

NELS GRINDHEIM PETERSON AND MARTHEA ELENVOLD MATHIASDATTER JOHNSON, charter members of East Norway Lake Lutheran Church

Nils Grindheim Peterson was the oldest of six children born to Petter Nielsen Grindheim and Wilhelmina Katharine Metzel and was born on January 5, 1836 on the Grindheim farm, Finnås/Moster Parish, Hordaland, Norway. Nels followed his younger brother Hans to America joining him in Beloit, Wisconsin in 1857. Two other brothers, Peter and Christian would eventually follow. Nels' two youngest siblings, Anna and Andreas, died before he left Norway. Nels and his brother Hans arrived in the Monongalia County Settlement in 1859. Nels established his homestead on land located in Section 31 of Colfax Township on a peninsula dividing Norway Lake and Games Lake.

In August, 1862, Dakota Indians attacked the Swedish settlement at West Lake (Monson) killing thirteen people and the settlers living to the east took refuge on an island in Norway Lake to escape the attack. Nels' future father-in-law, Mathias Johnson, received word of the attack and went to warn Nels. They escaped to Paynesville and eventually made it to St. Francis in Anoka County while the Norway Lake area and a large expanse of Minnesota was closed to settlers. Nels, along with three of his brothers, enlisted in the army and was assigned to Troop D, First Minnesota Cavalry, under General Henry Sibley which pursued the Dakota Indians into Dakota Territory. On November 4, 1863, Nels was mustered out of the army and returned to Anoka County where he was married to Marthe Elenvold Mathiasdatter on December 23, 1863. Marthe was born on August 6, 1841 in Stord, Hordaland, Norway to Mathias Fjeldhaugen Johnson and Valgjerd Estabovold Arnesdatter. The Johnsons were neighbors to Nels in Colfax Township.

Nels and Marthe had six children:

1. Sophus Christian Nels (1864-1936) born in Anoka County prior to the family's return to Norway Lake. All the other children were born in Colfax Township.
2. Wilhelm Johann Nels (1865-1934);
3. Peter Andrias (1867-1940);
4. Matilde (1873-?);
5. Ole Mathias (1877-1954)
6. and Carl Sam (1880-1967).

Of the Peterson children only two maintained contact with the Norway Lake community. William took over the home farm and lived there his entire life. The land remains in the Peterson family and is owned by Nels' great grandson, Dallen Peterson. Carl Sam Peterson married Olena Engen and lived in Minneapolis but Nels' great grandson Ron now owns the farm lying on the west shore of West Norway Lake.

Nels Peterson died on April 8, 1912. Marthe died on June 29, 1918. They are both buried in the First Lutheran of Norway Lake Cemetery where they were active members. Nels was a charter member of the East Norway Lake Church. It is interesting to note that the log cabin Interpretive Center at the log church site may well have once been the home of Nels and Marthe Peterson.

Prepared by Marlin Henjum

Sources Consulted

U. S. Census

Minnesota Territorial and State Censuses, 1849-1905

U.S. Evangelical Lutheran Church of America Records, 1875-1940

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Ancestry.com

"Peterson Roots," compiled by Nella (Peterson) Swenson

"Peterson Family History," compiled by Peter Gandrud

Web: Minnesota, Find A Grave Index 1800-2012