

THE SULDAL NORWEGIAN SETTLEMENT IN JUNEAU COUNTY

BY

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Hjalmer Holand wrote in 1908, "*All the blue-tinted hills which a person sees to the south of Camp Douglas, New Lisbon and Mauston are crawling with Norwegians. The settlement includes some 500 people from Upper Telemark and 1200 from around Suldal in Rogaland.*" Although the connection with Suldal Township in Rogaland County in western Norway began in 1850, Ole Gjermundson Tveit from Upper Telemark, Norway must be considered the actual founder of Norwegian settlement in Juneau County.

A bachelor, he had come to Maughs Mill (Mauston) from the Norwegian settlement called Koshkonong to work in the sawmill for Milton M. Maughs. In his spare time, Ole explored the surrounding countryside looking for good land. During his rambles, he found an uncommonly beautiful valley a few miles west of Mauston. The valley was nearly round in shape, level, and protected against weather on all sides.

Tveit informed his acquaintances at Koshkonong of his discovery. The Koshkonong Prairie Settlement had been established in 1840 and took its name from Lake Koshkonong Lake and Creek. The lake is located in Jefferson County at the point where Dane, Jefferson and Rock counties meet. The most important and prosperous of the Wisconsin Norwegian-American settlements, its name was applied to a general region that extended a considerable distance from Lake Koshkonong and included the southeastern portion of Dane County, the southwestern part of Jefferson County, and the northern part of Rock County. The region actually consisted of smaller settlements separated by short distances from each other. By 1850, Koshkonong had a population of 2,670 Norwegians. Tveit was a member of the Norwegian settlement near Sun Prairie in Dane County, Wisconsin which had been settled by immigrants from Telemark, Norway in 1843. Ole, the son of Gjermund Torjusson Tveit and Anne Rasmusdatter, was born in Laardal Township, Telemark County, Norway in 1818. He emigrated to the United States in 1846.

In the spring of 1850, Ole returned with Nils Bjornson Farastad and Ole Johnson Magnushommen, brothers-in-law who were also from Upper Telemark. They took up claims in present Lindina Township about five miles southwest of Mauston. After breaking up some land and making hay for the winter, they returned to Dane County for their families.

According to Joseph Hanson in his *History of Juneau County*, Ole Johnson seemed to have the idea that he wanted the whole country because he broke up land in several places. When they returned that autumn, Knut Ormson Mo from Suldal Township, Rogaland County, Norway and Knut Mikkelson (a distant cousin of Knut Ormson) from Roldal Township, in neighboring Hordaland County, Norway came with them. They built their log houses and made a permanent settlement that autumn. (Mauston *Star*, June 2, 1887, p. 1.)

Most of the low land in both North and South Valley was under water so they went out into the bluffs that reminded them of their homeland. Nils Bjornson (Benson) was the oldest so he had first choice of land. He took land in section 5 across the road from the present Suldal Cemetery. Knut Ormson chose the land which is now the Riley farm near the junction of the present Suldal and Felland roads because the soil was black as far as he could thrust his knife and in the creek was a spring that he called the "water of life". Ole Gjermundson said he would take the land in between where Allie Peterson now lives. The 1857 tax rolls for Lindina Township show that Ole Johnson owned land in sections 4, 5, and 9.

Knudt Mikkelson settled in section 6 on what later became the Nelson and Steen farms. His brother Andres lived with him and his family.

In the fall of 1852, Helge Oleson Boen from Telemark County, Norway settled in the northern part of Plymouth township and at the same time Knut Knutson Oland settled in the southern part of Fountain township. John Halvorsen settled on a farm adjoining Knudt Ormson in section 9. Lavrens Augenson Odegaarden from Vinje Township in Telemark County also came in 1852. Lavrens' sister, Margit, was the wife of Ole Johnson Magnushommen.

Knut Ormson was the beginning of the connection between Suldal, Norway and Juneau County, Wisconsin. Gunder Johnson Braatveit, who emigrated from Suldal in 1852, came to Lindina Township in 1853. He stopped first with Odd Larson's father, Lars Olson Osteraa, another immigrant from Suldal (November 1849), for a short time in Dane County, Wisconsin. While there he learned about the Lemonweir Settlement through Nils Bjornson whom Lars Olson had bought out prior to Bjornson's coming here. In 1855, Lars Olson and his family came to Juneau County (Hanson *History of Juneau County*).

