Liberty Township History

Liberty Township reveals the attitude of the pioneers who named it. The name remains as a reminder of this feeling of gratitude and faith in the new country exhibited strikingly in this way by the township organizers. In 1878 there were only six settlers in the town of Liberty. They were Patrick Connery and sons, Tim and John, P. H. Connery, Mike Connery and John Scott. In 1879, the Hayer Brothers, Rufus Mayo, Albert Boddy, Albert Middleton, Tom Dinsmore, Miles and William Henry Standish, K. S. Green and Even Eneberg settled in Liberty. The Hayer Brothers came from Pennsylvania, the Standish brothers from New York state, Green and Eneberg from Rice County, Minnesota.

In the early days of the century Liberty Township had four school districts: No. 66 Golden Beam; No. 91 Golden Star; No. 109 Sunnybrook, and No. 67 Sunny Brook. Today the Sand Hill River wanders through Liberty Township. The land is mostly in large farms. Records at the Polk County Courthouse in Crookston show Liberty Township was organized September 13, 1880. The first meeting was held at the home of Jacob Stambaugh, Miles Standish and Samuel Hayes. Clerks for the election were Patrick H. Connery and Isla Johnson. There is no record of the officers elected at that meeting.

The first birth on record was of a boy, Edan, born March 11, 1900, to Peder H. and Mary A. Tallerud. Eight births were listed that year.

Present township officials are: Carl Todahl, Robert Berhow and Norman Nolte, Supervisors; Roland Gullekson, clerk; Marvin Scott, treasurer.

NELS CLEMENTSON

The late Nels Clementson, a farmer in Liberty township, was a pioneer of Polk county, having become a resident about 1887. He was born in Goodhue County, Minnesota, June 30, 1859. His farm is located in section 15, Liberty township, five and a half miles northeast of the village of Fertile. His first purchase consisted of 160 acres, which cost him $3.00 an acre. More land joining this 160 acres was purchased later. His land then consisted of 580 acres.

Mr. Clementson's first dwelling on his farm was a one-room shack fourteen feet by sixteen feet. He owned four horses, a wagon, a plow and some other farm implements. Mr. Clementson was married in 1896 to Miss Joran Landsverk, a native of Norway. To this union seven children were born.

In 1903 Nels built a fine modern house. In 1908, he built a large T-shaped barn, stabling all his livestock. Mr. Clementson had the satisfaction of knowing that all he had, he had acquired by his own persistent hard work, his careful thrift and his good judgment in the management of his affairs.

His interest was not only his farm. He was a stock holder in the Co-operative Creamery of Fertile, and helped organize the Farmers Elevator Company in 1894, which served as president for eight years.

When he saw that the hour was ripe for this enterprise, Nels helped to organize the Farmers State Bank of Fertile and of this he became president and held that position until his death in 1928. The farm of the Clementsons, which consists of 500 acres, belongs to the heirs. The children of Mr. and Mrs. Nels Clementson are as follows: Norman Clementson, deceased; Josie Clementson, deceased; Mrs. Stanley Simpson (Millie), teacher, retired, Seattle, Washington; Mrs. Clarence Olson (Mable), teacher, retired, Enderlin, North Dakota; Nellie Clementson, teacher, retired, Fertile, Minnesota; Willie Clementson, farmer, retired, Fertile, Minnesota. Nellie and Willie are still living on the farm. The fields are rented out to Clayton Engelstad. The Clementson family belong to the Lutheran church.

CHRISTOPHER AND CAROLINE ENGELSTAD

Christopher and Caroline Engelstad immigrated to America from Norway in 1870. With them were their sons Christ and Martin and a daughter Mary, who became Mrs. Olavus Ring.

