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**A Brief History of the  
BEAR CREEK  
COMMUNITY**

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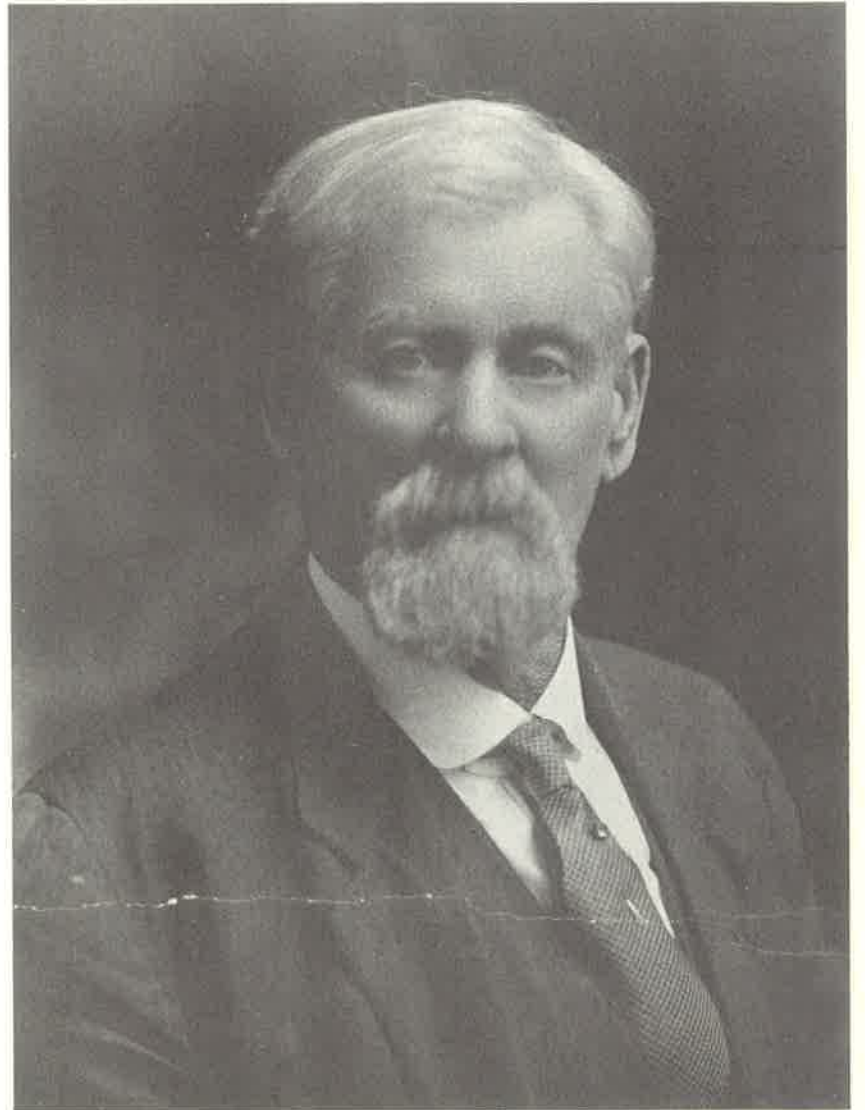
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**Mower County, Minnesota**

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**LARS G. HANSON**

**Who, with the late Ole Jorgens, compiled this history.**

**BEAR CREEK COMMUNITY'S FIRST CHURCH**



**This building, said to be the oldest in Mower county, is now standing on the farm of Sever Temanson.**

**MR. AND MRS. OLE O. FINHART**



Ole O. Finhart was born January 7, 1824, in Southern Aardal, Valders, Norway, coming to Dane County, Wis., in 1848. He came to the township of Frankford, Mower county, Minn., in July 1854. He served in Third Battery Light Artillery in the Civil War, also in the House of Representatives, 15th Legislature. He took an active part in political affairs and showed his interest in the advancement of religion and community betterment by donating a corner of his homestead for the location of the Bear Creek Lutheran church and cemetery. He died January 28, 1898.

Kari O. Hovda Finhart was born in Valders, Norway, March 25, 1833, coming to Dane county, Wis., in 1852. She made the journey to Frankford township, Mower county, Minn., by ox team with a colony of 37 souls in July, 1854. As the wagons were full she walked most of the way from Milwaukee. She was married to Ole O. Finhart in 1855 and was the first Norwegian bride in Mower county. She had a family of eight children, Ole, Olaus, Caroline, Martin, Matilda, Adolf, Syver and Sorina. She died February 18, 1913.

On the Fourth of July, 1914, the people of Norwegian birth and descent met at the home of Syver Hovda in memory of the sixtieth anniversary of the arrival of the first Norwegian settlers in the townships 103, Range 14, 104, Range 14, and Township 104, Range 15, Mower County, Minnesota, now known as Frankford, Racine and Grand Meadow.

By a unanimous vote of the assembled people, Lars G. Hanson and Ole Jorgens were requested to collect data and write a history of the early life in the settlement.

The present pages is our attempt to comply with the request.

This early settlement being largely along a small stream of water called Bear Creek, the settlement people adopted the name "Bear Creek Settlement" and it has always been recognized by this name by other Norwegian settlements in Minnesota, and this name was legally established in the organization of the Lutheran Church Association by the adoption of the name "Bear Creek Norwegian Lutheran Church" as the incorporated name of the congregation.

The first party of colonists were nearly all native Norwegians — except for a few young children — and all born in the church parishes, Aurdal south and Aurdal north, in the judicial district name Valdris, and at that time, Christiana stift (state), at this it is called Hamars stift — it is a part of the old Christiana stift.

