**Tales Of Early Settlers**

Courier Date ???

The following account was sent to me by Hans Westley in 1928, under the title "A Little Scribbling."—Ruth L. McH.

One day in the winter of 1881 I came home from school in Norway I was told that we were going to America—even as soon asin the month at March! My heart surged and pounded in rapture to think that we were going on such a long journey, first over the Atlantic Ocean and then for several days by train to the interior of America. For a child this was magnificent; and I was then twelve years old. Besides, Father and Mother told us, we were to be outfitted with new clothes and shoes—not only one suit, but several. That was really the high point! Overcoat Too! And not only shoes, but even boots—with iron heels —we were to have. We became self-important and had to tell all to our playmates and relatives.

But on the actual day of departure we realized for the fast time what serious business this really was. One had to leave a good home,- dear friends, and relatives; and don't be too sure that a twelve-year-old hadn't a -sweetheart—which was perhaps the worst thing of all as we set out. There was crying and wailing all around. Still, we had to grit our teeth and bid farewell—and quickly too, for here, thundering into Bryne station came the train which was to take us to Stavanger. For many of us it waa last farewell.

In Stavanger we boarded a vessel over to England over the North Sea. Thus the journey had begun in earnest; and things looked none too bright as we were packed into a large deep room with many shelves along the walls, built as bedsteads where one could lie down. Before long seasickness appeared, both audibly and visibly until things were quite horrible. We tried to bury our heads in the pillows, but it didn’t help much. It was night-time and getting up to the deck was out of the question. Ugh, it was disgusting! But the North Sea voyage came to an end as we sailed into Hull, England, whence we took a train to Liverpool, - at night, seeing nothing of the country.

In Liverpool we had a long wait for the ship which was to take us over the Atlantic Ocean. It proved to be a poor ship, which sailed slowly and labored hard. The understanding seemed to be that we were to have another, larger and better boat; but as it turned out it was a poor one.

We were quite a sizable company of acquaintances from Staanger: Betuel Herigstad with wife and children, Karl Lende, Kristoffer Aaasland, Andreas Vatne, Lars Herigstad, Sven Loge and wife, Sven Lunde, plus Ole H. Westley with wife and nine children of which I was one.

Well, the boat inched its way forward while other ships swept past us and soon disappeared over the horizon. This we found annoying. However, we had to endure patiently; and in contrast to the cattle-boat over the North Sea we felt on this Atlantic ship we were well off. Then – something happened to the boat which filled us all with terror. The entire ship shook and trembled, as it seemed to us. Everyone hurried on deck to see what was wrong. We learned that our propeller was lost – the thing that made the ship go.; and now we lay bobbing about, getting nowhere. If I understood correctly, distress signals were hoisted and after a time a ship approached and a short conference between captains took place. We were then towed for a long time until we reached Newfoundland, where for nine or ten days we were laid up for repairs. At long last we reached New York harbor and boarded a long train for the overhaul trip through Chicago and St, Paul. Our objective was Granite Falls, Minnesota where we were lodged with relatives – first with Ole Lende, who lived in town and was county treasurer. The next day we were taken by horse conveyance to a farm where Ole Lende also a relative, received us most kindly. A number of young men had already found work, some on farms and one with a shoemaker in. town. The journey had taken six weeks.

As it turned out, several of our company decided to go to Dakota Territory and take land. My

father, Ola Westley, along with Betuel Herigstad, Sven Lunde and others then set out with oxen. Mother and we children as well as Mrs. B. Herigstad were to remain there at Lende's. I, the twelve-year-old, had to get out and herd cattle, far from mother and family. That was the end of all my joy about America; my heart sank as I approached the place where I would spend the entire summer with no prospect of seeing the others. I felt extremely unhappy, wept and longed for Norway till my heart burned and ached. I sat naming my Norwegian comrades one after another. My face was turned in the direction where I supposed Norway to be. But after a time the pain eased as I found new comrades and became used to my lot; and real pleasure followed when one of Ola Lende's sons, namely Gabriel Lende, was sent to herd nearby., We were permitted to graze our cattle together during the day, and so things were much better.