Those were the days of the sailing vessels, so they spent six long weeks crossing the Atlantic. Beside the usual huge emigrant chest for clothing and perishable food was another trunk which is still in the family. It shows the painstaking effort of the workmen of that day. It is all hand crafted with a rounded cover, reinforced with heavy iron straps and iron handles on each end of the trunk. The lock is hand made with a very large key. The year is printed on it together with the initials of the builder. It is as sturdy as the day it was built, almost 200 years ago, by some distant ancestor.

The family came to the Fertile area and settled in Woodside township on the farm now owned by Ingram Severson near Rodnes church.

The following children were born there: Hilda (Mrs. Bernt Johnson), Dora (Mrs. Martin Walters), Emma (Mrs. Charles Patterson), Oscar, Hannah (Mrs. Lewis Hanson), Charlotte, Alfred, Millie, Alma (Mrs. Lewis Gardener) now of Chicago. She is the only living member of that generation of Engelstads at this time (1975).

Martin and Dora (Mrs. Martin Walters) were the only two who remained in Polk County until their deaths and many of their descendants still make their homes in Polk County. Christopher and Caroline Engelstad are buried in Maple Lake cemetery east of Fertile.

Martin Engelstad immigrated to America with his parents, Christopher and Caroline Engelstad, when he was four years old. He grew up in Woodside township and married Marie Nesseth, formerly of Ellsworth, Wisconsin. They lived in the village of Fertile for a while, where Martin and his brother Christ owned a small hotel and livery stable. This hotel building was later moved east of the village and used for a "pet house", which was a place to isolate people who had contagious diseases, such as smallpox, diphtheria, etc., which were common before immunization was known or practiced.

Later Martin farmed in Russia township near Beltrami for several years. Their family consisted of: three children who died in infancy; Mabel (Mrs. Herman Holen), Clarence, Hazel, who died at the age of 16 during the influenza epidemic of 1918; Ella (Mrs. Page Blum), Eldou, who became an arthritic and died at the age of 47, and Geneva (Mrs. Kenneth Olson).

During the years they lived in Russia township, the times were hard and the money was scarce, so butter and meat were taken to Crookston and "peddled" around to the saw mill workers living in Carmen Addition. Surprisingly, Crookston then had a saw mill, sawing the logs that were floated down the Red Lake River from the woods to the east.

After a few years of farming, Swamp fever killed many
horses in the community, and the grasshoppers invaded and ate the crops. The settlers became discouraged and many moved away. In 1909 Martin and his family moved to Liberty township and bought the farm and built the house where Burnice Engelstad now lives. They were active members of Varnes congregation.

Martin was civic minded and active in co-operative organizations. He was president of the Fertile creamery, president of the Farmer's Potato Co-operative, and president of the Garfield Insurance Company. He was also director of the Polk County Fair Association, served on the school board of the former school district 109 in Liberty township for many years.

The only Engelstads of this generation who still live in Polk County are Clarence and Mabel (Mrs. Herman Holen).

Marie Engelstad died in 1930 and Martin in 1940. They are buried in Varnes Church cemetery.

Clarence Engelstad was born in Russia township, Polk County to Martin and Marie Engelstad. In 1909 they moved to Liberty township to the farm which is still in the family.

He married Olga Stephenson, whose parents, Ole and Pauline Stephenson, had joined many others from the Fertile area and moved east, when the timber lands in Beltrami and Clearwater Counties were opened to homesteading in 1895. Olga taught in the rural schools of Polk and Clearwater Counties. Five children were born to this union: Maurice, Orvis, Clayton, Mary Ann, and Myles. They were members of Varnes congregation, where the children were all baptized and confirmed; and the family was active in all the organizations of the church.

Clarence was also active in civic affairs, serving as supervisor in Liberty township for many years; clerk of the school board of the former District 109. He has also served as one of the nine directors of the Garfield Farmer's Mutual Fire Insurance Company for 35 years, the last few years as president of the board of directors.

Clarence also served on the Polk County Re-Organization Committee in the 1940's, when the small rural schools were closed and merged into larger units in the nearby towns and villages. One of the rural schools that was thus closed was the school in Russia township which his father had helped to organize in the early 1900's.

