

By Nels Opheim

1. It was fifty-three years ago that my father, Omund Nelson Opheim, came to Griggs County to make his home. It was the spring of 1879 that he left Decorah, Iowa in the company of Lars Brekke, Hans Seim, Colben C. Grindeland and Lars Solberg, with thoughts only of finding a new home in the Dakotas. These men are the pioneers of Griggs County.

They travelled as most all pioneers travelled, with horses and covered wagons. In St. Paul they stopped to inquire about unclaimed land with good timber. Here they were given the name of a surveyor whom they were instructed to visit upon their arrival in Fargo. This man informed them that "There was no better land in the world" than the land along the Sheyenne River. He, also, gave them a plat of this land, so they journeyed on anxiously anticipating the country where they were to make a new home for themselves and their families. In Fargo, too, they traded their horses for oxen, as this animal is much sturdier than the horse, and it is better suited to this part of the country at that time.

Upon their arrival in Valley City they proceeded south, but found all of that land taken for a distance of at least fifteen miles, so they returned to Valley City and then went north in quest of the land the surveyor had told them they would find along the Sheyenne.

No one had, as yet, settled at this particular point, but when these men saw the land they were satisfied, and they unanimously decided that this would be where they would establish their new homes.

They had ordered their mail sent to Newbergh Postoffice over on the Goose River, and this was a distance of twenty-four miles from the place they were locating on the Sheyenne. One of the party, Lars Solberg, a brother of Mrs. Opheim, decided to settle on the Goose River when he saw it, as it appealed to him although the rest were very anxious to return to the Sheyenne. The other members of the party begged and pleaded with him to come back. They pointed out the disadvantages of splitting up at this time, and what it would mean to their families, but he had fully decided that the Goose River was where he wanted to make his future home, so they returned to the Sheyenne without him.

On their return to the Sheyenne they went up the Goose River to its source and then across to the Sheyenne, following the Sheyenne to the point where they had first chosen and where Opheim built a log cabin which was undoubtedly the first home built in what is now Griggs County, and which cabin is now located on the courthouse grounds at Cooperstown. The lime used for plastering the house was obtained by burning the limestone on the premises.

After building the cabin in 1879, Opheim returned to Iowa for his family and possessions going most of the way by train, and returning in a covered wagon with his family in the fall.

Needless to say, the hardships of these pioneers of Griggs County were many, even flour was considered a luxury, and the nearest point at which it could be obtained was Grand Forks. During the winter of 1879 it took three weeks to go there and purchase it.

The crops were sowed by hand, and dragged with a home made drag. The grain was cut with a cradle and threshed with a flail. Then, in order, to separate the wheat and chaf it was necessary to throw the grain across a room. The wheat was heavier than the chaf so it would go farther and so be cleaned.,

In 1882 they had their first term of school for the children. It was held in Opheim's log house, and Mr. Ole Serungard was the first teacher.

These facts are taken chiefly from a letter written to his wife by Omund Nelson Opheim, dated Sheyenne River, August third, 1879, which letter is still in my possession.

By Nels Opheim

Omund Nilson Opheim

Born Sept. 29, 1829
Ulvik Hardanger, Norway.

Died Aug. 5, 1885
Griggs County, N. Dak.

Kari Nilson Opheim

Born Feb. 2, 1825
Ulvik Hardanger, Norway.

Died Dec. 26, 1906
Griggs County, N. Dak.

Omund Nilson Opheim came to what is now Griggs County from Iowa in the spring of 1879, settling on the land that is now the Nels Opheim farm on the Sheyenne River, east of Cooperstown, and at this time he built this log cabin which is undoubtedly the first home built in Griggs County. Later, during the same summer he returned to Iowa and came back to Griggs County by covered wagon with his family and possessions, among which were these articles of furniture in the cabin, here.

When we look in quest of the land the surveyor had told them they could find along the Sheyenne, they were not satisfied, and they unanimously decided that this would be where they would establish their new home.

They had ordered their mail sent to Pembroke Postoffice over on the Snake River, and this was a distance of twenty-four miles from the place they were looking on the Sheyenne. One of the party, Lars Selberg, a brother of Mrs. Opheim, decided to make on the Snake River when he saw it, as it appeared to him although the rest were very anxious to return to the Sheyenne. The other members of the party begged and pleaded with him to come back. They pointed out the disadvantages of splitting up at this time, and what it would mean to their families, but he had fully decided that the Snake River was where he wanted to make his future home, so they returned to the Sheyenne without him.