In the fall my father returned from Dakota; all the men had taken land and liked it there. Now Father was to teach Norwegian school. Never shall I forget my joy at seeing my own father again. All sorrows were past. We were to remain in Minnesota through the winter and then in the spring of 1882 go to Dakota. But the winter was a hard one, with much sickness; and death took one sister, named Axeliana. Father had to leave early in the spring to take care of his land and relatives from Norway had come over after we did, and had gone directly to Dakota to take land: Ola Stokka with wife and two children, Sven Lunde with family, Nils Herigstad with family Karl Herigstad, and probably others. Those now wrote to us who were in Minnesota, and, sending money, asked us to buy oxen and cows for them, to bring along when we came. This was done, and as spring advanced we were waiting only for a little boy to get well, so that we could start out. This dragged on. Finally, when the weather became really warm and the grass was growing, the boy was carried out to the wagon and laid in his bedclothes there. Within a week he was well. As there were only two grown men in the group, they had their hands full keeping things going.

January 25, 1972 Courier

Tales Of Early Settlers

Ruth Lima McMahon, a descendant of pioneer settlers in Griggs County, has supplied the Sentinel -Courier with a number of historical articles she has compiled from accounts written by the people who lived the experiences they told.

Her foreword:

In 1928 several of the pioneers who had come to what are now Sverdrup and Bald Hill townships in the 1880's wrote or told of their early experiences, in answer to interest expressed by me and shared by many others of the second generation.

It is my intention to send these accounts to the Sentinel-Courier, with permission to print when and as the editor finds room for them. I begin with the present enclosure of a letter from Betuel Herigstad. Mr. Herigstad, acting as an agent for the Gunard Line, may rightly be called the leader of the group of emigrants from Stavanger, Norway, who having sailed from that port on April 10, 881, stopped first with relatives and acquaintances at Granite Falls, Minnesota, and then proceeded as related by them, to newly opened land in Dakota Territory.

Translations of the written accounts were made by me several years ago, and the originals are in my possession.

Perhaps most of us agree that this is a time when we need to know American history in order that we may understand the present and find hope for the future. The lives of our immediate ancestors, the immigrant pioneers, are now an important part of that history. The fruits of their actions and beliefs lie in the future.

RUTH LIMA McMAHON

Ebensburg, Pennsylvania

October 20, 1972

The following account was dated at Cooperstown, North Dakota, March 7, 1928, and sent to me by Betuel Herigstad with this note:

"Dear 'Miss Lima:

Am sending, enclosed an accout of our experiences in journeying here, as well as some scattered remarks about people and conditions hereabouts. Have not touched closely on the schools; thought some of those who came later might do that.

If you find what I have written unsuitable throw it in the stove, or perhaps certain parts thereof.

Respectfully,

BETUEL IHERIGSTAD

On one of the last days of May, 1881, a company of nine men, set out from Christian Aarestad's farm near Granite Falls, Minnesota, to seek their own homes on the fertile plains of Dakota. Two of these men (Waldemar Klubben and Sven Lunde) had left their families in Norway. Four left theirs in Yellow Medicine County, Minnesota, namely Ole H. Westley, Chr. Aarestad, Sven Loge, and Betuel Herigstad. Three were unmarried—Omon Westley, Knut L. Haaland, and Karl Herigstad.

Chr. Aarestad, who had farmed in Minnesota for a few years, acted as our leader,

With three ox teams and two cows we set our course for Benson, Minnesota. All went well crossing the prairies that far. In order to hasten our journey the oxen and all goods were then loaded on to a railroad car and shipped to Fargo, which was then only a small town. Arriving there we, found one of the oxen dead—a strongly felt loss to the two who owned it jointly.

Driving oxen we now continued our journey for the most part along the Northern Pacific railroad. As there was seldom any trail to follow we sometimes struck swampy places, where the wagons sank in and the contents had to be carried to dry ground. With the aid of a long rope the oxen could then pull the wagon free. During such, experiences we had need of both patience and endurance. It helped that some of our company took a light or even a humorous view of incidents which many would consider irksome.

