

Syver Iverson¹ and Anna², Charter Members of East Norway Lake Lutheran Church

A venerable church history book³ has:

Syver Iverson [Syse], from Hardanger. Came to Dane Co, Wis 1854; to Norway Lake 1873. Married with Anne Thompson, from Voss. Came to America 1849, came here with her man.

(In modern Norway, there is just one Syse farm. It is in Ulvik Parish, Hordaland County.)

Records⁴ of the Ulvik Church show that Syver (spelled Sjur) left that church with his parents and siblings, bound for America, on 25 April 1854:

Iver Ørjansen, age 50; Inga Mikkelsdatter, age 47;
Ørjans, age 21; Anna, age 16; Sjur, age 11; Inga, age 6; Britha, age 3.

Syver (spelled Sever) also appears in the 1870 census of Irving Township, Jackson County, Wisconsin. At this point he is married and the couple has three children:

“Sever” Iverson, age 28; Anna, age 27; Ingebar, age 4; Louisa, age 3; Martha, age 1. The parents were born in Norway, the children in Wisconsin.

The 1880 census⁵ of Arctander Township, Kandiyohi County, Minnesota, has this information:

Syver Iverson and Anna Iverson, both age 38, both born in Norway;
daughters Inga, age 14; Betzy, age 12; and Martha, age 10; son Iver, age 8; all born in Wisconsin;
daughters Brita, age 5; Julia, age 3; and Emma, age 9/12; all born in Minnesota

In the 1910 census of the same place, the household consisted of Syver and Anne, both age 67, and daughter Selma, age 26. It is noted that the Iversons have been married 44 years and she is the mother of 11 children, of whom 9 are living.

According to church records⁶, Syver died 31 October 1925 in Willmar, MN at age 82 years, 10 months, 8 days. The implied birth date is 23 December 1842. The date of birth is confirmed in an obituary article⁷, which is subtitled “Third Street Printer, Pioneer of Arctander...” The named place of interment is “the churchyard at Norway Lake village.”

Additional information, too lengthy to recount here, is found in the writings⁸ of one Ellen Hilleboe, a niece of Syver. It is evident that she has expended great effort to record the story of Syver and Anna’s family. Among other things, her writings include information on 9 of Syver and Anna’s children (who are, of course, 1st cousins of Ellen) Suffice it to say that there were many troubles and tragedies. Here are two paragraphs:

“Much of this family seems to have vanished into thin air. There would appear to be some mental health issues with this family. Syver’s death certificate lists senility as one of the medical conditions impacting on his death. I am told that Anna’s sister ended up being committed to a mental institution in South Dakota. Their daughter Bertha Miller spent the five years prior to her death in St. Peter State Hospital. Their son Iver spent 15 years in the Anoka Insane Asylum where he died.”

“The other mystery is where Syver and Anna were buried. Syver’s obituary says he is buried at Norway Lake Village. The only trouble is that there is no such place. Heritage Seekers in Kandiyohi County claims this is Jericho and he is buried at East Norway Lake Lutheran Church; he’s not listed in their plot map. There is an Anna Thompson listed in their plot map. I have not yet located the Calvary Lutheran Church cemetery.”

Report prepared by Earl O. Knutson, March 2020

- 1 Family history researcher Patricia Lindgren has established that three charter members of the two Norway Lake Lutheran Churches (four if we include spouses) are closely related, as follows: Urjans Iverson, Syver Iverson, and Anna Iversdatter were siblings and Iver Syse was a 1st cousin. (These relationships were independently verified by Hardangerlag genealogist Stephanie Benoit.) Eventually, 1st cousins Anna and Iver married. A fourth sibling, Gjertrud (Mrs. Anders Monson) was also a charter member, and is written up separately.
- 2 Anna’s origin was difficult to determine. Vossalag President Jean Marthaler suggested that she is Anna Nilsdatter Nakke, whose family is listed among the 1849 emigrants from Voss. Information collected by Voss researcher Darrell Tygstad, relayed by Jean, shows that her father’s name in America was Neils Thompson. Further evidence is found in the baptism records of the Beaver Creek WI church: the parents of Betsi Lovise, born 14 Nov 1867, are Syvert Iversen and Anna Nielsdatter.
- 3 Festskrift – En Fremstilling af det Kirkelege Arbeid i Norway Lake fra 1862 – 1916. Translated by Edna Rude, Gary, MN. Translation promulgated by Peder C. Gandrud, Bemidji, MN. Translation page 20
- 4 <https://media.digitalarkivet.no/view/8315/41033/4>; Thanks to Hardangerlag genealogist Stephanie Benoit for finding this entry.
- 5 Census records were located and viewed using Ancestry.com.
- 6 ELCA Records of Calvary Church, Willmar, MN; located and viewed via Ancestry.com
- 7 Willmar Tribune, November 4, 1925. Page 1
- 8 *The Writings of Ellen Hilleboe* made available by Patricia Lindgren.