On their return to the Sheyenne they went up the Snake River to its source and then across to the Sheyenne, following the Sheyenne to the point where they had first chosen and where Opheim built a log cabin which was undoubtedly the first home built in what is now Griggs County, and which today is now located on the northeast grounds of Cooperstown. The line used for measuring the house was obtained by working the limestone on the mountain.

After building the cabin in 1879, Opheim returned to Iowa for his family and possessions going east of the way by train, and returning in a covered wagon with his family in the fall.

Difficult to say, the hardships of those pioneers of Griggs County were many, and their own unfoldered a luxury, and the nearest point at which it could be obtained was Grand Forks. During the winter of 1879 it took three weeks to go there and purchase it.

The crops were sown by hand, and dragged with a horse and trap. The grain was cut with a scythe and threshed with a flail. Then, in winter, to separate the wheat and oat it was necessary to throw the grain across a rock. The wheat was heavier than the oat so it would go farther and so be cleaned.

In 1879 they had their first term of school for the children. It was held in Opheim's log house, and Dr. Ole Selberg was the first teacher.

While here we were blessed with a letter written to his wife by Daniel Nelson Opheim, Grand Sheyenne River, August third, 1879, which letter is still in my possession.

Biography of Omund Nelson Opheim (oldest pioneer)
--Kenneth Monson

The parents of this pioneer were Mr. and Mrs. Nels Opheim. The name of this pioneer is Omund Nelson Opheim. He was born on September 29, 1829, in Norway.

He traveled in covered wagons from the state of Iowa and came to North Dakota in 1879 and settled on Section 12, Township 146, Range 58. Their first home was a log house. The closest place to go and get provisions was at Grand Forks to the mill, but later they went to Valley City.

Their closest neighbor was L. Martinson at the distance of twenty-four miles.

The machinery they had were walking plows, and a home-made drag. They cut grain with a cradle. They had a team of oxen, and sowed by hand. They threshed with a flail. The wheat yielded forty bushels to the acre. They got their wood from the timber on the farm. The first winter they had no wheat crop so Mr. Opheim took his team of horses (they had not traded off the horses for oxen) and drove up to Goose River where he bought some wheat from another farmer. Other farmers from Goose River accompanied him and they went to Grand Forks to get their wheat ground into flour. They followed along the river valleys because they didn't dare go across the prairie. The trip to Grand Forks took three weeks.

Prairie fires were frequent. When a fire started out the farmers had to plow up furrows and build back-fires. The prairie fires were not so bad around Opheim's farm because of the river. But it did happen that the fire jumped the river.

Omund Nelson Opheim was married to Kari Solberg in Norway. The only descendant of this pioneer is Nels J. Opheim, Cooperstown, N. Dak.

Mr. Opheim died August 5, 1885, on the farm.

(Amand Nelson Opheim)
Early Pioneers

--Pearl C. Mathison

The earliest pioneer was Nels Opheim, generally called pioneer Nelson. He came with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Amand Opheim, from Winesheck County, Iowa, in 1879 and settled on section 12 in what is now Washburn township. It was one year before other settlers came.

Next year, in 1880, came John Hogenson with his wife and two children. They settled on section 16 in Romness Township. Their means of travel was a covered wagon drawn by oxen. They were driving sixteen head of cattle and 26 sheep. They all arrived on September 30, 1880. After their arrival, they made two trips to Valley City. Their first real arrival before sending for the wife and children was on the 27th day of April, 1880, when he built a house and made some preparations for wintering his stock.

During the summer many settlers arrived, among them were Mr. and Mrs. B. Olsen and his sons and daughter. Mr. and Mrs. Bent Olson are the parents of the first white child known to be born in the county, who is Anton Olson, born January 31, 1881. He is still residing in a place near where he was born.

The next birth occurred on section 16, also Romness Township, when Elmer Mathison was born on May 17, 1881.

The free land had been taken up mostly further east, and in our state only a small portion of the Red River Valley had been settled, so prospective settlers could make their choice. Some went out to make a location, and informed their friends that they had found what they were seeking.