All these first colonists or settlers left Norway as emigrants for America during the years between 1840 and 1853. All came across the Atlantic Ocean in sailing vessels and nearly all of them temporarily made their homes in Wisconsin, in Dane County.

Following are the names of the first arrivals in Bear Creek:

Ole Olsen Finhart from Bang, Aurdal South.

Ole Simonson Jobraaten and wife, Liv, and children, Simon, Beret and Syver, from Begne dalen, Aurdal South.

Ole Olsen Hovda and wife Kari, born on the Gaard Boen and children, Ole, Kari, Syver, Hermand, Arne, Engebret and Guri, all born Reinli, Aurdal South.

Amund Lindelien and wife, Marit, born Bang, Aurdal south, and a child, Beret, born in Wisconsin.

Anders A. Lybeck and wife, Sigri, and child, Kari, born Bang, Aurdal South.

Ole Olsen Sjurud, born Etendalen, Aurdal South and wife, Magdalena, born Reinli, and children, Trond and Anne, born in Wisconsin.

Hans Andersen, born Gamlemoen, Begnedalen and wife, Ragnhild, born Berg, Etnedalen, Aurdal South.

Nils Syversen (Moen), born Bang, Aurdal and wife, Elen, born in Lands parish.

Amund Johnson (Klastolen) and wife, Anne, born Etnedalen, Aurdal South, Ole Julsen, and a young woman engaged for marriage but dissolved — her name is not known to the writer.

Knud Nilsen (Haugerstuen), Aurdal North.

Syver Olsen Skalshaugen and brother, Erland, both born Bang, Aurdal South.

This body of first settlers, thirty-six in number, arrived in township 103, Range 14 — this township was in organization given the name Frankford — on the first of July, 1854. From Wisconsin and to the point of first camping ground, the colonists moved in two separate bodies, all in tented wagons drawn by oxen and bringing with them household goods and a few carpenters and blacksmith tools.

Nearly all single persons and families brought one or more milking cows, some sheep and hens and small pigs in boxes attached to the wagon boxes. The two moving caravans arrived in Frankford Township on the same day and constructed their camp on Section 9, in town 103, Range 14.

From this point or camping ground the colonists, individual or the head of families, started out in search of lands for his future home. All the lands within the townships now called Racine, Grand Meadow and Frankford was government land except a few quarter sections claimed by land speculators under soldier warrants. In Frankford, including the new arrivals, so far as known, there were only fifty white persons stopping or camping on this date. Within the borders of the last named townships.

In a few days, all persons entitled to preempt public land had each selected his prospective homestead. However, Ole Simonsen was by common consent allowed to make his home on the southeast quarter of section five in Township one hundred and three in range fourteen. For the sake of getting a temporary dwelling shanty ready as quickly as possible, four men, heads of families, joined hands in building a log house twenty-two feet by sixteen and twelve feet high. The roof was thatched with pieces of bark and over the bark was square pieces of sod carefully laid.

In this house the four allied families lived the first winter. In this house on November 2, 1854, the first child of the colonists — a girl — was born to the parents Nils Syverson Moen and his wife, Elen. The next summer, 1855, the three families who had over the winter lived together, with Ole Simonson, moved on their own claims and during the next winter the first English school was held in this said family dwelling house, one Mrs. Henry Moore, was the teacher.

On the third Sunday in June, 1856, Rev. C. L. Clausen held the



first Lutheran Church service in this same house and organized the Bear Creek Lutheran Church. Rev. Clausen presided and Gulik Dalen acted as Secretary. Ole Finhart and Ole Simonsen were elected trustees. It is right to remark here that Gulik Erlandsen Dalen had at this time arrived in the settlement as it is seen he was present at this church meeting. Gulik Dalen's family at this time was his wife, Kari Syversdatter Kirkeberg Moen, from Bang, Aurdal South. Gulik was born on the Gaard Bruflat, Etnedalen, Aurdal South. With Gulik was his aged father Erland Bruflat. The Dalen family had for some time lived in Dane County, Wisconsin and from there moved directly to Bear Creek in the early spring of 1856.

Other families and individuals also came this same early spring and summer, namely, Ole Froland, (Florand) born in Telemarken, Norway, and his wife, Martha, and child Ragnhild, born Oxnaberg, Voss, Norway, and Jonas Nelsen Berg, born Etnedalen, Aurdal South, and two daughters, Ragnhild and Kirstin, and his wife, Marit Halvorsdatter Milevandet, Bang, Aurdal South.

Early in the spring of 1855, before Rev. Clausen visited Bear Creek, Ole Finhart decided to get married and wanted to get married by a Lutheran preacher. He with his betrothed, Kari Hovda, started for St. Ansgar, Iowa, to find Pastor Clausen, and with him went Nils Syversen Moen and his wife. Mr. and Mrs. Syversen wanted their first child baptized. The party started across the unsettled prairies in a wagon drawn by a yoke of oxen. The first night the party camped on the prairie. The second day they reached Cedar River near St. Ansgar. At this point Ole and Nils left the women in the wagon and walked over to the parsonage, there to find out that Pastor Clausen was absent from his home in some distant place in Iowa or Minnesota. The parties in their wagon returned and reached their homes. Ole Finhart didn't want to put off his marriage any longer and in his wagon drawn by his oxen he went a long distance into Fillmore County, and there discovered a lawfully qualified Justice of the Peace, by whom Ole and Kari were made lawful husband and wife.

