GETTING STARTED

Ole Larson had his work cut out for him. At the age of 43, he was beginning a new life - as a Michigan farmer. Ole was not experienced at farming, to say the least.

ELSIE: "Dad didn't even know how to milk a cow. Mother was expecting another baby (Roy) and she told him, 'You'd better learn to milk the cow before I take to my bed!'"

Yet Ole succeeded at the farming business and was able to survive the hard life of farming, as told here.

One of the first things the Larsons had to do was acquire some work animals. Every farmer required either a team of oxen, mules or work horses to pull the plow, wagons and sleighs. In 1899 a decent team of work horses would have cost about $100 to $150 per horse. Ole apparently did not have such a large amount of money, especially after the move across the country.

ELSIE: "Someone told dad to go see old Pete Murphy. He was the only one who had any money, and he owned a lot of land. Old Pete loaned dad, someone he had never seen before, the money to buy a team. Murphy was a good, old Irishman who couldn't even sign his name; he'd sign it with an "x". You just don't find people like that anymore."

The Larson family got their land plowed, crops in and they were able to put up enough food to survive. No doubt it took a lot of hard work and determination to learn how to run a farm, but the Larsons succeeded.

IMPROVING THE FARM

The Larsons gradually acquired livestock, such as pigs, chickens, milk cows and the like. Ole built a large barn and pens to house them all.

ELSIE: "Back then, anyone building a barn had a barn-raising bee. Area families donated their time and labor. The men built the barn while the women visited and prepared a good dinner. I would guess that this was the case when dad built our barn.

Usually, a barn was built by first nailing all of the 2" x 4"'s together on the ground, then the sides were pulled up by ropes - perhaps with a team. Once secured together, the sides were covered and the roof put on.

Our barn was 30' x 50'. It was a gamble-roof barn. The mows were not as large or as high as some barns, which means it wasn't as hard to put hay up in them. The barn didn't have a basement.

One end of the barn served as a cow barn and the horses were kept at the other end. A silo stood on one side, about halfway between the two ends.

Dad added several other farm buildings, such as a tool shed, chicken coop, pig pen, corn crib and drive shed. A drive shed was a 3-sided building with a roof used to store machinery in the winter.

Our water supply was furnished by a pump run by a windmill, which was located not far from the house. But, if the wind wasn't blowing, we'd have to pump the water by hand. A pipe ran 15 or 20 feet from the pump to the barnyard, into a large livestock tank, thus supplying the farm animals with water."

The Larsons acquired the necessary farm tools and implements needed to work the farm. Ole also built a sleigh to be pulled by the team, as well as a one-horse cutter.

ELSIE: "I used to drive the cutter on Friday afternoons in the winter to pick up my sister, Martha, whern she was teaching at the Phiniesy School."

The Larsons gradually worked on and improved their house as well as the rest of the farm. Their home was surrounded by a large, fenced-in yard in which Andrine had planted lilac and rose bushes, as well as many types of flowers. On one side of the yard, a gate led to the barnyard, and out near the mailbox by the road, was another.

Ole improved the exterior of the house by adding a large stone porch in the front.

Inside, Ole made many improvements. He made the cellar into what is called a "Michigan cellar." He built a brick wall around 3 sides of it and covered it with cement. This provided ample room to store their many canned goods. On the fourth wall, Ole built a large potato bin. A chute connected to one of the windows made filling the bin quite easy. In the fall bushel baskets of potaotes could be emptied into the chute from outside the house, rather than having to carry them indoors and downstairs.

The main floor of the house contained a kitchen combined with a dining area, living room and two bedrooms. After living in Michigan about 10 years, a new, larger kitchen and pantry was added on and the old kitchen turned into a dining room. Along with the living room, all of these rooms were then newly decorated. (See the section on "Martha Larson, Teacher")

The second floor contained two finished bedrooms and one larger room that was not lathed or plastered. Ole finished this room and it was used as sleeping

quarters by some of the children.

The house also contained a large attic used to store household items not in use and perhaps occasionally, dried food. In the winter clotheslines strung across the attic came in handy for drying clothes.

ELSIE: "When I look back at things now, I'm proud of my parents. Mother and dad had a lot of pride besides being hard workers. Those two characteristics helped account for the fact that we had decent clothes and ate good food. We had much more than the neighbors.

Look at the nice home they had. We had the nicest house along that road. Dad built a stone porch around the front of the house and down in the basement he put in a stone wall with a ledge around it and covered it with cement. It was what they call a Michigan basement, like the fruit room in the house we (Earl and Elsie) had on Opdyke Road in Pontiac a few years back.

Mother stored her canned goods on the basement ledge. It came in really handy because we put up a lot of food back then to see us through the rest of the year."

1900 Census

The Larsons were located in Sheridan Township during the census of 1900. The State of Michigan Library in Lansing was the source of the following census information. Note that there are some things incorrectly recorded by the census taker, such as spelling of names, spelling of "Sweden" etc.

