

Biography of C. P. Bolkan

--Dorcas Bolkan, *d. of Freeman Bolkan*
Written 1928

C. P. Bolkan, early settler and pioneer of Griggs County, was born in 1854 near Trondhjem, Norway. In 1866 he came with his parents to America where they settled in Rock County, Wisconsin, about 25 miles south of Madison.

For nine years they resided here, until Mr. Bolkan moved to Iowa where his folks had gone a couple of years before. He stayed here five years, until 1880 when he came to North Dakota. Besides himself, he had two companions, John Dahl and Ole Havvick. They travelled by railroad to Fargo and then took a steamboat up to Caledonia, a small town one and a half miles from the Red River. In those days, Caledonia, although only having a few families, was the county seat of Trail County. Trail County, then, included Griggs and Steele too.

As there were no branches off the main railroad running through Fargo to Bismarck, the three men were forced to walk from Caledonia to the Sheyenne Valley, which was their destination. This distance was about sixty miles.

The country was thinly settled all over and on this side of what is now Portland, there were practically no inhabitants. In one instance, the men passed the last settler's shanty about noon and were forced to sleep out on the prairies. It was the last part of April and the ground was wet and slushy for there had just been a fierce snow storm. Besides, they had no blankets or overcoats, so altogether they spent a very disagreeable night. The next morning they set out on foot again and reached the hills of the Sheyenne Valley at about the place where the Arneson home east of Finley now is. However, they did not believe that they had reached The Sheyenne River, for they had been told that the country was very hilly and also that the timber was very thick. They soon met two men, though, and they were informed that they had reached their destination and that they were only one mile and a half from Mr. Opheim's claim, he being the first settler in the Sheyenne Valley.

The next thing these men did was to take out claims. Of course, the land was not surveyed so the only way by which they could have the land was to stay and live on it. All three of the men decided to stay and Mr. Bolkan took out his claim on Section 34 in Washburn Township or on the place where Chester Piatt now has his farm. In 1881 the land was surveyed and the claims officially recorded so after a couple of years the land was proved and Mr. Bolkan went out working during the summer and fall months. As there was very little work to be obtained around here, he went to farms around Valley City and Casselton.

In 1884 Mr. Bolkan was married to Pauline Spelde, one of the first schoolteachers around here. They have had nine sons, all of whom are living except one. They are: Rudolph, Freeman, Edwin, George, Alfred, Albert, Carl, and Peter.

The Bolkan family lived in several places before moving into the city of Cooperstown where they still reside. They came in here in 1907.

Biography of C. P. Bolkan
--Dorcas Bolkan

Mr. and Mrs. Bolkan had five sons in the service during the World War. George, Edwin and Alfred were overseas and Carl And Albert in training here in the United States.

At the present time Mr. Bolkan is 74 years of age.

C. P. Bolkan

Christopher P. Bolkan was the son of Peter and Annie Bolkan who were born and married in Norway — at Stordalen, Northern Trondhjem. In 1866 Mr. & Mrs. Peter Bolkan with four sons and a daughter ~~arrived~~ ^{came} to Oxfordville Wisconsin, and in 1873 he moved to North County Iowa and bought land there. Christopher (1854-1945) with John Dahl and Ole Havik came to Washburn Township in April 1880, looking for land. He selected his land on Sec. 34-146-58, in the Sheyenne River valley, and had a house and breaking when the surveyors came in July 1881.

In the winter of 1881-2 he taught a term of school for some children of pioneers in the Sheyenne River valley, before any formal school was organized in Griggs County. His pay was breakly done for him by the parents of his pupils.

In 1884 C. P. Bolkan married Pauline (Lena) Spilde (1861-1930) she was the daughter of Paul Spilde of Dakorah Iowa, and a sister of Mrs. ~~Dr~~ Iver Seim.

To them were born eight sons. Of these, Willie died at 7, six served in W.W.I, Edwin is employed in the Griggs County court house, and 7 are living (1957)

Mr. Bolkan represented the 16th Legislative District in the first Legislative Session after North Dakota became a state.

Mrs. Porterville

INCIDENTS of early GRIGGS COUNTY

When I came here in the spring of 1880 there was only the Opheim family that had spent the river in the valley, except a pair of hunters, Mr. and Mrs. Durban, who made their home about 10 miles farther up the valley, and only stayed there 2 or 3 years before they sold out. At that time there was a strip of vacant land of about 25 miles between the most westerly Goose River settlers and the Sheyenne valley and during the summer of 1880 all the people who came across the prairie from the east came to the river (Sheyenne) at the Omund Opheim place, and from there spread up and down the valley so that by fall the valley was filled a long way up into Nelson County, because they were all after water, wood and protection from the weather so there were no settlers on either side of the prairie until the spring of 1881.