We will mention in connection with Ole Finhart's marriage history that he and his wife were the first couple married in the Bear Creek Settlement and perhaps the first in Mower County. Finhart came to America in the year 1848, had acquired a fair common school education in Norway and during his residence in Wisconsin he attended an American English school. With these qualifications he was the natural leader in the settlement and a staunch supporter of the Lutheran Church. In the War of the Rebellion, he served in the First Minnesota Battery and in 1872 was a member of the House of Legislature of Minnesota.

As already mentioned an additional number of persons came to Bear Creek in the spring of 1855. These were Halvor Olsen Klas-tolen and wife, Johanna, and with them a sister of Halvor Klas-tolen, name Kjersti; all of these were born in Etnedalen, Aurdal South, and Christen Tuff, born West Slidre, Valdres, and his wife, Anna, born Lier, Norway; and Nils Nelsen Haugerstuen, born Aurdal North and his wife Anne, — her birthplace is unknown. Aslak Knudsen Aamot also came in the spring of 1855.

In 1856 came Halvor Johannesen Vig, (Week) and wife Jorand born Haugerstuen, and children, Johannes, Siri, Ragnhild and Kari, all born Aurdal north. Together with the Week family came Ole Lunde, Nils Lunde, Peder Huset, Gulbrand Renna, and Anders Torhaug, all from Aurdal north. All the persons as arrivals in 1856 came to the Bear Creek settlement on Sunday, the 22nd of June of said year.

By memory it will be stated that on this Sunday, the 22nd of June, the first regular Lutheran Church service was held in the settle-ment by Rev. C. L. Clausen, and on this same day the church was organized. The service and organization meeting was held in the house of Ole Simonson Jobraaten. At this first church service, six children were baptized. Names as follows: Gunhild, daughter of Nils and Elen Syversen, born Nov. 2, 1854 and Marit, born March 6, 1856; Ole, son of Ole and Kari Finhart, born April 10, 1856; Joseph, son of Chresten and Anne Tuf. born ? ; Anne, daughter of Hans and Ragnhild Andersen (Gamlemoen), and Engebret, son of Amund and Marit Johnson Lindelien.

The date of the organization of school district No. 28 is not known to the writer, but this can be found in the records in Austin, but part of the deed given for the school house ground is in the writer's possession, and bears date the 17th day of January, 1859, and signed by Ole and Liv Simonsen and certified to by Walther S. Booth, Justice of the Peace. The land contained one half acre and situated in the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ , Section 4, Town 103, Range 14.

On this ground the school house was built — the writer thinks during 1857. Minnesota was yet a territory. The house was built by voluntary work. The men of the settlement each bought a certain number of logs, squared and hewed and then fitted them into the building. The house from foundation with walls, roof and furniture included was all completed by free and voluntary contribution. The settlers built the house for school and temporary church meet-ings and for many years it was so used.

About 10 rods east of the school house and little to the south of

a due east line, a grave yard privilege was granted or donated to the Church Association by Ole Simonsen, and the first person buried in this cemetery was Anders Torhaug who died from overexertion trying to drive a pair of young steers. This accident occurred on the old trail east of Ole Finhart's home and about 80 rods due west of the present Bear Creek church. Halvor Week and Torhaug came together through the grove, but Torhaug's steers forced him faster forward than Week could ordinarily walk, and when Week caught up to Torhaug's team and wagon, Torhaug lay unconscious by the roadside. Mr. Week brought water from the creek nearby and did his best to revive him, but he expired without regaining consciousness.

The second person buried here was Erland Bruflat, father of Gulik Erlandsen Bruflat. The family adopted the name Dalen at the time becoming citizen of the United States. In 1864, Ole Simonsen died and was buried in this graveyard, and before it was abandoned for the new cemetery about the Bear Creek Church in 1870, it is said by many of the oldest settlers that about 40 persons were buried in this first grave yard.

In the fall of 1856 came to Bear Creek, John Amundsen Lindelien, born Hedalen, Aurdal South, and wife, Beret Knudsdaughter born Bang, Aurdal South, and with them were the following named children: Thora, Ole, Gulik, and Gunhild. We will note here that Thora Lindelien became the wife of Aslak Knudsen Aamodt, and Gunhild the wife of Dr. O. W. Anderson of Rochester, Minnesota. She was generally known by the name Julia Johnson and married by this name. John Amundsen Lindelien moved to Bear Creek from Springdale, Wis.

During this year 1856, came Anna Oxnaberg, born Voss, Norway and her son Torgeir. She became the wife of Syver Olsen Skalsaugen. She was a sister of Martha, Mrs. Ole Florand.

In 1857 came Helge Johnson and wife Barbra, from Wisconsin. Helge was born Aurdal North on farm named Odegaarden.

In the summer of 1858 came from Norway, Amund Finhart and his sister, Sigrid, born Bang, Aurdal, So., and Ole Sorflaten and wife Olia, and a boy child, name Ole. With this last named family came Anders Halvorsen Milevandet and wife, Olia, born Finhart. These two families were born in Bang, Aurdal, South.

After the log school house was built the settlement had visits now and then, irregularly, from one pastor, Jensen, preacher in charge of Highland, Fillmore County, Minnesota, and one Rev. Fredriksen, a peculiar character who traveled from settlement to settlement clad and wrapped in sheepskin, and by his peculiar ap-

pearance he was generally known as the sheepskin (Skinfeld) preacher.

In May, 1858 came Rev. A. C. Preus to Rock Dell, upon request from St. Olaf's church, to conduct church service and announcement was communicated to Bear Creek people informing them if they wished to have any ministerial business administered, they were invited to come to this church meeting. Most all the settlement people of Bear Creek went to Rock Dell and brought with them many children to be baptized and eight to be confirmed. The meeting was held under a large oak tree on Golberg's farm. The writer will remark it was on the senior Golberg's farm — the father of the large Golberg family. Here Beret Simonsen and Simonsen, children of Ole Simonsen Jobraaten; Siri and Ragnhild Week, daughters of Halvor Week, Engebret and Gudrid, children of Ole Olsen Hovda, Sr., and Gunhild and Gulik, children of John Amundsen Lindelien, were all examined in their religious knowledge and confirmed in the Lutheran faith.

