LEAVING THEIR HOMELAND

It was about that time, 1889, that 33 year-old Ole and 27 year-old Andrine decided to join her sister, Martina Johnson, in the United States. No doubt Martina had been writing to her family in Norway and her reports must have been favorable, because Ole and Andrine decided to emmigrate, too. We do not know whether the Johnsons came to the United States by invitation of someone else or not, but that was the usual pattern.

What made Ole and Andrine decide to leave their homeland and relatives? It was not that they had such a bad life in Norway, for Elsie says that her parents brought with them two very large trunks of beautiful clothes and some fine furniture.

ELSIE: "Mother never said she regretted leaving Norway. She always said you could have more over here. No, she never regretted it."

Elsie does say that it would have been nice to have grown up with other relatives, cousins and grandparents nearby. No doubt Ole and Andrine missed their relatives left behind, even though they never regretted their decision to leave.

ELSIE: "I remember coming home from school one day, I must have been about about 10 or 11 years old, to find mother fixing supper and crying and crying. I asked her whatever was the matter and she replied, 'I got word today that my mother died.'"

Years later, Andrine told her children of leaving Norway. She had asked her youngest sister, Johanna, if she would like to come too. Their mother, Caroline Olson, cried, "Isn't it bad enough that you go yourself, are you going to take them all from me?"

Caroline Olson journeyed to the train station with her daughter, son-in-law, and two little grandchildren. The train would take the Larsons to the port city at which they would board the boat to take them to their new homeland.

Andrine's last glimpse of her mother was that of her mother walking around the corner of the train depot, wiping her eyes with her apron.

ELSIE: "How they had the fortitude to do something like that is more than I can comprehend. I don't know how they could do that in those days, knowing that when they left they would never be back, and they would never see each other again, not poor people like that."

Ole and Andrine, with their two children, two year old Martha and 3 week old Ole, boarded the large ship which would be their home for the next three weeks. Their two large trunks of beautiful clothes and crates of furniture were safe in the hold below, no doubt stored with similar belongings of other Norweigans, all off to "The New Land."

We can only guess that the ship ride must have been uncomfortable at first, but hopefully got better as the passengers became accustomed to the ship's motion. We also do not know what the accommodations were like, but we do know that Andrine had the problem of washing her children's diapers while on the ship.

PENNSYLVANIA

We are not sure where the Larsons landed, probably New York or New Jersey, and we can guess that they took a train to Pennsylvania. The family spent some time, we are not sure how long, in Wilkes-Barre and then moved on to Williamsport, where the Johnsons lived. The Larson's stayed with their relatives until Ole had found work and earned enough money to build his family a nice brick home on Camel St.

No doubt it was of great help to the Larsons that their relatives had been in the United States for a while, were familiar with the town and probably knew some English. Language was a problem faced by many immigrants.

ELSIE: "Mom and dad did not know one word of English when they came over from Norway. Mother went into a grocery store and wanted to ask for a loaf of bread. Well, she called it 'braid.' They gave her a packet of trim to sew on clothes! Mother pointed to the bread to show what it was she really wanted. My folks learned to speak good English, but always retained a trace of their accent."

EARL: "You really have to hand it to them. They learned to speak really good English."

The Larson's no doubt had many new experiences in their new country that we will never know about. One thing Andrine told Elsie years later was her first experience with tomatoes.

ELSIE: "Over in Norway there was no such thing as tomatoes. In the United States, mother went to the market and saw a lot of women buying these red vegetables. So, she bought some, thinking she would try them, too.

When the folks lived in Pennsylvania, before I was born, one of the neighbors had a get-together and invited the rest of the neighbors. Someone brought popcorn, which mother tried, and according to her, "I 'chuged' and I 'chuged' but it 'vouldn't' go down!"

Apparently she'd never had popcorn before - I'm sure they didn't have it in Norway!"

Ole labored at his trade for about nine years in Pennsylvania and during this time he and Andrine were blessed with five more children: Mary, born 1892;

George. 1893; Ruth, 1895; Joseph, 1897; and Elsie, 1898. (It is interesting to note that at this time in Pennsylvania birth certificates were not required. So, when Elsie applied to receive social security at the age of 62, she had to send to Kansas City for a record of her birth. Well, she found out that she was born in 1898, not 1899 like she had always thought. No doubt, 1899 was easier to memorize when she was a child. She had always known the correct age she was, but had just used the wrong year.)