As to stores I will say that Andrew Knutson started the first store in the fall of 1880 on his claim on Section 36 in the present Romness Tp., which is about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile north of the Qualey bridge on the west side of the river, which he operated about 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ years until the town of Mardell was started in the spring of 1882 on Section 13 in Washburn Tp. In this town of Mardell there were three stores, a blacksmith shop, a land office and a big hotel operated through the summer but when it was decided to vote in the fall to make Cooperstown the county seat, the town of Mardell died and some of the people moved to Hope and others to Cooperstown.

As to battlegrounds the only one I know of was located on the Ben Johnson farm north of the Opheim schoolhouse, where our pioneer road meandered between the graves for some distance but the only information I have is what Omund Opheim had gotten from a half-breed by name, Pete Grant, who with others were camping at Stump Lake in 1879 when Opheim was building his log cabin and on their way to Valley City the half-breeds stopped one night there. (at Opheim's). All that I can remember is that the fight had taken place 24 years previous to that time, which would be 1855, --that it was a fight between two bands of Indians, some may have been half-breeds, and that this Pete Grant was with one of the bands, and that he was 15 years old at the time and that he helped to take care of the ponies.

Now, it may be if you could see Nels Opheim who lives just east of the Lutheran parsonage that he could tell you more. And if you see John Johnson who lives 2 blocks east of Opheim's who helped break up the battlefield, perhaps he could tell you more. I know they found some things there.

Bibliography: Christopher Bolkan

from Hannah's notes.

Mrs. Porterville

DATA from

C.P. Bolkan----- Jan. 20, 1938

A pair of hunters and trappers, Mr. and Mrs. Du Andrew Durham, settled in the Romness neighborhood in 1879 and lived there several years before they disposed of their place, when they moved to Valley City. They even operated what was called a P.O. for a while. They lived in the woods near the river and the place is included in the Thompson farm lately.

The desirable places in the other six miles of the valley in Griggs and up thro' Nelson County was taken up pretty well during the summer of 1880. R.C. Cooper did some building and breaking and started his ranch on Section 26, Cooperstown Tp. in 1880 and somebody spent the next winter there, but possibly not the Cooper family. In 1882 when I was over there for the first time the Cooper family was living on section 34 about three-fourths mile S.W. of the ranch where they resided for many years before moving into town. As I have been told many of his hired men proved up on pre-emptions and turned them over to Cooper Brothers, so perhaps somebody claimed residence there as early as 1880. Outside of this possibility, I feel sure there were no settlers except those in the valley.

(Additional data)

(John Hanson Engen came to Washburn Tp. in 1881.)

Sverdrup Tp. in 1880

- Arne Luckason
- John Atchison
- Alex Saunders
- Alex Chalmers
- Mathew Davidson
- E. G. Fitch - E. G. Fitch
- John Pates

(Lars Johnson came to Sverdrup in 1881).

N.B. Does Bolkan mean 6 sections or 6 miles above?

C. J.

Account of pioneer days by C. P. Bolkan
to Mrs. Claire Jackson.

When the river valley east of Cooperstown was first settled this was a part of Traill Co. In Jan. or Feb. 1881 the territorial legislature set apart about the western half of this county and called it Griggs Co. in honor of a Red River steamboat captain but it was not organized until the summer of 1882. At that time it included the present Steele Co. By fall

By fall in 1881 there were 6 or 7 families in the neighborhood who had children they wished could have a little schooling during the winter. But as there was no school organization nor teachers available they agreed among themselves to offer me the job. Though I was not prepared for a teacher I was glad to get a chance to earn my living and a little more for a while and accepted their offer and conducted what they called a school through Jan. Feb. and Mar. of 1882. Being that John Qualey had the biggest house, a two-story log cabin I think 14x16 feet with a lean to on one side. That side building was used as a school house. As I kept no record of anything I cannot give you exact information but I think there were about 15 pupils and they came from the Opheim and Johnson families on Sec 12 Township (Washburn) 146 R. 58.; the Arneson and Monson (Steele Co.) families, Sec. 6, T. 146, R. 57; John Qualey (Pommes) Sec. 36, T. 147, R. 58; Iver Seim (Steele Co) Sec 30, T. 147, R 57. There was an Olson family a little further north but I can not remember whether or not any one from there attended.

I boarded about 2 weeks with each family and the next summer they did a little breaking for me as pay. My memory is so faulty that I cannot remember all names and many have disappeared in one way or another, but there are a few left here such as Nels Arneson and it may be that his two sisters Mrs Ella bergstrom and Mrs Anna Mc Dermot now of Cooperstown also attended. I am not sure that John Johnson was one of them, but I think his two younger brothers Bernard and Carl were. Nels Qualey, Albert Monson, Mrs. Albert Monson, a Qualey girl, and Mary Seim, now Mrs Andrew Dahlin of Binford and Nels Opheim were in the bunch.

After Griggs Co. was organized about midsummer '82 there was a school district formed in the Mardell neighborhood that fall and the following winter Ole Serungard taught school in the log cabin (now standing on the Court House grounds) after the Opheim family had built their frame house.