In 1970 Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Engelstad received the Valley Farmer and Home Maker Award presented by the Red River Valley Development Association at the Crookston Winter Shows.

They moved to the village of Fertile in 1968, leaving the farming to their son, Clayton, who lives on the land formerly owned by his father and grandfather. Clayton is the only one of the family who continues to live in Polk County.


In 1974 Clarence and Olga celebrated their golden wedding at the farm where they had lived for thirty-three years. All their children and 13 of their 15 grandchildren were present, along with relatives and friends from far and near.

As we have traced the Engelstad family from Christopher and Caroline to Martin and Marie, to Clarence and Olga, to Clayton and Carole, we have covered a span of more than a century.

During that time, America has gone from “horse and buggy” days to the present space age. Many changes have taken place in all areas of transportation, communications, standard of living, etc. What was considered out-of-reach luxuries at one time, are now considered necessities of life, but this supposition may not necessarily be true.

We are thankful for our Christian parents and proud of our Scandinavian heritage. But most of all we are proud to be Americans, and may none of us tarnish the name of America.

Clayton Engelstad was born to Clarence and Olga Engelstad in Liberty township. After graduating from high school from the Crookston Agricultural College and serving four years in the United States Air Force in World War II, he returned to Fertile. He married Carole Berg, Moorhead, Minnesota, and now has five children: Craig, Marie, Jean, Paul and Eric. They live on the farm formerly owned by his father and grandfather before him.

Clayton received the 1965 Polk County Outstanding Young Farmer Award, given annually by the Crookston Jaycees. Clayton is active in the National Farmers Organization, the Farmers Union, Lions, Elks, and the Fertile Flying Club. He served on the Fertile board of education for several years.

Carole teaches business education in the Fertile-Beltrami school and was selected the 1973 Teacher of the Year by the students and fellow teachers. She was also one of the top 30 teachers in the 1974 Minnesota State Teacher of the Year competition and was honored at the Minnesota State Fair. She is active in the vocation and business education organizations as well as MEA and NEA. She is on the board of directors for the Day Activity Center for the retarded of Polk County, as well as being active in many other community activities.

The family formerly belonged to Varnes church of Fertile, but presently belong to Little Norway church, where the fami-
family is active in many of the church activities and organizations. Clayton is presently treasurer of Little Norway as well as of the parish. The youngsters are active in Fertile 4-H club, Luther League, FFA, Ski Club, boys wrestling, girls volleyball and cheerleading, band and choir, as well as the Fertile Saddle Club.

**JOHN SCOTT**

John Scott was one of the first six settlers of Liberty township. He emigrated from Scotland. He and his wife, Mary Connery, first lived in Grant county, just four miles North of Elbow Lake, Minnesota. In 1878, the John Scott-family homesteaded his farm six miles west of Fertile along the south banks of the Sand Hill River. Their children then were Ella, Rutherford (Rudy) and Etta. The twins, Grace and Margaret, were born later. This was truly one of the pioneer families of the Fertile-Beltrami area. It was the time when they were frequently visited by Indians who walked right in and took the food right off the table. Overcoming all hardships of pioneer life, including floods and droughts, John developed his place to be one of the outstanding farms of the community. He had dairy cattle and grew record crops of grain.

One Scott or another of the family has always owned this farm. After John’s death in 1907, his son Rudy kept the farm going until 1947, when he retired and moved to Salem, Oregon. Rudy died in 1951. The farm was then taken over by his son, Marvin. To keep it in the family, Marvin’s son Michael now owns the Scott Homestead which has been in the Scott name for 97 years.

