

Thomas (Tellef) Osmundson and Bergit Svensdatter, Charter Members of East Norway Lake Lutheran Church

Gunnilde Ellingsdatter was helping plant a farmer's garden on a beautiful spring day on the Hardanger Fjord. She was a domestic on a fruit farm in Kinsarvik, Norway. It was a beautiful place to live, the sky was blue and the rich green hills were filled with fruit trees blossoming with pink and white flowers. Gunnilde was single, but at 33 she was also pregnant. She knew she must travel away from her village to have the child, for it would bring shame to stay. It made it even harder that the father was not interested in marriage, so she must face this all alone.

Luckily, the family she worked for made arrangements that she could stay with a family in the Parish of Stord Hordaland about 200 km away. Gunnilde was very thankful that her employer arranged a place for her to stay, and for the trip to Stord. There she worked for the family she was living with while waiting for her delivery. In October, on a cold dreary day her first born son Tellef arrived. Tellef was baptized on October 26, 1835, just days after he was born. While she was overjoyed with her new son, she knew this was the beginning of a very difficult life for the both of them. The weather this time of year was not conducive for traveling home to Kinsarvik. It would be better if Tellef was a bit older before they returned to their village, so she and young Tellef waited until spring to travel home. The trip home was difficult, having to care for her precious son. As she traveled up the Fjord she had many mixed emotions of returning home to the familiar sights and smells of the apple blossoms and uncertainty of her future with this small child. She needed to care for Tellef, but also she had a demanding job as a servant. This would not be an easy life.

Time flew by, and five years later Tellef's father Asmund decided to marry Gunnilde. They were married in the little white church in Kinsarvik which sits right on the Fjord. Tellef was no doubt thrilled to have a father. His father worked on the same farm as Gunnilde, so the family settled there. Asmund had grown up on the Meland farm in Utne, just across the Fjord from Kinsarvik. He loved the family farm, but he was not the oldest son, so according to tradition it was the oldest brother that inherited the farm. That left Asmund with no choice but to become a laborer on another farm. The family of three had a difficult life as servants to a farmer, working long hours six days a week. The rule of King Oscar I made it even harder, since he did not support the working class.

The family did enjoy each Sunday afternoon when the extended family would gather on the Meland farm where the Asmund family lived. Tellef enjoyed playing with his cousins, so this time together was one of the best memories of his childhood. This did not last forever, as Asmund left his family and later had a child with another woman. This made life even harder for Gunnilde and Tellef.

When Tellef was eighteen he made a decision to leave Norway for the new land of America. Here he could have the opportunity to start his own farm, not work for others. His mother had worked to support him all his life, and now he decided to take her with him to America. But such a trip was expensive, and he had little money. Based on the typical practice of the day, it is probable that Tellef worked to pay for the passage. We know Tellef left his home in Norway in 1852 and the next time we have records of him is in 1854 when he arrived at the port of Quebec, where his name changed to Thomas Osmundson. He then travelled to Beloit Wisconsin, meeting Bergit Svensdatter and in 1859 they were married. Only a few months after the marriage the couple and their first child, Samuel and moved to Lake Andrew township in Minnesota which had recently been declared open for settlement. There they settled on the shores of Norway Lake to begin building their legacy.

In 1875 Thomas moved closer to Wilmar, owning a dairy farm on what is now the Holiday Inn property. Then in 1896 he moved to Virginia with his three youngest children. Thomas went back to Norway in 1899 to inform his family of the opportunities in America. He hoped others would join him and have a chance to improve their life.

Thomas had a difficult childhood and did not have a bright future in Norway. But the strength of his character pushed him to take the risk and make the long trip to America and to work hard to establish his own farm. He persevered and as a result built the first Osmundson homestead just outside Willmar Minnesota. During his life he followed his Christian values, served on the school board to insure his children received a good education, and was active in local politics.

Thomas Osmundson's Great Great Granddaughter,

Hazel Osmundson Niedermuller

Editor's Notes:

- Since this was written by a descendant, the usual requirement of listing sources is waived.
- The author states that she has several photos from Norway that she can share with other descendants; niedermuller@earthlink.net.