When it was the occasion, Andrine and Ole would dress in their fine clothes from Norway. Andrine would put on her beautiful bluish-gray cordoroy dress that had a row of covered buttons down the front. Over the dress she would wear a matching, tight-fitting jacket, plus a fine cape trimmed in a half-dozen or more rows of black velvet ribbon. Her long, blonde hair was braided and pinned on the back of her head in a bun, and no doubt adorned with a fashionable hat.

Ole would accompany his wife, dressed in his fine suit, complete with swallowtail coat, top hat and cane.

An able homemaker, Andrine found time while taking care of seven children to sew their clothes, cook, bake and clean house. No doubt it was nice to have her sister and family nearby, and we can guess that the families celebrated many a holiday and birthday together.

MICHIGAN BOUND

Ole earned a good wage as a stonemason and bricklayer, but in the winter there was not any work, and therefore it was hard to make ends meet. That is why after about nine years in Williamsport, Ole decided to take up a Baptist minister's offer and trade his brick home for a farm in Michigan, sight unseen. (See Exhibit A-page 8A).

We do not know how the minister happened to come by the farm; but perhaps he inherited it and had never actually seen it himself.

Ole figured that at least on a farm they could raise their own food, and he could work three seasons out of the year at his trade and bring in a decent income. So, the arrangements were made and in March of 1899, 43-year old Ole, 37-year old Andrine, and their 7 children, the youngest being a 3-month old daughter named Elsie, boarded the train for Michigan.

The family reached Clare and switched trains to go another 4 miles east to Loomis. But upon arriving on that cold, March day they were still about 2 miles

EXHIBIT A

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Record of the transaction between the minister and Ole is found at the Clare County Clerk's Office, Harrison, Michigan. An abstract of the deed giving Ole title to the land is found in Liber 33, page 111:

Horace G. Hall and wife to Ole Larson:

27 of January 1899

Rev. Horace G. Hall and Dor E. Hall, his wife of Williamsport, Pa., late of Erie, Pa.,

and Ole Larson of Williamsport, County of Lycoming and state of Pennsylvania:

$900.00

SE 1/4 of the NE 1/4 of Section 33, Township 17, = 40 acres.

The transaction was witnessed by a notary and is recorded in the Michigan records as follows:

State of Pennsylvania
County of Lycoming - on this 27th day of January in the year 1899, before me an alderman in and for said County, personally appeared Rev. Horace G. Hall a D.D. and his wife, Dora E. Hall, now residing at the city of Williamsport, Lycoming County, Pennsylvania, to me known to be the same person I described -- and who executed the within instrument who acknowledged the same to be their free act and deed.

W.H. Braine
Alderman

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south of their new home on section 33 of Sheridan Township. An area farmer, Thomas McGivern, himself an immigrant from Belfast, Ireland (also an uncle of Earl Kaul) took pity on the travelers and gave them a ride in his horse-drawn sleigh two miles north on the Loomis Road to the new farm.

We can only guess that the Larsons were a bit disappointed with their farm. We do not know what kind of rosy picture the minister had painted of the place.

ELSIE: "If the folks could have seen the farm first, they probably wouldn't have taken it - not with all the work that had to be done."

The house was large, but not completely finished. The only outbuilding was a small barn. The forty acres of fields were full of tree stumps, remnants of the timber era of a few years earlier. Ole was faced with the task of pulling stumps that were so thick that, as Elsie says, "you could go out and sit behind anyone of them and no one would see you."

STUMPING

We are not sure whether the entire acreage had to be stumped or whether some of it had already been done. Somehow the Larsons must have grown crops - perhaps they planted around the stumps until they had a chance to pull them out. A job like this would not have been accomplished in a short period of time. No doubt the Larsons got some of the fields stumped within the first few years they were there, and other fields served as pasture. But, the Larsons always had 4 or 5 acres at the back of their 40 acres that remained woods. The "little woods" provided firewood and Christmas trees.

According to Earl, Ole did not stump the fields until many years later, but if this is true, the Larsons would have been in Michigan for over 10 years before clearing any of their fields.