Most of the company were in their best years and had a high purpose, namely the finding and building of homes for themselves and their own. The best thing that can be said about this journey is that the same God who led the children of Israel in the desert also had a guiding hand here even if the pillar of cloud and fire was not visible as of yore. Arriving a few miles from Fargo, where lived a rich landowner (a bonanza farmer by the name of Dalrymple), our attention was arrested by the sight of a fully completed boat on dry land next to the farmer's dwelling. It was almost as large as "Restaurationen", which in 1825 crossed 1 the Atlantic with fifty-three emigrants from Stavanger. As there was no sign of a lake or sizable river for many miles around all passersby were naturally amazed and curious at the presence of the boat. The explanation lay in a rumor that Mr. Dalrymple had settled on land so low that anyone who chose to live in the locality was likely to drown in the rainy season. To remedy this they set about building. As soon as the boat was completed Mr. Dalrymple announced that now he had insurance for all who might suffer distress at sea on the prairie. When our company reached Valley City we had to stop and stock up on supplies; for now we were headed for open country where there were neither railroads nor stores. Here our group was enlarged when Martin A. Ueland joined us. With heavier loads we now struck out toward the north using the banks of the Sheyenne River as a landmark. The first night we stayed with a farmer who with a good will supplied our needs. Farther on, where the land was not settled, we turned our wagons into bedrooms fox the night. Those of us who possessed some feminine traits then set to work boiling coffee and frying pancakes and other delicacies for supper. The country was mostly and the view endless. Every where the ground was covered with luxuriant grass. Two Scotchmen, Mr. John Feith and Mr. John Peath\*, had by letter informed Chr. Aarestad about good land approximately forty miles n of Valley City. Consequently this was our goal.

\*Editor's Note: Probably refers to E. J. Fitch and John Pates.

On the 6th of June, 1881, our company came to a halt on section 22, town 145, range 58. The land was still not in market, nor was it surveyed; the latter, however, was done a few days later. Looking out over the prairie on all sides we could see towards the west at a distance of about four miles two covered wagons, the only sign of human life in the region. To be sure, there were a few scattered settlers along the river but their houses were invisible from a distance because of thick woods.

Two by two we walked out over the plains in different directions to choose each his own quarter-section of land. Most of the group knew each other well from Norway. They came from Thime, Hoiland, and Jestal, Jaederen. They wished to live near each other. Thus eight of the company settled in the township of Sverdrup, as it is now called; two went farther on. Two of the eight made their homes along the river and therefore had logs for their houses. The other six had to use sod, for both houses and barns.

As soon as these houses were somewhat ready, the families came from Norway and Minnesota to Valley City, where we met them with our ox teams. Although all of these people were accustomed to good houses in Norway they were readily content in these poor sod huts. Two of the newly-arrived women did, to be sure, take a dark view of both the interior and the exterior of the first of these huts which met their eye; but as they drove on across the prairie to reach their own homes they tried to cheer each other. After a pause her thoughts seemed to clear for one of them. She said: "It will have to be our comfort that we shall become rich."'

Along with the families from Norway came also Ole J. Stokka from Hoiland with hia family. At home he had been farmer and schoolteacher. Here too, he was made use of as a religious teacher besides being a farmer, He remained always content with having come to this good and free land. Mrs. Stokka was for years a much used midwife in this settlement. Doctors were not in those days as indispensable as they are now.

As early ns 1882, and in the years following, relatives i and acquaintances came from Norway, along with land-seekers from the older states, and the free land was soon taken. The task now was to create an ordered society. Townships were organized. The railroad was laid to Cooperstown. Schools were built, and roads laid out. As the majority of the settlers were religious people congregations were soon organized and churches built. In most of these the service copied that of the Norwegian State Church. However there were small groups who felt less bound to Norwegian church customs.