The pioneers left their former homes mostly to better their conditions, to make a home of their own for themselves and their loved ones.

The early experience of these early pioneers were like the others. They had to put up with blizzards, hail storms, droughts, prairie fires, gophers, not forgetting the loan sharks or money lenders that would collect their 12 to 15% interest on land.

THE FIRST SETTLER IN GRIGGS COUNTY

Omund Nelson Opheim, called "Pioneer Nelson", who came from the vicinity of Decorah, ~~Linn~~ Des Moines County, Iowa and settled in the Sheyenne Valley in what is now Griggs County was the first white settler in Griggs County. He was born in Hardanger, Norway. He and his family were the only white settlers for a while. His youth was spent at Cambridge, Wisconsin, later he moved to Iowa and still later, to Dakota territory.

Together with the Omund Nelson Opheim family came Gustav Olson, who soon moved to other parts. Then in 1880 came John Hogenson, ~~from Lybuck, Nebraska~~ ~~Carl~~ Carl Olson, A. Nelson, Iver Sein, and J. E. Qualey.

Valley City, 45 miles distant, was the settlers' nearest market, where they traded their wheat and oats for food.

In 1880 came Ed Evenson, Aslak Gunderson, Sven Loge, Tobias Lima, J. Johnson and S. Nelson.

The first Norwegian church in Griggs County was the Ringsaker Church in what is now Romness Township in 1887.

Ringsaker, Thine and Ottawa congregations were organized in 1882 by Rev. L. Lundeby.

(The above is translated from the Norwegian language).

Bibliography: Normanden i America -1907
by Martin Ulvestad

AN OLD SETTLER GONE

(Quoted from Griggs Courier, Aug. 7, 1885)

" Wednesday morning about 5 o'clock Omund Nelson Opheim or "Pioneer Nelson " was found in his wagon at his farm on the river (Sheyenne) dead. His horses had become entangled in a wire fence and stopped. The body was lying face down, while the face was beaten into an unrecognizable mass. He had left town (Cooperstown) in the evening before eight o'clock. His team was seen running at various points on the river road without a driver; and at one point, his body was pounding on the wagon bed, as the horses jumped. This wild ride was over the Sheyenne bridge and through Mardell to his place on the river. It is now discovered that the deceased was suffering from rheumatism and to alleviate his misery, had while in town, been drinking considerably, although he was not a drinking man. The coroner's jury composed of H.P. Smart, Andrew Johnson, Julius Stevens, H. Retzlaff, H.G. Pickett and F. Thompson, found that he came to his death from apoplexy, heart disease or both; but the coroner thinks the pounding he received while the horses were running, sufficient to account for the death, concussion producing apoplexy. Mr. Nelson-Opheim leaves a wife and children, also grandchildren and a comfortable property. He was the first settler in Griggs County and was unanimously respected by all who knew him. His funeral occurred Thursday and was largely attended from Cooperstown and the county."

First Settlers

Mrs. Porterville

(in Griggs County)

In the spring of 1879, Omund Nelson Ophain left Decorah, Iowa in the company of Lars Brekke, Hans Sein, Colben Grindeland and Lars Solberg with thoughts only of finding a new home in the Dakotas. These men are the pioneers of Griggs County.

They traveled as most all pioneers traveled with horses and covered wagons. In St. Paul, they stopped to inquire about unclaimed land with good timber. Here they were given the name of a surveyor whom they were instructed to visit upon their arrival in Fargo. This man informed them that "there was no better land in the world than that along the Sheyenne River. He also gave them a plot of this land so they journeyed on anxiously anticipating the country where they were to make a new home for themselves and their families. In Fargo, they traded their horses for oxen as the ox was much sturdier than the horse and better suited to this part of the country at that time.

Upon their arrival at Valley City, they proceeded south, but found all of that land taken for a distance of at least fifteen miles, so they returned to Valley City and then went in quest of the land the surveyor had told them they would find along the Sheyenne.

No one had, as yet, settled at this particular point, but when these men saw the land they were satisfied, and they unanimously decided that this would be where they would establish their new homes.

They ordered their mail sent to the Newberry Post Office over on the Goose River, and this was a distance of twenty-four miles from the place where they were locating on the Sheyenne.