**OLE O. SORTE AND SON, PEDER O. MOEN**

Ole Olsen Sorte was born in Norway, July 19, 1807. He was a carpenter and kept on with this occupation until his marriage to Jonetta, John’s daughter Eideem, in 1839. They bought a place called Lillemoen, from which they got their name. In the spring of 1865, he sold this place and immigrated to America. There had been an agent in Norway who talked people into leaving Norway to work in the copper mines in Michigan near Superior.

Ole Lillemoen or Moen had twelve children, of whom one, named Sara, was married to Haagen Larson Sorte Pldos, stayed in Norway until her death and left no family. Ole with his wife and eleven children and a neighbor named Oluf Reppe, seven, who later married one of his daughters, left for America.

There were fourteen members that crossed the Atlantic Ocean. They came to their journey’s end in August, 1865. They went to the town of Hancock, Michigan, where the copper mines were. There were woods all around a small log cabin for them to live in. They could choose to work in copper mines or cut wood, which Ole Moen did.

After some time, their youngest child, three year old Haftar, died. Later Ole sustained a broken arm when a tree fell. The family got very discouraged with life in America, and spoke to a worker, Bjorn Geving, who had his father in Iowa. They decided to get someone who could speak English and help them to Iowa. Hans Semby did help them move to Lansing, Iowa and later to Point Creek, Iowa. It had been ten months since they arrived. Ole’s wife passed away, as well as their newborn child; all are buried in Hancock, Michigan. The younger children stayed with some of the older ones. Peder stayed with his father. After working for some years at whatever work he could get in Iowa, Ole bought sixty acres of land and married a widow who passed away after eight years.

Peder O. Moen stayed there until he was united in marriage to Caroline Haugrud on December 4, 1880. She also had immigrated from Norway at eighteen years of age and worked for German families in Iowa.

After one and a half years there, they decided to move to Minnesota, as Peder had a brother at Fertile, Minnesota named Ole Johan Moen.

Peder and Caroline and infant daughter, Julia, born February 1882, travelled by riverboat up the Mississippi River with belongings, which consisted of a covered wagon, two yoke of oxen and some cows. After landing in St. Paul, they traveled by covered wagon to Fertile, Minnesota. They lived in a small log cabin that belonged to Ludwig Hammer (this is the farm home of Ivan Wilkenson in Liberty Township). Their five month old daughter passed away in June of 1882.

Peder got a homestead by Melvin Station (in Onstad Township; this was located southwest of the John Van Raden farm). The 150 acres was light and sandy soil, which made it difficult for them to grow crops.

Ole Moen came by train to Fertile and helped his son, Peder, build a sod house which was their home for seven years. They also built a sod shelter for the livestock. Their three oldest sons were born here: John Oscar Moen, born 1883, passed away January 1975; Melvin A. Moen, born May 8, 1886, died January, 1957; Oberling Moen, born September 2, 1888, passed away August 1963. Ole Moen had made his home with them for nine years, passing away November 9, 1889. He is buried at Varnes Cemetery.

The Moens then built a lumber house. Clara P. Moen was born March 22, 1893 and still lives near Fertile. The family moved to Liberty Township and resided there the rest of their lives. Two daughters and a son were born in Liberty Township: Anna R. Moen, born July 29, 1895, passed away October 1920; Hulda H. Moen, born November 28, 1898, lives in Fertile; Otto Moen, born March 13, 1904, passed away in February 1974.

Peder Moen bought 120 acres west of Varnes Church about one-half mile west. This became their home until their death. He was the first farmer to cultivate this acreage; he used oxen and walking plow, and later used horses to farm with, as well as for transportation. Peder passed away in January 1939, at 81 years. His wife Caroline lived until 83 years of age and passed away in January, 1944. Their family lived more or less in the Fertile-Melvin area all their lives.

**Lowell Township**

Lowell Township was originally a part of the town of Crookston which was organized March 28, 1876 and at that time consisted of an area now divided into four townships. At a special meeting of the Polk County commissioners held April 4, 1877 a petition of legal voters residing in the present township limits to have Township 150 Range 47 detached from the town