

Biography of Tønnes Watne
--William Sharpe

May 20, 1929

Tønnes Watne was born February 7, 1854 in Hailand, Norway, near the city of Stavanger. His parents were Simon Foss-Watne and Maria Foss-Watne. They lived on the edge of a lake named Hille-Vatne. Tønnes was the third son of seven children and therefore was not in line to inherit any of his father's possessions. The law of those times allows only the first son to inherit his father's goods. As the farm was too small to support all of the family, he decided to come to America.

He came to America in the spring of 1884 with his wife and three children. He travelled by a small steamer from Stavanger to Hull, crossed England by train to Liverpool and by White Star Liner to New York. He landed at Castle Garden and took an immigrant train to Stony City, Iowa.

That fall he left Iowa and came to Griggs County, North Dakota, because of the high priced land in Iowa. Also, there was a colony of Stavanger people settled here and land was still obtainable by preemption and Homestead Acts.

Arriving at Cooperstown, he went out to Nels Herigstad's homestead by wagon drawn by oxen. He bought the homestead rights in 1886 from Julia Bustrack for \$200. The land bought is located at the northeast quarter of section 8, Sverdrup township 145, range 58. His first house was a frame building with a shed on the side.

While working in Iowa, Tønnes had the experience of killing a rattlesnake with his bare hand. The snake had struck up his trouser leg and he had caught the snake by its head and crushed it.

They had a violent snowstorm in 1887 or '88 which covered the house and barn with snow. To get out they first had to take the snow by the door inside the house to be able to make steps to get out.

The first crop they reaped was about a bushel of wheat from the whole farm, the rest having been killed by an early frost. A prairie fire that got away that same fall threatened to burn the house and barn but they managed to plow around it. When all was thought safe, a whirlwind caught up a flaming straw and the fire started again. It didn't get to the buildings but it burned up a lot of brush on this side of the Sheyenne River.

His nearest neighbors were Mr. and Mrs. Wilhelm Watne, Andrew Watne, Simon Ouren and Mr. and Mrs. Swen Algaard. His first tools and farm implements were a breaking plow, a walking plow, oxen and later, horses. He helped the hired neighbors and in turn he hired out to Cooper's ranch and the Brown farm.

The first school was taught by Mrs. Will Carleton and Andrew Watne was one of the first to be a member of the school board in this district. A Lutheran by the name of Nessheim was the first minister of the community. Later the pioneers organized the Saron Free Church and Tønnes was one of the first Elders of the Church. He was a member at the time of his death.

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Fuel was the brushwood obtained from the Sheyenne Valley and wood and coal bought in Cooperstown.

Tønnes Watne married Bertha Watne May 1, 1880 in Hailand's Church, Norway. He died December 19, 1917 on his homestead and was buried in the Saron Cemetery, Sverdrup township. His wife followed him six months later.

He had ten children, eight of whom are living and are listed below as they rank in the family:

- Simon Vatne, Albert Lea, Minnesota
- Maria Watne, Cooperstown, North Dakota
- Georgeanna Sharpe, Cooperstown, North Dakota
- Janna Sharpe, Glenfield, North Dakota
- Gretha Greenland, Cooperstown, North Dakota
- Laura Vatne, Cooperstown, North Dakota
- Rachael Lovegren, St. Paul, Minnesota
- Vera LaHue, St. Paul, Minnesota

Two are deceased, Wilhelm Vatne who was killed in the Chinese Revolution in 1911 while acting as a teacher for the Missionaries' Children, and Minnie Vatne who died in 1921 while acting as a nurse at St. Lukes' Hospital, Fargo, North Dakota.

There are thirteen grandchildren.