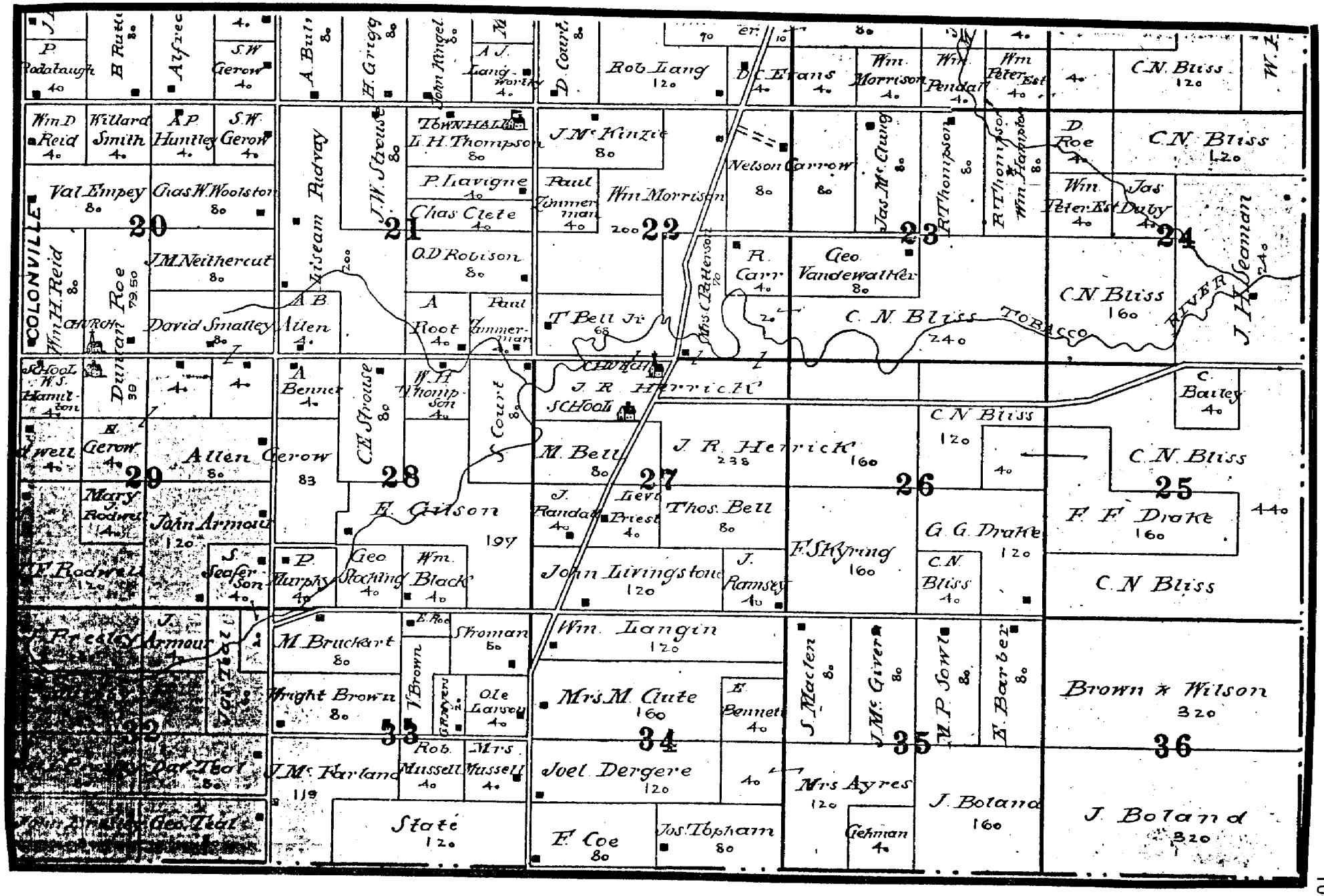
EARL: "Yah, I had been out plowing and had just come up from the field. The folks had gone to town. Ole came to our place in his horse and buggy and asked where John Kaul lived, for he was going to purchase a stump machine from him. I told him I had to take care of the team first, so I put them in the barn and fed them, then invited Ole to come in and have some dinner. I made us something to eat - fried potatoes, etc. After eating, I gave him directions to Uncle John's.

When the folks got home, I told dad about Ole's visit. Dad said 'Larson probably wanted to know what kind of a place you were from, in case you marry his daughter.'"

Earl says he was about 15 or 16 when this occurred. Elsie feels her dad would have cleared the acreage in the first few years they were in Michigan. If Earl is correct, the Larsons would have been in Michigan for over 12 years.

So, we will never know, but we can guess that perhaps Ole purchased the stump machine to stump some of the land on his farm, or to stump some of the 40 acres he purchased in about 1913, which was located about 1 mile from the Larson farm.

The following page contains a copy of the southeastern portion of Sheridan township from the 1906 Standard Atlas of Clare County, Michigan. Sheridan township is the southeastern township of Clare County, and borders Isabella County on the south and Gladwin County on the east.

The original Larson farm is shown in section 33; the school and church the family attended are shown in section 27. The Larsons later purchased an additional 40 acres from _____ in section _____.

SOUTHEASTERN PORTION OF SHERIDAN TOWNSHIP, CLARE COUNTY