For the first ten years there was little rain, and therefore poor crops; consequently several of us went into debt for farm machinery. Things took a turn for the better in 1891 when we began having better crops. The aforementioned families had, on their arrival here, from one to six children. Their numbers increased until, in 1904, there were from six to thirteen in each family. From that time on there was further increase by grandchildren of the earliest corners —yes even great-grandchildren, as in the case of Ole H. Westley, who sees the fourth generation. Of both the older and the younger generation a number have died through the years. Of the original company are still alive Waldemar Klubben, Martin A. Ueland, Mrs. Sven Lunde, Mrs. Ole H. Westley, Omon Westley, Betuel and Karl Herigstad.

BETUEL HERIGSTAD

\*June 12 is the date of arrival by Omon B.Herigstad. See "The First Norwegian Settlement in Griggs County, North Dakota," 1909 or 1910, printed by the North Dakota Historical Society.

**February 8, 1972**

Hans Westley’s Story, Part II

A rather large group of friends and relatives from Norway had come over after we did, and had gone directly to Dakota to take land: Ole Stokka with wife and two children, Sven Lunde with family, Nils Herigstad with family, Karl Herigstand and probably others. Those now wrote to us who were in Minnesota and sending money, asked us to buy oxen and cows for them, to bring along when we came. This was done, and as spring advanced we were waiting only for a little boy to get well, so that we could start out. This dragged on. Finally, when the weather became really warm and the grass was growing, the boy was carried out to the wagon and laid in his bedclothes there. Within a week he was well. As there were only two grown men in the group, they had their hands full keeping things going.

My brother Ommund was extra careful. He hitched two ox-teams to the wagon where Mother and the children were. On this wagon we had a cover, with oilcloth over the roof to keep out the rain. Adolf Heigre's wagon was also covered, as well as a third wagon driven by me, the thirteen-year-old. In this wagon a large, high Norwegian chest was set well forward and used as a seat. In his cautiousness my brother walked beside the ox teams the whole time, leading them. To me it seemed senseless — beyond all reason — to trudge along like that when he could just as well ride, and I called him a fool.

On approaching a down grade it was customary to stop and brake the hind wheels with a chain, to prevent the wagon from rolling on to the oxen's heels. This, too, was necessary for the others, but not for me. I waited until the others were well down the hill, had removed the chain from the wheels, and had moved on, leaving the road clear. Then I said "giddap" and the oxen 'began to jog down the hill until the wagon shoved them and, not liking this, they had to hurry a little. Now the wagon drove unmercifully into them and they had to run. If the hill was high, and maybe long, the speed became greater and greater. Not only that, but in the 'back of the wagon were two churns wherein milk was stored, and quite often the milk splashed out of bounds and up over everything, according to speed and bumps. It was great fun. The milk didn't matter, for-we had an over-supply. Tied to the rear of the wagon was a young ox-team which often had one milky shower after another. Yes, that was fun! My sister Maria and my brother Martin were in this wagon with me, their responsibility being to herd the cattle we had taken with us. These walked loose after us who drove, and in two or three days were so used to the arrangement that they needed little herding. There were five ox-teams altogether, and quite a flock of cows, perhaps seven or eight. The best fun of all was camping for the night out on the prairie. With plenty of grass and open plains most of the way, the cattle did very well.

The distance was 300 miles, but as we traveled only 100 miles a week it took us three weeks. Provisions consisted mostly of bread, soda, crackers, cream, syrup and milk. I don’t remember that we had anything else, except that we had coffee once in a great while. But I do remember it being said that we were getting fat. We had so much milk that we sometimes washed in it when there was no water conveniently nearby.

Our progress was slow, but progress it was, day by day exexcept on Sunday. Then it was, hardly proper to push on in this manner. The first town in Dakota from Minnesota, was Wahpeton. We knew that in Valley City there were some of our people and we looked forward to this town. It was also the nearest town to where Father and others dear to us had taken land. Thus Valley City was our town, even though thirty miles from the land we had taken into possession. To this town, then, we came at length.