The writers will remark as a leading direction for future information that the girls in this confirmation class in time became the wives of men as follows: Beret Simonsen, married Hermand Hovda; Siri Week, Lars G. Hanson — Modalen —; Ragnhild Week, wife of Ole Johnson Lindelien; Guri Hovda, wife of Ole Jorgens, and Gunhild Johnson, wife of Dr. O. W. Andersen of Rochester, Minnesota.

How many children were baptized at the above described church meeting is not known except Ole Florand, son of Ole and Martha Florand, but there were several others.

In the early part of the summer of 1861, Pastor Jensen, temporary minister of the churches, St. Olaf, Rock Dell and Bear Creek, held confirmation in Rock Dell and confirmed Syver Simonson Jobraaten, son of Ole Simonsen, Kari Week, daughter of Halvor Week — she became the wife of Hans G. Hansen Modalen; Ragnhild Tuff, daughter of the widow, Beret Tuff who was now a resident in the Bear Creek settlement. Ragnhild Tuff married one Ole Hansen. This couple moved to Lac Qui Parle county, Minnesota. At this writing both are dead many years ago. Anne Sjuru was in this class. She married one Knud Storodden, and Kari, daughter of Jonas Nelsen was married to Engebret Fjeld. They moved to Iowa and at this writing both are dead.

The widow, Beret Tuff, as said, was a resident of Bear Creek, and had children, Ragnhild, Ole and a second Ole, Peter, Beret and Anders.

In the year 1861 came a large number of emigrants to Bear Creek directly from Norway. Their names are as follows: Gutorm Hansen



Modalen, and wife, Kjersti, and children, Else, Lars, Beret, Hans, Kari, Christi, Gunhild-Maria and Anne Christine. The whole family were born Begnedalen, Aurdal South. The daughters in this family married as follows: Else, wife of Michael Olsen Beltestad. He died and she is now the wife of Borger Andersen of Lands parish, Norway. Beret, married Nils Julson, from Aurdal north, who came to Bear Creek in 1862. Kari married Mikkell Molstad of Hadiland, Norway. She died and he then married the sister Anne Christine who at this writing is Mrs. M. Molstad of Spring Valley, Minnesota. Christi married Wegger Torgrimson, both dead. Gunhild Maria married Knud Iverson of Begnedalen, Aurdal South, both dead.

In the emigrant group with Modalen came Martha Syversdaughter, now the wife of J. H. J. Weeks; Ragnhild Guliksbraaten, she became the wife of Erland Olsen Skalshaugen, and her sister, Anna Thorina who married Engebret Hovda, both from Ness Odalen, Hans Simonson and wife, Olia, and one son Simon. Hans was a brother of Ole Simonsen. With the Modalen group of emigrants came Erik Suversen Oymoen and wife, Maria, and two children, Ragnhild, who married Halvor Jorgens, and a son Simon. This family came from Aadalen. Erik Eriksen Haugen came with the Modalen family in 1861.

In July, 1861, came Engebret Sorben and wife, Kari, and children Ole, Beret and Anton, born Bang, Aurdal South. Beret became the wife of Eilef Jorgens of Reinli, Aurdal So. Knud Knudsen Ostagaarden, the Sr. and Knud the Junior, and two daughters, Ingeborg and Sigri. Ingeborg married a man in La Crosse County, Wis. by name Trond Arnesen Haugen. Sigrid married Arne T. Boen. All of the Ostergaarden family came from Reinlid, Aurdal So. Trond Arneson was from Aurdal North.

In this squad of emigrants were Syver Skaran and wife, Marit, of Reinlid, Aurdal So., and children. With them were Anne, wife of Trond Boen and sons Syver and Ole and daughter Beret, wife of Syver M. Hoff and Dortia, wife of Simon H. Simonson, Jens Brager and wife, Kari and children, Ole and Hans, both dead, and daughter Oliana, wife of Ole Tande, now residents of Northfield, Minn.

In this emigrant group was Ole Jorgens of Reinlid, now one of the writers of this sketch.

In 1861 the Bear Creek Lutheran Church together with the St. Olaf Parish of Rock Dell, sent a call for a permanent preacher to the state church authorities in Norway, and on this call one L. Steen came recommended by the said church authorities. The St. Olaf Church congregation had in the fall of 1861 a parish residence built and Pastor Steen domiciled himself in this parish building. It was

agreed between the St. Olaf's parish people and the people of Bear Creek that the preacher of St. Olaf should visit and preach in Bear Creek every seventh Sunday. In conformity with this agreement, Rev. Steen held regular church services in Bear Creek at stated times in the log school house and from the beginning of his administration, records were kept of all ministerial acts and the acts of the church association in connection with church affairs. Before this time no records were written in book form. Some pieces of paper had some notations, but these cannot be found.

In 1862 and 1863 came a few individuals and families to Bear Creek and with the recording of these this sketch will close the list of old settlers. In 1862 came Arne T. Boen to Bear Creek from Iowa and Engebret Nelsen Haugerstuen and family, wife Aaste, and the sons Nels, Haldor and Erik and daughter Siri, wife of Syver Hovda. With the Nelson family came John Week, Sr., and wife, Ingeborg, and at that time one child, Johanns, Jr., now a resident of Thief River Falls; and with them came Nils Juelson and Ole Baker, known as hardware Ole Baker of Rochester, Minn.; and Ole Juelsen and wife Ragnhild and one Erick Eriksen, sometimes known as Erik Tveit. His wife was Astri Tveit, and his sisters, Marit, wife of Syver Sorben and Siri, wife of Knud Olson Grondalen of Underwood, Ottertail County.