One of the party, Lars Solberg, a brother of Mrs. Opheim decided to settle on the Goose River when he saw it as it appealed to him although the rest were very anxious to return to the Sheyenne. The other members of the party pleaded with him to come back. They pointed out to him the disadvantages of splitting up at this time and what it would mean to their families, but he had fully decided that the Goose River was where he wanted to make his future home, so they returned to the Sheyenne without him.

On their return to the Sheyenne they went up the Goose River to its source and then across to the Sheyenne, following it to the point which they had first chosen and where Opheim built a log cabin, which was undoubtedly the first home in what is now Griggs County and which cabin is now located on the Court House grounds at Cooperstown. The lime used for plastering the house was obtained by burning the limestone found upon the premises.

After building the cabin in 1879, Opheim returned to Iowa for his family and possessions going most of the way by train and returning in a covered wagon with his family in the fall.

Needless to say, the hardships of these pioneers of Griggs County were many, for even flour was a luxury and the nearest point at which it could be obtained was Grand Forks. During the winter of 1879, it took three weeks to go there to purchase groceries.

The crops were sown by hand and dragged with a home-made drag. The grain was cut with a cradle and threshed with a flail. Then in order to separate the grain from the chaff it was necessary to throw it across the room. The wheat, of course was heavier than the chaff and thus it would go further and so be cleaned.

In 1882, they had their first term of school for the children. It was held in Omund Nelson Opheim's log house and Ole Serungard, now deceased, was the first teacher; also the first teacher in Griggs County.

Omund Nelson Opheim, the acknowledged first settler in Griggs County (locally he is called "Pioneer Nelson") who settled in the county of Griggs in 1879, was born Sept. 29, 1829 at Ulvik, Hardanger, Norway and at that place in 1847 he was married to Kari Solberg

The early pioneers in the Sheyenne valley recall the hospitality of the Opheims and relate how Mrs. Opheim "good soul" worked early and late to accomodate the new comers to Griggs County.

Omund Nelson Opheim or Pioneer Nelson was found (Aug. 5, 1885) in his wagon at his farm home on the Sheyenne River, dead. The horses had run away and this wild ride was over the Sheyenne bridge and through Mardell (a ghost town now) to his home on the river. Mrs. O. N. Opheim died Dec. 26, 1906. They are both interred in Sheyenne Valley cemetery, located on their homestead, 2 miles from Sheyenne Valley church. This is the first cemetery in Griggs County.

Nils Ulven was the first settler buried in this homestead cemetery. Two children were born to this union, Nels Johan and Martha. Martha died Jan. 16, 1916 at Jamestown. Nels Johan Opheim is living at Cooperstown. There are seven grandchildren, Martin Olaf Opheim, Cooperstown; Katrina (Mrs. Gilbert Anderson) Minneapolis; Clara Mathilda (Mrs. Nels Johanson) Princeton, Minnesota; Carl Oliver Opheim, Bismarck, North Dakota; Omund Norman Opheim, Cooperstown, N. Dak.; George Edward Opheim, Cooperstown, N. Dak.; Clara Inez (Mrs. Wm. Bostrom) Cooperstown, N. Dak.

Bibliography:

Nels Opheim, son of "Pioneer Nelson"

Cooperstown, North Dakota

Griggs County Sentinel Courier, *Cooperstown, N. Dak.*
Vol. 53 No. 8 May 23, 1935

Judge Will H. Carleton

Member of the "Cooper group" of pioneers, Cooperstown, N. Dak.

A letter written by Omund Nelson Opheim dated Aug. 3, 1879 at Sheyenne River, to his wife who was in Iowa. This letter is in the possession of Nels Opheim, Cooperstown, North Dakota.

Notes

OMUND NELSON Opheim (Pioneer Nelson)

Omund Nelson Opheim, the first white settler in the Sheyenne valley -in Griggs County- (1879) was from Hardanger, Norway. In 1880 came John Hogenson from Aamot, Osterdalen, A.E.Lybeck from Land, Norway, Gilbert Olson from Ringsaker, A. Nelson from Ostmarken, Iver Seim from Hardanger and John E. Qualey from Sogndalen. Valley City was the nearest market place. In 1880 there settled in the vicinity of Cooperstown and Hannaford, Ed Evenson from Eastern Totten, Norway, and A. Gunderson, J. Johnson, S. Nelson Tobias Lima and Sven Loge.