By 1854, the small community had grown to 12 families and 43 individuals. On May 22, 1854, John Halvorsen, Knud Ormson, Ole Johnson, Nils Bjornson, Gunder Johansen, Laurans Augondsen, and Andres Mikelsen sent a letter to Pastor H. A. Preus of Spring Prairie in Dane County, Wisconsin asking for a visit by a Norwegian clergyman once or twice a year. They wrote him that they were located twenty miles

northwest of the Dells bridge in Lisbon Township, Adams County. They had begun to build a schoolhouse and had chosen the location of a churchyard which they wanted to have dedicated.

Herman Amberg Preus was born on June 16, 1825 in Kristiansand, Norway. His grandfather was a Lutheran clergyman; his father, a college president; and his mother, a member of the prominent Keyser family. He attended the University of Norway from 1843 to 1848, receiving the degree of A.B. in 1843, and that of candidate of theology in 1848. In 1851, he accepted a call as pastor from three churches in the vicinity of Spring Prairie located in both Dane and Columbia counties, Wisconsin and was ordained before leaving for the New World. Upon his arrival at Spring Prairie there were no church buildings, and he had to enter upon his work as a minister by preaching in small log cabins. Being a hard worker, Preus soon extended his field of activity far beyond his original charge. He often would preach at places over one hundred miles from his home. During this pioneer period, Preus preached once or twice every day, or at least once every other day.

Preus came the first time on July 25, 1854 and held church services in the home of Nils Bjornson. There was no bridge across Brewer Creek and Preus had to be carried across. Knut Ormson guarded the minister's horses and buggy during the night to prevent them from being stolen by the Indians.

At the bottom of the letter from the congregation, Pastor Preus made notations concerning part of the distance from Spring Prairie to Lemonweir: 12 miles from Kingsbery's Tavern ? no road and 10 miles from Rodgers Mill ? is road. On Sunday, he held services in Roche a Cree, on Monday, he made the trip to Lemonweir, and on Tuesday, he held the first church services. On his return trip, Preus stopped and held services on Thursday at the Moe Settlement (Newport, Sauk County). On Friday, he journeyed to Portage where he held services at 11 o'clock. On Saturday, he returned to Spring Prairie.

Suldal

Eventually the entire Norwegian settlement in southern Juneau County became known as Suldal. Einer Haugen described it in 1952 as " a small settlement mostly comprised with the triangle formed by the villages of Elroy, Mauston, and New Lisbon, in the townships of Lisbon, Lindina, and especially Plymouth. Plymouth church, 5 miles west of Mauston, is known in everyday speech as 'Suldal,' because the overwhelming majority of the members came from that place in Norway. Other dialects seem to have been displaced by this one. The youngest generation does not speak Norwegian, but in the middle and oldest generation there are many who can and do. There are 8 Lutheran congregations in the area, divided among 3 pastors; very few Norwegian

services are now held. There has been much intermarriage with neighboring Germans. Grain and tobacco are chief crops." (Haugen, Einer, *The Norwegian Language in America*, vol. 2, pp. 611?12).

A few more families came to Lindina during the 1850's: 1852 - Gunder Johnson Bratveit and family; 1855 - Gabriel Oddson Tornes, Lars Olson Austara and family; 1857 ? Askild Jacobson Mokliev and family; and 1858 - Gabriel Johnson Lunde and family.

During the Civil War era, a significant number of families from Suldal came to Juneau County. Some of those who have been identified with their dates of emigration include: 1860/1 ? John Johnson Lunde and family; 1861 - Gabriel Haavorson Veka and family, Nels Nelson Steinbru and family, and Jon Tormodson Quammen; 1862 - Even Evenson Austara and family, Halvor Halvorson Veka, Ole Nelson Kleiva and family, Bjedne Eivindson Austara and family; 1863 - Ole Halvorson Kolbeinstveit and family, and Marta Nelson.

In 1864, Lars Bakken Guggedal, a former school teacher, led a party of 50 people from Suldal. He was an all-around man, good at composing verse and with a joyful disposition. Snatches of songs he wrote could still be heard in Suldal in 1908. The group included - Lars Osmundson Guggedal and family, Halvor Halvorson Steinbru, Tormod Albertson Oystad Hauen and family, Albert Johnson Kjetilstad, Ole Halvorson Kalhagen, Lars Thorsen Mogleiv and family, widow Kari Nelson and family, Nels Olson, widow Ingeborg Ormson, Odd Oddson Stuv, Osmund Vintrhus, and Bjedne Vintrhus and family. They came on the ship or ships Hebe and Eris to Quebec. Traveling from there to Chicago. They were settled in Juneau County by June of 1864.