In 1863 came Jorgen Olsen Hellingen, the family in becoming citizens of the United States adopted the name Jorgens. His wife's name was Secil, born Hagen, Reinlid, and their children with them were Eilif, Siri, wife of Ole Sven, and Sigrid, wife of Syver Bohn, and Halvor at present living on the old homestead. The two older children of the family had arrived in the settlement some years before, the daughter, Ingrid, the wife of Amund Finhart, and Ole, at present living in Minneapolis. This family came from Reinlid, Aurdal So.

This ends the enumeration of Bear Creek settlers who came there more than 50 years ago, reckoning back from this year of the compilation of this topical sketch, now 1915. A complete history of the original settlers before fifty years ago, should give account of every child born of these families that would in the future enable many persons to trace the lineage of descent.

Rev. Steen served the Bear Creek church till the year 1869. Steen was by natural disposition or bringing up in an aristocratic family, a stranger to the character of the common Norwegian people. He didn't try to become intimately acquainted with the church members or in any fashion attempted to gain their friendship or social relation, but always in an official superiority commanded. He showed this disposition as well when he ordered a woman to bring

him a cup of coffee or brush his clothes, as when he presided at a church business meeting, and for the least little act by his parishioners that didn't suit his notions, he lost his patience and calm temper and broke out in intemperate language. Many of his most earnest and faithful church supporting members lost their love for him.

In the crisis of the strained condition between Rev. Steen and his congregation, a Swedish Methodist preacher began to hold meetings and he was able to turn several families and individuals in favor of his church. At one time 15 families of the settlement joined the Methodist congregation. Most of them were members on probation. Rev. Bjork, that was the name of the preacher, was a forceful and enterprising man and soon had a small church and parsonage built on the highway corner two miles north of the present village of Grand Meadow — the village of Grand Meadow and the Southern Minnesota railroad were not in existence at this time. Rev. Bjork was an intelligent, shrewd and cunning man, but lacked the essential qualification necessary for a pulpit preacher. His congregation was nearly all Norwegians and he being an uneducated Swede was not able to modify his Swedish language to properly impressive figures in language. He struggled and worked hard for the establishment of his church and increase of membership, but his defects as stated were against him, and besides this, many of the members moved away from the neighborhood, and he left the place for some other location. The Methodist conference of Minnesota was not willing to abandon the little church and sent several able preachers who could speak the Norwegian language intelligently. Among these were presiding elder Amund Olson Ulland, a person of unstained character as a preacher, citizen and a sincere Christian. Another honorable, honest and upright man, Rev. Asle Knudsen spent a few years of his life there in earnest preaching, but the church could not be redeemed or advanced. The Lutheran church had by this time discharged Rev. Steen and in his place was the able and efficient Rev. Jorgen A. Thorsen. The Bear Creek church was built during the years 1869 and 1870, and the cemetery located about the church building. Rev. Thorsen preached in the Bear Creek church every fifth Sunday.

In 1875 the Bear Creek congregation dissolved connection with the St. Olaf congregation and united with the churches of Bloomfield and Le Roy, and together with said church organizations sent a call for a preacher to the state church authorities in Norway, Rev. Ole A. Bue accepted the call and was installed minister of the united congregations Bloomfield, Bear Creek and Le Roy. In Bear Creek he preached every third Sunday.

Rev. Bue served the Bear Creek congregation till the year 1893. At this time the Bear Creek church congregation dissolved connection with Bloomfield and Le Roy and together with the church organization of Grand Meadow Village established a parish by name of Bear Creek and Grand Meadow. The new parish bought 50 acres of land near the Bear Creek church in Section 7, Town 103, Range 14, and erected necessary buildings on it for a preacher's home. At this time, 1893, the Bear Creek - Grand Meadow congregation accepted Rev. S. O. Rondestvedt as their pastor. He served the churches till the year 1901 and resigned.

During the same year, 1901, the churches called and accepted Rev. O. G. Belsheim. He served the churches till the year 1907.

During the year 1907 the churches called and accepted Rev. A. H. Gjevre. He served the churches till the year 1913 and resigned.

In 1913 the churches called and accepted its present preacher, H. C. M. Jahren.

This completes our brief skeleton history of the early settlement of the Bear Creek Norwegian colony with dates and figures of incidents in our possession. It is mostly compiled from personal recollections of the writers and other old persons yet living who at the early days were young children or youths. A comparatively full history of the development of this colony up to the present date would make a large and interesting history.

We will return to a few remarks about the hard struggles of the first years in the settlement. Nearly all the colonists were without money sufficient to insure them against great suffering during the first years before they could raise grain for bread and this condition was general among all settlers of all nationalities in the territory. Our Norwegian settlers were all young and strong people and able and willing to work, but could find little or no employment for pay.

It must be understood that the first great necessity for all the settlers or homesteaders was to build shelters for themselves to live in and some kind of hovels for their domestic animals. It was, also, necessary to get as many acres of ground broke the first summer as possible so as to enable them to grow something for food the next year. The settlers brought their steers together and put 4, 5 or 6 pairs together in a string. This string they called breaking teams. In this way each and all got a patch of an acre or few acres broke. Many of the settlers were so poor that they didn't own a yoke of steers, but those who had oxen broke a patch for them.