Pioneer Nelson-His childhood was spent at Cambridge, Wis. then he went to Decorah, Iowa.

In 1881 S. Sanderson settled in the vicinity of Gallatin. He was the first settler there he came from Christiania.

T.T. Fuglestad wrote: I started out in 1883. The ticket was bought to Valley City as there were no railroads N.W. of Valley City. " In that day, with oxen team, came we from Valley City to this county's deserted prairie, where many poor people had taken homesteads in 1882. In the spring of 1883 it looked dark for them. The provisions were nearly gone. Both people and animals were in danger of starving on account of the Sheyenne River flooding and the market place so far away. However, relief came in time.

FIRST SETTLERS IN GRIGGS COUNTY

The first settlers came to what is now Griggs County as early as 1879 but it was not until the spring of 1881 that they arrived in appreciable numbers.

In the spring of 1879, Omund Nelson Opheim also called Pioneer Nelson was the first settler in what is now Washburn Township, and also the first settler in Griggs County. Mr. Opheim came from Winesheck County, Iowa. He entered government land on Sec. 12 of Washburn Tp.

After building his log cabin, covering the roof with elm bark and plastering the house by burning limestone found upon the prairies, Mr. Opheim returned to Iowa for his family, returning with his family in a covered wagon the fall of 1879.

The nearest point at which they could obtain flour was Grand Forks. During the winter of 1879, it took three weeks to go there to purchase groceries.

Needless to say, the hardships of these pioneers of Griggs Co. were many. The crops were sown by hand and dragged with a home-made drag. The grain was cut with a cradle and threshed with a flail. In order to separate the grain from the chaff it was necessary to throw it across the room. The wheat, being heavier than the chaff, would go further and so be cleaned.

In 1880, came C. P. Bolken, Amund Fluto, Ole Havig and John Tarfin who took land in Washburn Township. Arne Luckason, John Atchison and Alex Saunders arrived the same year and settled in Sverdrup Township.

In the spring of 1881, new settlers and land seekers came into the territory and the only place to go for a meal was Opheims. Mrs. Opheim worked early and late to accommodate the newcomers.

FIRST SETTLERS IN GRIGGS COUNTY

2.

In 1882, they had their first term of school for the children. School was held in Opheim's log house and Ole Serungard was the first teacher in Griggs County.

The Nelson log cabin, the first home in Griggs County was moved to Cooperstown in 1932, as a feature of the fiftieth anniversary of the county. It now stands on the court house square as a monument to Griggs County pioneers.

Bibliography:

Nels Opheim, *farmer*
Cooperstown, N. D.

A letter written by Omund Nelson Opheim dated *Aug. 3, 1877*, at Sheyenne to his wife who was in Iowa.

Judge Will H. Carleton
Cooperstown, N. D.

1. It was ~~fifty~~ years ago that ~~settler~~, Omund Nelson Opheim, came to Griggs County to make his home. It was the spring of 1879 that he left Decorah, Iowa in the company of Lars Brekke, Hans Seim, Colben C. Grindeland and Lars Solberg, with thoughts only of finding a new home in the Dakotas. These men were the pioneers of Griggs County.

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Upon their arrival in Valley City they proceeded south, but found all of that land taken for a distance of at least fifteen miles, so they returned to Valley City and then went north in quest of the land the surveyor had told them they would find along the Sheyenne.

No one had, as yet, settled at this particular point, but when these men saw the land they were satisfied, and they unanimously decided that this would be where they would establish their new homes. This is just 2 miles north of #7.

They had ordered their mail sent to Newbergh Postoffice over on the Goose River, and this was a distance of twenty-four miles from the place they were locating on the Sheyenne. One of the party, Lars Solberg, a brother of Mrs. Opheim, decided to settle on the Goose River when he saw it, as it appealed to him although the rest were very anxious to return to the Sheyenne. The other members of the party begged and pleaded with him to come back. They pointed out the disadvantages of splitting up at this time, and what it would mean to their families, but he had fully decided that the Goose River was where he wanted to make his future home, so they returned to the Sheyenne without him.

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These facts are taken chiefly from a letter written to his wife by Omund Nelson Opheim, dated Sheyenne River, August third, 1879, which letter is still in my own possession.

Insert
Story on farm