Other emigrants were: 1867 - Tjerand Paulson Kolbeinstveit and family; 1868 - Johannes Ormson and family; and 1869 - Albert Larson Lofthus and family, and Lars Lofthus.

In 1872, Kari Tjerandsdtr. Overskeid, the widow of Lars Albertson Moe, left Suldal and settled in Elroy. Together with her sons, Tjerand, Lars, and Ole, Kari operated a country store in Elroy. They also had an agency for an immigration line, Norge ? USA. Many of the Juneau County Norwegians from Suldal bought tickets from Kari's agency and sent them to relatives in Suldal. When these people emigrated, it was natural for them to find lodging in Kari's inn. The Moe home in Elroy, became, therefore, in the last quarter of the 19th century something of a center for immigrants from Suldal.

Knut Hamsun, an eventual recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature, came to Elroy, Wisconsin in about February of 1882 where his brother Peter lived. Upon his arrival Knut worked briefly at the Moe family store. Knut, after spending the summer working for farmers named Loveland and Spear, returned to Elroy. He went to work for Edmund Hart and soon became a clerk in Hart's store. He lived in the Northwestern Railways Hotel, for a year, sharing a room on the top floor with William T. Ager, a grade school teacher in Elroy. Henry M. Johnston, the high school principal, taught him English. Svend Tveraas, a local farmer, was a friend. Knut began giving lectures on the Norwegian writer, Bjornstjerne Bjornson and made an enemy of Pastor M. P. Ruh. Ruh warned people against attending Hamsun's lectures defending Bjornson because of Bjornson's attack on Christianity and the established church. In late 1883, Knut moved on to Minnesota.

Gunder Johnson Braatvedt from Suldal was described by Hjalmar Holand as an influential man called the Norwegian king, patriarch and philosopher. Genial and talkative, he was also a clever lawyer for the newcomers. In those days, it was common to set up a shop at election time where whiskey was served free to several hundred voters. But Gunder and his people refused to be taken in by these blandishments. Said he, "Yes, we will drink your whiskey and smoke your cigars, but we will vote as we please." This became a favorite saying in the community.

In 1892 George Winsor of Wonewoc, who married a daughter of Jess Winsor, built a cheese factory in section 7 at the crossroads of Suldal and Johnson roads. Seymour Ranney made cheese the first year. Two kinds of cheese were made, chiefly American. When the corn was growing, they squeezed juice from the green leaves and added to the cheese to speckle it green.

By 1898 there was a feed mill, Winsor's North Valley Creamery, a store, and post office. The feed mill stood in Ed Johnson's marsh by a big spring in the creek. It was run by William Nelson and Will Felland. Minas Anason helped them many nights when they were so busy that they had to run night and day. Nelson and Felland charged by the sack to grind the feed. A favorite story is told about Hagen who brought in a big wool sack half full of grain. To get back at him, Nelson got into the sack and tramped it clear full of feed until it weighed about 1,200 pounds. They rolled it onto the wagon so that Hagen had to unload it when he got home.

Minas Anason helped build the store when he was about 17 or 18. Theodore Felland, Anason, and his half-brother Ole G. Johnson ran the store. They sold groceries, common dry goods, coonskin coats, and took orders for suits. They had lots of trade.

The name Suldal was given to the community when a post office was established in the store. When they couldn't decide on a name for the post office, Tveit wanted

Felland or Moe, Pastor C. Schrive suggested "Suldal." They all agreed. The post office only existed from 1898 to 1901. Theodore O. Felland was the first postmaster.

To the west there was a log school house where the Norwegian school house now stands. Jacob Quamme, the father of Lars, was teacher and precenter for the East and West Lemonweir congregations for 22 years beginning in 1882.

An agreement had been made by George Winsor and the farmers to stick together. Later he sold out to the Elgin Creamery Company (a sort of chain company) and moved out in the night to Hustler. Minas Anason met him that night while coming home from a courting trip. The store and creamery were discontinued in the 1920's. The creamery was torn down and the store moved across the road and made into a house.

By 1908, considerable tobacco was being raised by the Norwegians in Juneau County. Felland and Nevstvedt were the first to try tobacco growing and the crop brought considerable prosperity to the farmers.

Today, the Suldal name is commemorated by Suldal Road and the Suldal Cemetery in Lindina Township. Tilmer Roalkvam of Elroy is said to be the last to speak the old Suldal dialect. The dialect has been lost in Norway.