Nearly all the men settlers travelled far and near in search of work the first winter, but seldom found a chance to work for any



kind of money compensation. It is well known to the writers that strong and young men considered it a great luck to find a chance to cut and split rails and cut cord wood a whole day for 25 to 50 cents, and some of them had to walk 6 miles in the morning to the work and of course that same distance back to their homes in the evening.

During the first winter there was a general scarcity of flour or meal for bread. One woman told the writer that as far as she knew, there was not so much wheat for flour in the settlement that a loaf of bread could be baked. In this flour famine Ole Finhart undertook to drive to Decorah, Iowa with his yoke of oxen to buy flour, but there was not one pound to be gotten. All he could get was a sack of corn meal, and this sack was divided among the destitute families.

The settlers of mixed nationalities among and about the Norwegian colonists were mostly all as poor in money wealth as the Norwegians. None hired men or women for money wages. Kari Hovda, later Mrs. Ole Finhart told often that she worked several months for an American family in the new village Frankford without any compensation except her board — said she was glad to get her board. After a couple of years girls as kitchen servants were paid from 50 cents to one dollar and fifty cents a week and it may be added that these servant girls were used or rather abused by their employers as slaves or beasts of burden. A hired girl was janitor, water carrier, clothes washer, floor scrubber, house cleaner, nurse and in some houses she had to calcimine rooms with lime mixture. Her hours of work were not limited to a certain number of hours but in most cases she had to get out of bed at four o'clock in the morning and work till late in the night, often till 12 in the night. Her bedroom was never heated. In some homes she had to sleep in a rustic bedstead in the garret where snow often drifted in and covered her bed cover. It was an exception to the rule if a Norwegian hired girl was allowed to mix with the Yankee family in the sitting room except when she had to come in to work. She was not permitted to serve the family at the table. She was only allowed into the door of the dining room with the food she had cooked or prepared. There she was met by the lady of the house or some other appointed or privileged lady waiter who took the food from her hands and served it. These conditions lasted for more than ten years. The Norwegian girls and her parents had to submit to these hardships and indignities on account of poverty, but it was often expressed by parents of the poor girls, "If we were not so penniless and hard up, we would rather have our daughters feed pigs and milk cows than to be degraded servants of the Yankees."

When the Civil War broke out in 1861, the cost of cotton goods

rose to fabulous prices. A yard of calico cost as high as 50 cents. This rise in the price of cotton goods made the life of a working girl desperate. Her weekly wages did not rise with prices on her most necessary wearing apparel. She never received more than two dollars a week and she had to be a very competent and able girl to get two dollars. Most of them had to work for the old wages, one dollar or one dollar and fifty cents.

The second winter in the Bear Creek settlement, 1855 and 1856 nearly all the men population went down the Mississippi River toward Rock Island, Illinois, and into the woods to cut cord wood. They all found work and got fair pay. It was a lucky venture. They worked till late in the spring and returned to Bear Creek with their hard earned savings. This relieved the money stringency for all the families in connection with the wood choppers and most of these and others with them repeated the enterprise the next winter.

At this time the Bear Creek settlers began to have some farm products to sell. Wheat grew abundantly on their few acres of breakings. The herd had increased in cows, oxen and sheep. The food shortage had at this time disappeared.

The great question now was a marketing place for what farm products they could sell. There were no railroads in Minnesota at this time and the nearest steamboat station was Winona on the Mississippi River, and the distance from Bear Creek to Winona was about 60 miles. Roads to Winona there were none, and no bridges, so to get there with a yoke of oxen before a primitive lumber wagon with a load of wheat on was a perilous and slow undertaking. If rain had softened the ground, it often took the ox teamster two weeks to reach Winona and back home. During the winter season a journey of this kind was impossible. It could only be done during the bare ground season.

The price of a bushel of wheat at this time was about 50 cents and the pay was generally in merchandise at the stores owned by the wheat buyer. The nominal price of the wheat was not governed by a continental or world's market, but by the speculative notion of the grain buyer, and the price of the goods in the stores on which the farmer had his order was just as arbitrary in the opposite direction as on the wheat. The goods were always of job lot qualities such as could not be sold in the market in eastern towns and cities. As an example to illustrate this, the writer will state his own experience. In the summer of 1861, I bought a pair of heavy, low, split leather shoes, and paid two dollars for them in wheat at 50 cents a bushel. In other words, I gave four bushels of wheat for my shoes.

Another instance of this period: In 1863 I bought a small cook stove, worth not more than four dollars at first cost or wholesale



kind of money compensation. It is well known to the writers that strong and young men considered it a great luck to find a chance to cut and split rails and cut cord wood a whole day for 25 to 50 cents, and some of them had to walk 6 miles in the morning to the work and of course that same distance back to their homes in the evening.

During the first winter there was a general scarcity of flour or meal for bread. One woman told the writer that as far as she knew, there was not so much wheat for flour in the settlement that a loaf of bread could be baked. In this flour famine Ole Finhart undertook to drive to Decorah, Iowa with his yoke of oxen to buy flour, but there was not one pound to be gotten. All he could get was a sack of corn meal, and this sack was divided among the destitute families.

