

Anders H. Espelien¹ and Birgitta, Charter Members of East Norway Lake Lutheran Church

A newspaper report² "Found Dead in Bed" tells of Andrew Espelien's sudden death in New London, MN. It states that he was born in Goodhue County³, MN on September 1, 1853. (His parents' names are not mentioned.) From information given, the date of death was October 13, 1923.

The newspaper report sketches out Anders' life.

With his parents he moved to Kandiyohi County at his age 12. (This move, in late 1865 or early 1866, would coincide with return from exile of many early Norway Lake area settlers.) His parents bought a farm in Section 24 of Norway Lake Township, a farm Anders later owned. Anders was married twice: first to Martha Knudson who died just 9 months after; then to Bergitta Rustad. Five children were born to the latter marriage: Henry, Martha, Nettie, Clara and Adolph. In 1899 Anders and Bergitta moved to New London.

Brick church records⁴ show that Anders H. Espelien married Martha Knudsdatter Storebraaten (sister of Ole) in 1871. She died 1872, The same records show that Anders married Birgitta J. Rustad in 1872.

Anders and Bergitta appear in at least 4 census records⁵: 1875, 1885, 1900 and 1910. There are variations in spelling of both names. It is puzzling that the listed places of his birth include Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin.

Of Bergitta, census records** indicate that she was born in Norway. The 1900 census has the birth month and year as February, 1847 and her age as 52. Her obituary⁶, entitled "Mrs. A.H. Aspelien" states that she was born in Nannestad, Norway on Feb 7, 1847 and came to America in 1872.

In the 1875 census**, Anders H. Espelien (age 21, b. Illinois) resided in "New London⁷," Kandiyohi County. In the same household, there are Birgitta Espelien (27) and Martha (1), born Norway and Minnesota, respectively. In the adjacent household: Anders' parents Helge K. Espelien (63) and Ragnhild (60), both born in Norway.

In the 1885 census**, A.H. Espelien (31, b. IL) is found in Norway Lake Township, Kandiyohi County. With him are

- Birgita (37),
- Marte A. (11), Netta A. (9),
- Hundre Olive (4, male; *hard to read, probably should be Henry Oliver*),
- Clara J.(2),
- Eida L. Nelson(9) and Clara J. Nelson (6). The relationship of the last two th the rest is not known.

In the 1900 census**, Andris H. Espelien (age 46. b. Sep 1853 in IA) lived in Norway Lake Township, Kandiyohi County. With him: Birgita (52, b. February 1847 in Norway), son Henry (19), daughter Clara (17), son Adolph (14).

In the 1905 census**, Andrew H. Espelien (age 51) is in New London, Kandiyohi County. With him are Betsy (57), Clara (22) and Adolph (19).

In the 1910 census, Andrew Espelien (age 57, b. Wisc) is in New London Village, Kandiyohi County. With him: Bergetha (62, b. Norway, mother of 5 children, 4 still living), a son Adolph C. (24), a daughter-in-law Hilda N. (24), and 2 granddaughters.

In the 1886 plat⁸ of Norway Lake Township, the name A. H. Espelien is attached to the SW quarter of Section 25. The *Aspelien Post Office*⁹ was placed in the home of A. H. Espelien in section 25 of Norway Lake in March of 1893.

Anders and Birgitta lie at rest in the Oak Hill Cemetery, New London¹⁰. inscribed:

Espelien, Bergetha (1847-1913), Andres (1853-1923).

**All census records were viewed via Ancestry.com.

- 1 In some places, the last name is given as Aspelien.
- 2 Willmar Tribune (Willmar Minnesota) October 24, 1923.
- 3 But census records list alternate birthplaces: Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin. This uncertainty about birthplace is very puzzling.
- 4 *Keeping the Faith, Sharing the Faith*, the centennial book of the First Lutheran Church of Norway Lake, published in 1992.
- 5 All cited census records accessed via ancestry.com.
- 6 Willmar Tribune (Willmar, MN) July 23, 1913, page 1. Viewed on ChroniclingAmerican.loc.gov (This record was located only because, fortunately, the name *Espelien* appeared among the survivors.)
- 7 Careful reading of the handwritten census record will show that the township is Norway Lake, not New London.
- 8 <http://cdm16022.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p15160coll5/id/42/rec/1>
- 9 *Illustrated History of Kandiyohi County*, published in 1905
- 10 Findagrave.com