Somewhat restless we must have been as the end of our journey drew near. The oxen had to hustle a little more than usual. But we gazed in vain, as it seemed, for a first sight of this town which should be on the horizon. No matter how long we stared we had only the same endlessness ahead of us. At last we grew tired of gazing. Yet, suddenly, the landscape changed! High hills and valleys appeared, the road bore down into a hollow, and as we turned slightly we were suddenly aware of the town directly below us. There were also woods, and a river! This brought us to life. Besides, someone came walking towards us. It was Sven Lunde, Andreas Vatne, Karl Herlgstad, and a few others. They were working on the railroad. Things were becoming homelike now.

Various supplies had to be bought—things that would be needed—at home. For we were really getting home! We could well have sung "home, home, sweet, sweet home; there's no place like home, oh, there's no place like home." As far as beauty was concerned, we had better wait till we got there. When supplies had been bought, we had to jog on. As the prairie was our night-lodging we had better hurry and get out of town.

As we approached our own territory we were more than restless; we were terribly on edge to catch sight of the first house. Our patience was sorely tried, for it went so slowly. At long last some mounds appeared; they were sod houses. Finally we arrived at the first one. It was Sven Loge and family who lived here, and Waldemar Klubben and family. We stopped briefly but had to push on to our goal, our own home. The sun was low and we ought to get there before darkness fell. But no, it was dark before we caught sight of anything, so dark that we despaired of finding our way. But Ommund managed it. Though it was only three miles from Sven Loge it took forever—even if I thought we drove fast.

At last we stopped. And off we went on a run to reach the house. A faint rise could be seen; and as we approached we realized that the house was dug into a hillside. From above only the roof top was visible; but as we reached the lower part, which faced south, we found a window and on the southeast part was a door.

Thinking that perhaps Father was here and lay sleeping we began making noise in various ways; but he was not there, having gone to his neighbor, Ola Stokka, who lived but half a mile to the west. We therefore settled down till the morning in the way we were supposed to.

**February 15, 1972 Courier**

Hans Westley’s story – installment 3

But first (before settling down for the night) we lit a bonfire to announce that we had now reached our journey's end, and perhaps to give us a little light for preparing food and finding our things. It had been a long day, longer than any of the others, for we were determined to arrive that day. The oxen and cattle were tired of being driven so long and mosquitoes stung them till all was in an uproar. Great care had to be taken in unyoking the oxen to avoid being struck by the heads and horns ceaselessly swinging to drive off mosquitoes.

The next day rose clear and glorious, and birds were singing. Imagine! Here in the wilderness there were birds singing their morning song. And then we saw Father coming! Yes indeed he was happy that he now had his own safely with him; and besides, here were all sorts of things for farming—oxen, cows, a wagon. Now things would begin moving. And things began moving on that place that day.

All the people who had sent us money to buy their oxen and cows came to pick up their property, and the flock that we had become used to was divided and spread out until we stood there with only our own few, namely two oxen and one cow. Our good and faithful friend, Adolf Heigre, left us too, although he remained in the community for some time to follow.

Now we had to break land. We joined up with Stokka, who had an ox-team, and hitched four oxen to a sixteen-inch plow. My father held the plow while Stokka drove the oxen, and equal amounts were broken for each. It was very slow work, and no more than twelve acres was broken for us. Six acres had been broken the previous year when the land was taken, and this was considered enough. Com pared with the patches of field one knew in Norway, this was actually a great expanse. Father, in fact, failed to see how one could use as much as 160 acres; breaking twelve acres the second year really made a huge field. the six acres had been only a piece along the length of the quarter section; but the twelve acres, laid along the north line, were to extend from the west to the east line --a full half mile in length, though no wider than twelve rods. That should he more than enough.

Father had procured some seed wheat for seeding the six acres. The men had got together and shared the spring work. Father, who had no oxen, did all the sowing by hand, while the others, who had oxen, harrowed and worked the sods. This was done with home-made harrows. Kristian Aarestad was a smith and adept at fastening the iron tines into the beams shaped from oak trees. They were clever hands that did this work, for one could see harrows as fine as any that were bought from a dealer; if painted, one could scarcely tell the difference. Others had more clumsy tools; it really made no difference how they looked; the important thing was doing good work. We were all equally rich or equally poor and had to make the most necessary tools by hand.