The settlers of mixed nationalities among and about the Norwegian colonists were mostly all as poor in money wealth as the Norwegians. None hired men or women for money wages. Kari Hovda, later Mrs. Ole Finhart told often that she worked several months for an American family in the new village Frankford without any compensation except her board — said she was glad to get her board. After a couple of years girls as kitchen servants were paid from 50 cents to one dollar and fifty cents a week and it may be added that these servant girls were used or rather abused by their employers as slaves or beasts of burden. A hired girl was janitor, water carrier, clothes washer, floor scrubber, house cleaner, nurse and in some houses she had to calcimine rooms with lime mixture. Her hours of work were not limited to a certain number of hours but in most cases she had to get out of bed at four o'clock in the morning and work till late in the night, often till 12 in the night. Her bedroom was never heated. In some homes she had to sleep in a rustic bedstead in the garret where snow often drifted in and covered her bed cover. It was an exception to the rule if a Norwegian hired girl was allowed to mix with the Yankee family in the sitting room except when she had to come in to work. She was not permitted to serve the family at the table. She was only allowed into the door of the dining room with the food she had cooked or prepared. There she was met by the lady of the house or some other appointed or privileged lady waiter who took the food from her hands and served it. These conditions lasted for more than ten years. The Norwegian girls and her parents had to submit to these hardships and indignities on account of poverty, but it was often expressed by parents of the poor girls, "If we were not so penniless and hard up, we would rather have our daughters feed pigs and milk cows than to be degraded servants of the Yankees."

When the Civil War broke out in 1861, the cost of cotton goods

rose to fabulous prices. A yard of calico cost as high as 50 cents. This rise in the price of cotton goods made the life of a working girl desperate. Her weekly wages did not rise with prices on her most necessary wearing apparel. She never received more than two dollars a week and she had to be a very competent and able girl to get two dollars. Most of them had to work for the old wages, one dollar or one dollar and fifty cents.

The second winter in the Bear Creek settlement, 1855 and 1856 nearly all the men population went down the Mississippi River toward Rock Island, Illinois, and into the woods to cut cord wood. They all found work and got fair pay. It was a lucky venture. They worked till late in the spring and returned to Bear Creek with their hard earned savings. This relieved the money stringency for all the families in connection with the wood choppers and most of these and others with them repeated the enterprise the next winter.

At this time the Bear Creek settlers began to have some farm products to sell. Wheat grew abundantly on their few acres of breakings. The herd had increased in cows, oxen and sheep. The food shortage had at this time disappeared.

The great question now was a marketing place for what farm products they could sell. There were no railroads in Minnesota at this time and the nearest steamboat station was Winona on the Mississippi River, and the distance from Bear Creek to Winona was about 60 miles. Roads to Winona there were none, and no bridges, so to get there with a yoke of oxen before a primitive lumber wagon with a load of wheat on was a perilous and slow undertaking. If rain had softened the ground, it often took the ox teamster two weeks to reach Winona and back home. During the winter season a journey of this kind was impossible. It could only be done during the bare ground season.

The price of a bushel of wheat at this time was about 50 cents and the pay was generally in merchandise at the stores owned by the wheat buyer. The nominal price of the wheat was not governed by a continental or world's market, but by the speculative notion of the grain buyer, and the price of the goods in the stores on which the farmer had his order was just as arbitrary in the opposite direction as on the wheat. The goods were always of job lot qualities such as could not be sold in the market in eastern towns and cities. As an example to illustrate this, the writer will state his own experience. In the summer of 1861, I bought a pair of heavy, low, split leather shoes, and paid two dollars for them in wheat at 50 cents a bushel. In other words, I gave four bushels of wheat for my shoes.

Another instance of this period: In 1863 I bought a small cook stove, worth not more than four dollars at first cost or wholesale

price. For this I gave 40 bushels of wheat — there were no kitchen utensils with it — the money price of the stove was said to be thirty-seven dollars. I paid with wheat. The price of wheat in this case shows that wheat was almost doubled in nominal value from what it was 4 or 5 years ago, but my stove was more than six hundred per cent above its actual value. The Civil War was in progress and that had reduced the value of paper money and increased the cost of iron and labor.

In the villages about the Bear Creek settlement, small stores were started, but their trade was mostly a bartering business. The farmer's wife or daughter carried butter and eggs to these stores. Eggs were sold for from 5 to 8 cents a dozen and butter from 8 to 10 cents a pound. The pay for butter and eggs was always in goods in the store. The farmer's wife or daughter accepted for her burden of products, coffee, tea, sugar, needles, calico, thread, etc. The price on products sold by the farmer and the goods received in payment was not regulated by a competitive market, but by the more or less avaricious disposition of the shopkeeper. He fixed the price on the butter and eggs, and likewise the price on his merchandise. The new settler had no choice. He had to do the bartering unconditionally or carry his butter and eggs home.

In 1861 the Civil War broke out and new difficulties and hardships arose in the face of the new settlers in Bear Creek and all over the state of Minnesota. The banking business became chaotic. Up to this time, banks were founded on chattel and real estate securities. Now on account of the confused conditions and uncertain result of the war, property values could not be fixed by any recognized market standard. Banks quoted good one day were found insolvent the next. Gold coins were in a few weeks withdrawn from circulation by the rich money corners of the Eastern States.

To relieve the money situation, the Federal Government legalized large issues of paper money, popularly known as green backs — (legal tender). This class of paper money was not backed by government gold but by the honor and credit of the United States. Green backs, i.e., legal tender bills, were simply evidence of indebtedness of the United States to the bearer and the history about them shows they were redeemed with gold and silver by the United States Treasury.

During the successes and reverses in the war struggle, the gold value of the legal tender fluctuated in the hands of money speculators. During the most uncertain conditions of the war, a gold dollar could hardly be bought for four legal tender dollars. Foreign and domestic merchandise rose and fell in price as the gold market

fluctuated. There were stamp duties and taxes on every article of value, private and public documents, and on services of men and animals.

Every able bodied male citizen was enrolled for military services and many of the Bear Creek early colonists voluntarily enlisted in different Minnesota regiments. It has been stated before that Ole Finhart enlisted and served and so did his brother, Amund, in the same company and battery. Arne Hovda and Syver Simonson served in the 11th Minnesota regiment and J. H. J. Weeks served in the first Minnesota heavy artillery as commissary sergeant, and Nels Syversen and Engebret Hovda served as privates in the same company of heavy artillery.

