

Winneshiek County, Iowa

Erik Anderson Rude from Voss was the first Norwegian settler in the county.* He was also the first typesetter for the (Norwegian newspaper) '*Nordlyset*', 1847. He moved from Koshkonong, WI to Washington Prairie near Decorah IA. in 1850. Ole and Staale Tostensen from Hægebostad and Ole and Anders Lomen from Valders accompanied him. They were followed by Thore Skotland from Ringerike; K. Opdal, Gullick Jevne, Knud Bakke, Halvor Garden, John Thun, and Iver and Johannes Kvale, all from Valders; Jakob Abrahamsen from Tinn; Mikkel Omli, Aslak Aae and Tollef Aae from Kviteseid; Nils and Gjermund Johnson Hedal from Hitterdal, Telemark; John Bragestad from Voss; and Ingebrigt Haugen from Hallingdal. Most of these came from the Muskego settlement in Waukesha and Racine Counties, Wisconsin. Jakob Thorgrimsen Bjørtuft is also reported to have arrived in 1850.

Winneshiek County was organized in Nils Johnson's log cabin in the fall of the same year (1850). It certainly did not take much time for the Norwegians to organize and become Winneshiek County's fathers.

Wheat and swine became this settlement's main farm production. The nearest market was at McGregor, about 45 miles away. Their wagons were pulled by oxen, which in those early days were used for every purpose.

In Winneshiek County, many new immigrants arrived that had crossed the ocean on a sailing ship and continued the journey by horse-drawn canal boats. Old Halsten Nilsen wrote:

In the month of April [of 1850] I left my parents and my home in Vang, Valders to seek my fortune in America. After waiting a couple weeks in Bergen, 100 of us emigrants, among them Gjermund Hoyme and family, found passage on a brig that brought us to New York, after seven stormy weeks at sea. From there, we took a steamboat to Albany, canal boat to Buffalo, and another steamboat to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where we separated. Some came into Iowa, but Hoyme and I were among those who went to Port Washington, Wis. NW. We expected to get rich as soon as we stepped onto American soil, but it did not go as fast as we had thought. One does not acquire a fortune sawing wood at 50 cents a cord.

In 1854, I went west with the same Gjermund Hoyme, some of his family, and my wife and young child. Hoyme, now deceased, was the youngest in his family. He was then just a little boy, who was helpful in herding the livestock we had with us. After 3 week's journey by oxcart, we arrived in Winneshiek County. I say oxcart, but they were used almost only by the women and children. The men used Shank's Mare for the most part.

Little Iowa Congregation was established at Decorah in 1852 and is the oldest Norwegian congregation in Winneshiek County and the entire State of Iowa. Its first pastor was B. Koren of The Norwegian Synod. The church building was erected in 1854 and vies with a

congregation in St. Ansgar, Mitchell county, for the honor of first Norwegian church erected in the state. Luther College was founded in Decorah in 1852. Many Norwegian-American newspapers and periodicals were published in Decorah.

The first Norwegian to hold a public office in Winneshiek County was first settler Erick Anderson Rude, who was elected Sheriff in 1860. Ole Nelson, a teacher in Decorah, was elected to the state legislature in 1861, and was its first Norwegian member in the whole state.

* Halvor Valle, who was mentioned in the history of Clayton County as part of the first Norwegian settlement in Iowa, resided in Winneshiek County for a short time, perhaps as early as 1842. He was, however, working for the government and was not a settler. After living in Clayton County for some time, he returned and settled permanently in Winneshiek.

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