelius Marsett, born at Salt Lake City June second, 1850, was the first child born of Norwegian parents in Utah.[34] Peter C. Nelson, the youngest son of Carrie Nelson, born 1830, later settled in Larned, Kansas, where he died in 1904. Sara Thompson, oldest daughter of Öien Thompson, and born 1818, married George Olmstead in 1857 in La Salle County; he died in 1849, and in 1855 she married William W. Richey. Mrs. Richey settled in Guthrie Center, Iowa, in 1882, where she lived until recently. Benson C. Olmsted, Charles B. Olmsted and Will F. Richey of Guthrie Center, Iowa, are sons of Mrs. Sara Richey. Nels Thompson died in La Salle County, Illinois, in July, 1863. Daniel Rossadal and his wife, Bertha, both died in La Salle County in 1854. Nels Nelson Hersdal was born in July, 1800, and his wife, Bertha, in May, 1804; they were married a few months before the departure of the sloop. He, "Big Nels", as he was called, came to Illinois in 1835, returned to New York and did not bring his family to Illinois until 1846, though he moved west before. He lived until 1886, his wife having died in 1882. Peter Nelson and Ira Nelson of La Salle County, are their sons. George Johnson died from cholera in 1849.

Andrew Dahl went to Utah in the fifties, being one of the earliest pioneers of that state. A son of his, A. S. Anderson, was a member of the Utah Constitutional Convention in 1895. Ole

Hetletvedt, who located at Niagara Falls, not therefore in Orleans County, had three sons, Porter C., Sören L. and James W. The first of these, born 1831, became captain and later colonel in Company F, 36th Regiment, Illinois Volunteers, in the War of the Rebellion, and was Acting Brigadier General when he was killed in the Battle of Franklin (Tenn.). Sören Olson was killed in the Battle of Murfreesboro. James Olson, who also went to the front, lived to return to his home after the war. Porter Olson lies buried at Newark, Illinois, where a fitting monument adorns his grave. Finally I wish to add that Margaret Allen, the "sloop girl" born on the Atlantic, daughter of Lars Larson, married John Atwater in Rochester, New York, in 1857. They afterwards moved to Chicago, where he died in the early nineties, while Mrs. Atwater is, I believe, still living at Western Springs, Cook County. We shall now return to our settlement in La Salle County.

We have given above a brief account of the founding of the Fox River settlement. Out of that nucleus of about thirty persons, whom we know to have come there in 1834–35 grew up one of the largest and most prosperous of rural communities in the country. The settlement developed rapidly, before many years extending into Kendall, Grundy and DeKalb counties and becoming a distributing point in the westward march of Norwegian immigration during the following years. The settlement in Orleans County, New York, ceased to grow, the objective point of immigrants from Norway had been changed and the Fox River region received large accessions, especially during the year 1836.

Immigration from Norway which heretofore had been more or less sporadic, in which individuals and very small groups are found to take part, now enters upon a new phase, begins in fact to assume the form of organized effort. The year 1836 inaugurated this change, while in 1837 there was something approaching an exodus from certain localities in Western Norway. The desire to emigrate to America had also now spread far beyond the original center, at Stavanger; the source of emigration was transferred to a more northerly region and with it, as we have had occasion to observe above, the course of settlement in this country is not only directed to a more westerly region, Illinois, but also soon extends into the northern border counties of Illinois and into southern and southeastern Wisconsin.

As this increased immigration is historically associated with the names of two of those whom we have already met as pioneers in New York, New Jersey and Illinois, a brief account of their share in the promotion of immigration from Norway will be in place. These two are Gjert Hovland and Knud Slogvig. We have seen that the former of these came to America in 1831, being probably the first immigrant from Hardanger. His name deserves special mention as an early promoter of emigration from southwestern Norway, especially from his own province. He was a man of much enlightenment and liberalmindedness to whom America's free institutions made a strong appeal. He wrote letters home to friends urging emigration and these were circulated far and wide. In one of these letters from Morris County, New Jersey, 1835, he writes enthusiastically of American laws, and he contrasts its spirit of liberty with the oppressions of

the class aristocracy in Norway. He advised all who could do so to come to America, where it was permitted to settle wherever one chose, he says. Hovland was well known in several parishes in the Province of South Bergenhus, and hundreds of copies of his letters were circulated there; they aroused the greatest interest among the people and were no small factor in leading many in that region to emigrate in 1836–37.

Thus it may be noted specifically that in 1836 a lay preacher travelling in Voss had in his possession one of Gjert Hovland's letters, which letter was read by Nils Røthe, Nils Bolstad and John H. Björge and others. These three since said that it was the reading of Hovland's letter which induced them to immigrate.[35] Gjert Hovland, as we have seen, came to Illinois in 1835. His purchase of one hundred and sixty acres of land in the present Miller Township was recorded on June seventeenth of that year, the same date that the purchases of Kleng Peerson, Nels Thompson and Thorsten Bjaaland were recorded. Gjert Hovland lived there till his death in 1870.

The other name, that I referred to, is that of Knud Anderson Slogvig, who undoubtedly was the chief promoter of immigration in 1836. He had come in the sloop in 1825, and, as we have seen, settled in La Salle County in 1834. In 1835 he returned to Skjold, Norway, and there married a sister of Ole O. Hetletvedt, the sloopster whom we find as one of the early pioneers of La Salle County. While there, people came to talk with him about America from all parts of southwestern Norway; and a large number in and about Stavanger decided to emigrate. Slogvig's return may be said to have started the "America-fever" in Norway, though it took some years before it reached the central and the eastern parts of the country. It was his intention to return to America in 1836, and a large party was preparing to emigrate with him.

In the spring of that year the two brigs, Norden and Den Norske Klippe, were fitted out from Stavanger. The former sailed on the first Wednesday after Pentecost, arriving in New York July twelfth, 1836. The latter sailed a few weeks later. They carried altogether two hundred immigrants, most of whom went directly to La Salle County. Of these two brigs I shall speak again in a subsequent chapter.

I have above given some of the facts of Knud Slogvig's personal history. Having already spoken of one element in the cause of emigration I believe it will be in place to give a fuller account at this point of the various general and special factors that have been instrumental in bringing about the coming to America of such a large part of the population of Norway in the 19th century.