During the first ten years at the Bear Creek colony the people lived on their own production. The only thing for the table bought was coffee, sugar was looked upon as a luxury. From cane raised on the farms they made their own molasses. Several enterprising persons on different sections of the towns built molasses mills where the cane was pressed and the liquid boiled into molasses.

For clothing nearly everything was made at home. The sheep furnished the stuff which was carded and spun and woven into clothes in the little cottage houses of the settlers. Nearly every family owned a home made loom and this occupied a corner on the floor of the main living room. Entering those primitive homes you were generally met by the metric strokes of the batten in the strong hand of the operator, the mother of the family or one of her daughters. In another corner of the house was the spinning wheel busily turning out woolen yarn or linen thread from flax hemp raised on the farm. Some of the children were busy carding wool for the spinning wheel.

In the same little house and on the same floor with the weaver and spinner was the lord of the home chopping and shaving a yoke and bows for his oxen on an oaken wooden block brought into the room as a necessary utensil in making the heavy equipment for the oxen to work in.

The description given of the industries carried on in the early log house is not yet complete. There was often a woman or man tailor near the table making clothes out of the home manufactured cloth, and often a cobbler was a momentous necessity and he had to have a corner of the house.

On Sundays this house of week day activities was frequently changed into a room for social gatherings or a school room for religious instructions of the settlement children; and sometimes it had to be used instead of a church for worship. These houses were



all small in room space. The largest of them was not more than sixteen feet wide by eighteen or twenty feet long, and still the first years, in many of them, two families were sheltered. These settlers applied the old Norwegian saying: "Where there is heart room there is house room."

The settlement in social relation was very much like a large family and many instances could be written of one family or several aiding where temporary wants were known, and to the honor of the colony it can be said that little or no friction disturbed the general fraternal feeling in connection with the selection of claims, etc. In the few cases where greed made ripples, it was not of such serious nature that it led to any lasting feud among any of the families.

This colony was a competent collection of skilled mechanics as well as farmers. Many of them were carpenters; several blacksmiths, one an artistic turner, a couple wagon makers; three shoemakers and tanners; several stone masons and plasterers, and every man could hew and fit a log into the wall of a log house.

During many of the first years the Bear Creek colonists took no part in town or county politics, from sheer modesty, fearing they were not competent in language or knowledge of American Governmental methods, they never advanced a suggestion in town or county organization. A few Yankees as they called their English speaking neighbors were allowed free actions to name the towns and to organize the county, and the results show even today that those assumptive first officials were incompetent and careless. The county commissioners of Mower County allowed the Olmsted County commissioners to take one whole tier of sections from Mower County and annexed them to Olmsted County without a protest. To Mower County this blunder is a permanent loss.

The first township official in Frankford township was Ole Finhart. He was elected township supervisor. Some years after Finhart's election, Ole Jorgens was elected Justice of the Peace. Mr. Bostwick, who by Jorgens' election had to give up the office made the remark, it was a disgrace to Frankford Township to elect an ignorant boy foreigner for a Justice office. He said he had never heard of any such thing before in all his life, and he was at that time an old man. J. H. J. Weeks was about the same time elected constable. The Norwegian settlers began by this time to attend town caucuses and town elections.

A United States Post Office was established in the center of the Bear Creek settlement during the year 1860 with an American by the name of B. F. Langworthy as Postmaster. Nine-tenths of the patrons of the post office were of Norse extraction, and yet a home like name was not given to the post office or any of the towns

to indicate for the future that these people were the first settlers in this part of Mower County. Mrs. Langworthy was the active post-office clerk or deputy postmaster. Although she was a practical and intelligent lady, she had often great difficulties in reading the Norwegian names and in such predicaments she invented ridiculous constructions on their names for the merriment of her American friends, and she very reluctantly admitted a Norwegian child or adult into her kitchen to receive the mail. Her kitchen was the real post office and the depository of mail matters was a little wooden box partitioned off into a few pigeon holes. She trained her Norwegian patrons to remain outside her kitchen door till she found their mail and then she delivered the mail through the door.

The name Bear Creek is prominent in this sketch, but the creek itself is now almost a dry run. Before 50 years ago the Bear Creek was a very beautiful stream of water. The creek proper was made of two branches. The north branch started about the northwest corner of Grand Meadow and the southwest corner of Pleasant Valley. This branch from 50 to 60 years ago was a running stream, had several small lakes in it, or rather large ponds, and an abundance of fish. The south branch had its beginning in the high prairie a couple of miles north and west of the Village of Dexter. If during the coming 50 years these branches dry up and disappear as they have during the past 50 years, the people then living will wonder where the historic Bear Creek had its basins and ditches.

It is stated before that the first party of the first Bear Creek colonists started out on the journey for Minnesota from Dane County, Wisconsin, and the real starting point was Spring Dale. It may be asked what route did these emigrants follow through Wisconsin into Minnesota. It is stated by Syver Hovda at this date that so far as he remembers they passed through Blue Mound and Dodgeville and crossed the Mississippi River at Prairie du Chien. They and their teams and cattle were taken over the Mississippi River on a ferry drawn across by horses in a treading power. They landed in McGregor, Iowa and proceeded in a northwesterly direction passing Postville and Frankville, and next Decorah. Leaving Decorah they traveled almost in a due northerly direction through Winnesheik County into Minnesota Territory and entering Minnesota in Fillmore County, they followed the most passable trail thru this county till they reached Spring Valley and here they were on the border of their point of destination.