I think the first school house in Washburn was built in '84 on or near the old Mardell town site a few rods south of the present Nels Arneson house This was used for church meetings and other gatherings for many years. One of the early traveling preachers I remember hearing was a Rev. Lundebj at the home of John Torfin on what is now a Ueland farm $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$ mile south of the bridge school house. This man traveled up and down the river countru for several years but made his permanent home in S. W. Nelson Co. where he died in the late nineties. There were one or two preachers from the Goose River settlement who visited the early Griggs settlement, but as my memory fails me so sadly, I have no name for them.

I cannot give you any information about Lars Ulven as I did not know him and only saw him when I helped take care of him 1 or 2 nights when he was sick and delirious a short time before he died. It had been decided in some way to bury him at the Opheim place and I suppose this was an agreement between his sister and the Opheims and it may be that Nels Opheim heard something about him that I didn't but I thought he would be between 30 and 40.

As the pioneer trail from the east led right to Opheims house and everybody called there I think Nels Opheim, being much younger and probably has a better memory than I, could give you a little information about those early preachers and their doings. The Opheim home is about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile due north of Marshall

There was not a great variety of amusement the first years. As horses were scarce and no roads, most of the men made skis after the first bad snowstorm in Jan 1881 and they were used a great deal for several winters. I recall one nice Sunday we gathered at the Iver Seim place and spent the afternoon at the hill where we could have long smooth slides or as steep and rough as any one dared to use them. At this time there were 11 pairs of skis and several men and boys without, and the skis were busy all the time, and when anyone wanted to rest he could just watch the others slide and fall and that was just as much fun as sliding. Some times there were dancing parties put on in the crowded cabins with always coffee, lunch, and it also was a common practice to distribute a little alcohol or other hard liquor, which was appreciated by most of the men at that time. Then when a preacher came along they would go and listen to him, so they got along just as well as they do now.

Being as Nels Opheim has lived in Washburn since 1879 until now he could probably give you a little better detailed information. I moved away from there in 1902.

C. P. Bolkan
1312, 7th St S., Fargo

P.S. Mr Opheim now resides just east of the First Lutheran Parsonage in Cooperstown.

GRIGGS COUNTY PIONEER RECALLS FLOOD

Christopher Balkan, 83-year-old Griggs County pioneer, remembers when the Cheyenne River seemed bigger than the Atlantic Ocean.

Born in Thronhjem, Norway, in 1834, Mr. Balkan made the Atlantic voyage with his parents in an old sailing vessel on rough seas. Passengers furnished bedding and cooked their own meals. Guards watched over the boat stoves so too many cooks wouldn't start a miniature civil war and spoil their respective broths. After eight weeks of sailing the boat docked at Quebec.

A tough place, the Atlantic Ocean, but a drop in the bucket contrasted with the Cheyenne River, reminisces Balkan. He remembers his first voyage on that river—an involuntary one. Andrew Knutson, a settler, hired Mr. Balkan to watch his store for several days in 1881. Before Mr. Knutson returned from a milk-buying trip into Wisconsin, the snow melted, flooding the Cheyenne valley for half a mile in some places.

One night Mr. Balkan awoke to find the store cellar flooded. What to do? He began to build a boat with store shelves and counters. Using a jack-knife and a monkey wrench he completed a box-like craft by morning. Leakage spots were plugged with shoemaker's wax. He launched the S. S. Balkan and paddled about anxiously, but the water receded, saving the store from submersion. Periodically the settlers used the boat for river crossing and capturing ^{ing} a bit of Venetian atmosphere.

Of earlier episodes ^{Mr.} Balkan remembered ferrying across Lake Michigan to Milwaukee on all night trip. People and baggage were crammed into every corner ^{so} young Christopher cradled into a barrel and defied insomnia.

The Balkans went to Janesville, Wis. where they lived for nine years, and then moved to Iowa farm. In 1860 young Balkan joined a wagon team bound for the Dakotas. On arriving he filed a claim six miles east of Cooperstown and built a log cabin. He walked 50 miles to Valley City. During the winter he trekked over the snow on horseback skills.

CHANDLER COUNTY PIONEER RECALLS FLOOD

During the winter of 1881 a two-day blizzard covered the ground with four feet of snow. A neighbor, Lars Ulven, was caught in the storm while returning to his cabin, and spent a day and a half of aimless wandering. Though neighbors thawed out his frozen feet on finding him, gangrene poisoning soon took hold. No doctors were available, and two weeks later Mr. Ulven died. He was the first pioneer to be buried in this section.

In 1884 Mr. Bolkan married Pauline Slide. Eight of their nine boys are still living. They include Rudolph of Williston, Albert of Devils Lake, Freeman of Oberon, George of Oakland, California, Carl of Fargo, Alfred of Tolna, Edwin of Cooperstown and Peter, in southern Minnesota. William died at the age of six. In 1906 Mr. Bolkan quit farming and moved to Cooperstown, serving as mail carrier before retiring.

Bibliography: Edwin Bolkan
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Judge W.H. Carleton
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Christopher Bolkan
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