

Swen Gunderson Borgen¹ and Margit Syversdatter, Charter Members of East Norway Lake Lutheran Church.

Swen Gunderson Borgen (Swen was the father, Gunder the son) and Margit Syverts datter immigrated to America in 1857, following his two brothers, Syver and Steen who immigrated here in 1847. They sailed on a ship named Balder whose captain was a man named Haagensen.

Swen's passport listed his birth place as Rolloug Parish in Numedal, that he spoke Norwegian, was 47 years of age, and was of 'average' height with 'blue' eyes and 'light hair.' The passport also lists the following names: Farmer Svend Gundersen Knipenborg (Borgen) with wife Margit Syversdatter (age 45), two daughters and one son: Ragnhild, 18 years old; Bergit, 16 ¾ years old; and Gunder, 12 years old.

They arrived in Quebec in 1857 and traveled to Beloit, Rock County, Wisconsin where Swen Borgen's brothers lived. While living there, their son Gunder Swenson was confirmed, and their daughter Bergit was married to Thomas Osmundson.

In the spring of 1859 (some records say 1860), together with other families they traveled to Kandiyohi County, MN. Beloit is about 400 miles from Norway Lake in Kandiyohi Co., MN. They settled in Section 24, Arctander Township, traveling there by ox team with one cow and a calf.

The area was sparsely populated and was considered the western edge of the frontier. In fact, the 1850 census recorded only six thousand settlers living in the Minnesota Territory a few years before in 1850. Of these, only 12 were Scandinavians. By 1860 the total population of the new state was 172,000.

The first recorded homestead or pre-emption claim in Arctander Township was filed in 1957 by Nels P. McCool, only two or three years before Swen and his family filed their claim. When Swen filed his 'pre-exemption' claim², land could be bought from the government for \$1.25 per acre.

From the oral history passed down, it appears that most families lived in what they called 'dugouts' or sod huts while a more permanent residence could be built. Swen spent most the remaining part of the season building a cabin in an oak grove between Swenson Lake and Lake Mary. By 1862 the Norway Lake settlement consisted of about nine families. The crops were good for the season, but several accounts state there had been barely enough rain to produce them. It was the beginning of a severe two-year drought.

The pioneer families who settled in this area all had to leave their homesteads during the Dakota Conflict in 1862. It had reached the northern half of Kandiyohi County in August leaving 25 dead—16 within a six mile radius of Swen's cabin. In fact, some men from the Norway Lake settlement traveled west to the West Lake Swedish settlement where they buried 14 who had been massacred by the Dakota, and where Swen's son Gunder who was only sixteen years old, sat on a pony guarding the others. The Norway Lake settlers, along with a few others, in order to escape the warriors, fled to an island on Norway Lake call the Isle of Refuge. They resided there for three days before heading to the St Francis River area which is northeast of St Cloud. They were there for approximately two years. Swen had managed to take two of his cattle with on that journey. We who live in today's comfort can hardly imagine the hardships they went through.

In 1863 Swen and his son Gunder walked back to their farm to examine the damage. It was reported that the drought was so severe that when they passed Green Lake it was divided into three parts by bars that where far above the water line. Thankfully, their cabin was not destroyed by the Dakota like so many others in the area. Swen considered that was because of the good relationship they had with the Dakota before the uprising. The conditions were so dry that little grass could be found. They stayed in the cabin for two nights before returning to St Francis. Swen's assessment of their journey was always consistent: Green Lake in three parts; Lake Mary completely dry; no grass for even the two cows.

Swen Borgen, his son and wife were allowed return in the fall of 1864 after the area had been secured by the army. A fort had been built on the west side of West Norway Lake by the army's L Company. Swen and his family continued living on their farm until his death in 1904 at the age of 94.

Swen and Margit had three children:

1. Daughter Bergit married Thomas Osmundson.
2. Daughter Ragnhild married Christopher Engen, another Norwegian settler, and
3. Son Gunder married Gemine Negaard. They lived on the homestead their entire lives.

Report prepared by Gary Swenson, with help from Richard Lihdahl and Carolyn Mankell Sowinski.

- 1 Much of this information was obtained from a family history book "A Genalogy History of Gunder Swenson and his Descendants" written and compiled by Richard Lindahl and a webpage <http://mankell.org/borgen.html> constructed by Carolyn Sowinski. Both are descendants of Swen and Margit Borgen.
- 2 The farm was later became a homestead, with papers filed with the federal government. See http://mankell.org/swenson_homestead.html