Those who had come ahead of use had by now built themselves houses and barns. We now had to build a barn. Wooden material was to be found along the Sheyenne River, only a mile from where we lived; but the walls had to be built of sod. Wood was used as roof support, rafters and stays. The rafters were decked with brush and long hay, and on top of this was placed first a layer of sod with gravel filling between and then another layer of sod over it all. There had to be a steep pitch if the rain was not to penetrate.

The first thing we discovered about our sod hut was ants, here and there; and not only that but once in a while we found lizards crawling about. But a hutch such as ours, dug into the hillside, was cold in summer and warm in winter. In order to make it more homelike inside, and instead of having only the black sod walls and floor, we began making clay from gumbo and slamming it into the wall, fistful by fistful. One had to throw hard to make it stick. We then smoothed it out to resemble a plastered wall, and having finished this process, we procured some lime and washed the walls with it, making them as pretty as plastered house walls. For the floor we had to get lumber and lay it down. Aside from the long rafters inside holding up the roof, the room was open to the very top. The brush and hay laid over the supports was of course tinder dry, and from our stove the smoke-pipe went up through the roof, with the tinder nearby.

One day in mid-winter, with severe cold, much snow, and a rather heavy wind driving the snow—It was Sunday and Mother had made some soup for our dinner—just as we sat there fire caught in the brush of the ceiling and burned till it crackled. Ommund leaped up on one of the rafters and yelled for water. There was no water in the house, and in the excitement the soup-kettle, which contained a perforated ladle, was reached up to him. It was no good, and the fire spread quickly. I seem to remember that some rags were thrown him and then we got hold of snow—at any rate, the fire was put out. In the meantime Martin had been sent to Stokka's for help, but this was needless and bad for Martin's fingers, which froze, though not so badly but what they healed all right. There was certainly more than one sigh of relief when the danger to our hut was over.

The winter proved to be a very stormy one, with masses of snow. As our hut was in the hillside the snow piled up until we had to make a covered tunnel from the door, which was being constantly blocked by snow. The tunnel reached from fifteen to twenty feet out, with steps going up. At the end we made a sort of trapdoor which was closed at night. After one snowstorm which lasted for three days the cover was so deep that we had a Herculean task getting through and out even the first day. Not infrequently the cattle had to stand for days without either food or water, since it could be mortally dangerous to venture out in storms which sealed one's eyes and nose with snow like fine-ground meal, almost choking one. There was more than one such snowstorm that winter.

Another winter later on was just as bad. I remember our taking a ball of string and fastening it to the house before we set off in the direction where we figured the barn should be; but we were unable to find it, and if we hadn't had the ball of string which we unrolled as we went, we could not have found our way back either. We might have been near the barn for all we knew; when the storm was over there was little sign of any barn, it was so deeply snowed over. That winter my father lay ill with rheumatism nearly all winter, and as my oldest brother had gone off to "Pineryet" (the pine forests?) to find work, the 2 horses and the bringing home of fuel fell on me, then about fifteen years old. That time we had to seek help in shoveling snow from door, window, and haystack, in order to reach the cattle. Quite a few cattle we had too, as brother Ommund had bought himself oxen and cows the previous fall and kept them with us.

**February 22, 1973 Courier**

Ebensburg, Pennsylvania  
February 17, 1973

Dear Editor:

I have among my papers five letters written by Ole Westley, member of the Sverdrup pioneer group and father of Hans Westley, Dr. Martin Westley, and their brothers and sisters.

Two of the letters, the earliest ones, are handwritten copies made by any father, Ole D. Lima, on one of his later trips to Norway—I think in 1930. He mentions that various Ole Westley letters had been printed in a newspaper there. These two, written to friends in Norway, are dated October 8, 1881, and October 16, and are thus accounts from the settler's first season in Sverdrup Township.

The other three letters, in Ole Westley's own handwriting, were written to David O. Lima's father, in Gjesdal, Norway, and are dated, in order, December 12, 1903, February 16, 1904, and May 11, 1905.

All of these letters, copies and originals, I hope to file in the Cooperstown Museum at my earliest opportunity.

I enclose a few quotations, in my own translation, from these letters, as a follow-up to Hans Westley's story, which he modestly entitled "A Little Scribbling". Actually, the two 1881 letters were written while Hans and the rest of the family were still in Granite Falls, and Ole Westley was living in his newly-built cellar-and-sod house.

Sincerely yours,

RUTH L. McMAHON

\* \* \*

Westlye 8 October, 1881

Dear -,

The time has come when I can no longer restrain my desire to greet you with a few words.

It is with strange feelings that I sit down to greet friends in the home community. I seem to see you face to face, to sit in your houses, and I recall so well the entire families. r Not only when I write but during my daily work and activity in the woods and on the prairie with the oxen, as well as in my lonely cellar. I even begin to wonder if I am dreaming, or whether it is really so, that I am so tremendously far from you.

However, I can say that I am quite well, and content to be here. I hope that from my letters to others you have heard about my building a cellar-house, about the oxen, the location of my place, and so on. My health has been remarkably good.

Not until eight days from now will I go to meet my family, whom I have had to miss all summer. I have stayed mostly with my brothers-in-law. (Note: Ola Stokka and Sven Lunde).

I don't recall whether you were one of those who asked advice regarding America. It seems easier to earn a living here; but life is hard for the new settler for a long time at first. I could wish you and others were here, but I must say: think twice before you leave the homeland, where your cradle stood. It is of same consequence. (Signed) Ola Westlye

16 October, 1881

. . . we wish the winter were behind us; we fear the cold somewhat and most of us have little enough money for buying the necessary winter supplies.

During the winter months it is said to be risky to set out with oxen on the 30-mile prairie to our nearest town. We pray for a mild winter. (Note inserted by Ole Lima: The winter of 1881-82 proved to be one of the nicest in Dakota.)

We live in log and sod huts where some of us have to be content with the bare earth for walls and floor. Pioneer life involves considerable trials and discomforts which if they were well known in our dear Norway, might well dampen the America-fever.

We have no crop of any kind this fall, as we arrived so late this spring; we have to buy everything we shall need to live on until next fall, so it will be hard to get along through this period.

Just now we have had a couple of joyous days: last Thursday a man came to me in my cellar-house, Happy and surprised' was I when he told me that he was a "Konferens" minister sent by the church as a missionary among the new settlers. Oh, how glad I was when he asked if it was possible to arrange for a meeting that afternoon. I got into the buggy with him and we drove to the River to my brothers-in-law. Agreeing to meet at my house we sent word around and people came. It was homelike and refreshing. I had not heard a spoken testimony since Pentecost Day in Fargo.

The good man was well content with the food and lodging we could offer him and left the next morning for a little congregation farther north. By arrangement he came 'back today at 10 o'clock and conducted a service at Betuel Herigstad's.

After the service he helped form a congregation. Fourteen settlers were enrolled as members. The preacher (Nykreiin) was elected chairman. The name chosen for the group was Thime Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation. (Note: this was the origin of the West-ley Church" congregation. Oct. 16, 1881)

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In the letter dated December 12, 1903, Ole Westley says, in part: I am in better health than I was in Norway. Have for a long time been rid of the rheumatism which was bad even the first years here but which lessened gradually until now for a long time I have been free from it.

But I am aging and cannot stand hard work . . . therefore sold my farm to the youngest son two years ago. (There follows an account of what his children are doing.)

Under date of February 16, 1904, Westley speaks again of "children and grandchildren, of which we already have quite a flock, numbering 17".

As to weather, he remarks: "February began severe and continues so, down to 40 degrees below zero, in addition to blizzards—thus the 12, 13, 14—snowstorm all days." Yet people come to meetings held at the Westley church—"it was just possible to be out on the prairie".

Later he says: "There is considerable amount of Oregon-fever: three families went last year, and this year Knud Haaland and Reier Lima will go—thus they escape the cold winter."