NAME	DATE OF BIRTH	AGE AT LAST BIRTHDATE	#YEARS MARRIED	PLACE OF BIRTH OF: THIS PERSON	FATHER OF THIS PERSON	MOTHER OF THIS PERSON	YEAR OF IMMIGRATION TO USA	# YEARS IN USA
Ola Larson	Aug 1857	42	13	Norway	Norway	Norway	1889	10
Andrina E.	June 1863	36	13	Norway	Norway	Sweeden	1889	10
Martha	Jan 1888	12		Sweeden	Norway	Norway	1889	10
Ola L.	Nov 1889	10		Sweeden	Norway	Norway	1889	10
Mary	Jan 1892	8		Penn.	Norway	Norway		
George A.	Aug 1893	6		Penn.	Norway	Norway		
Ruth	Dec 1895	4		Penn.	Norway	Norway		
Omer J.	Aug 1897	2		Penn.	Norway	Norway		
Eliz	Dec 1898	1		Penn.	Norway	Norway		

NAME	NATURALIZATION	OCCUPATION, TRADE OF PROFESSION: OCCUPATION	MONTHS OF UNEMPLOYMENT	ATTENDED SCHOOL IN MONTHS	EDUCATION: CAN READ	CAN WRITE	CAN SPEAK ENGLISH
Ola Larson	Pa	farmer	0		yes	yes	yes
Andrina E.					yes	yes	yes
Martha				9	yes	yes	yes
Ola L.		farm labor	7	9	yes	yes	yes
Mary				8			
George A.				2			
Ruth							
Omer J.							
Eliz							

BECOMING ACCEPTED

In the beginning, the Larsons had to face the same problems that many other immigrants faced. They were strangers in a new area and had to withstand prejudices of some of the area people.

Elsie recalls the taunts of neighbor children: "dirty Norweigans" and "Swedes eat weeds." Such taunts are typical of how cruel people can be; even today. Any genealogical historian will verify that such incidents were common occurances in the 1800-1900s because people from different countries ate different foods, smelled different, dressed different, etc.

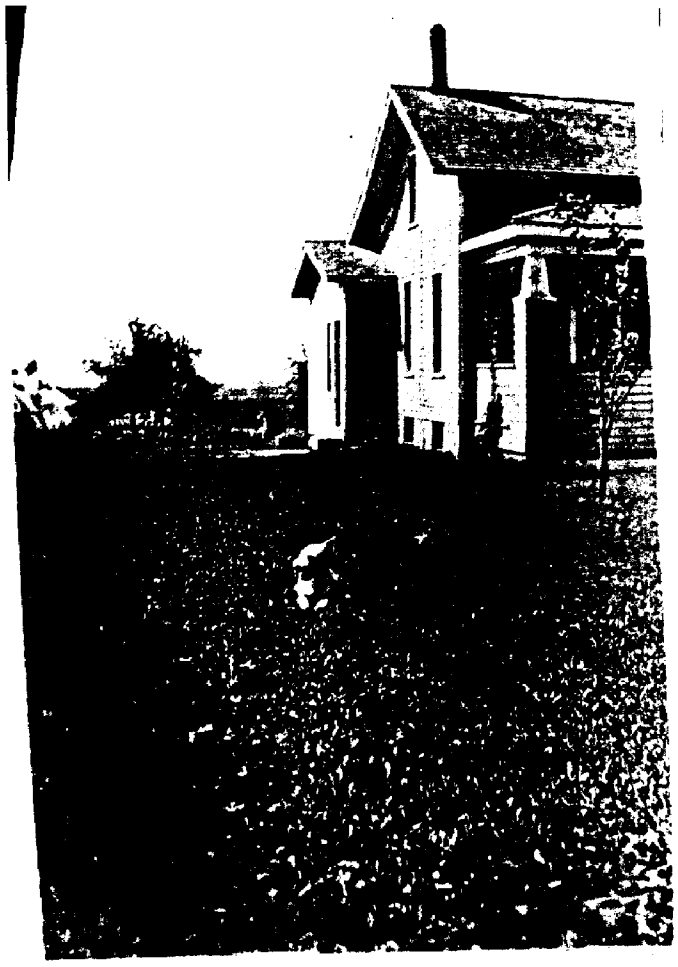
ELSIE: "I remember one time when a bunch of us were walking to school and 1 or 2 kids were taunting me. Another girl, Beulah Langin, told them, "You leave Elsie alone. - At least she walks along like she's civilized!"

The taunts did not last and before long the Larsons were a well established and respected family in their farm community.

Mary, Ruth, Elsie (in front) and Martha Larson.
Photograph taken 1904-05 in Clare, Michigan.

THE LARSON FAMILY: (Back row, left to right): Mary, Harold, Elsie, George, Ruth and Joe. (Front row): Martha, Andrine, Ole, Mildred and Roy. Photograph taken in Clare, Michigan approximately 1917.

Larson home.



LARSON HOME

LIFE ON THE FARM

The Larsons began living the life of a farm family, with Ole rising at 5:00 a.m. and starting a fire in the cookstove and perhaps the heatstove, and the rest of the family arising soon after. They would all pitch in and get the regular chores done before the day's activities of school, cleaning, baking, plowing, harvesting, or whatever.

Evening brought another round of chores to be done before the family could retire. Livestock had to be fed, cows milked, water brought into the house and wood chopped, just to name a few of the regular duties.

The children did their homework at the dining room table, pressed as close as they could to the big kerosene lamp that always sat in the middle of the table.

The rest of the house was dark unless faintly lit by other kerosene lamps.

ELSIE: "We had several kerosene lamps in the kitchen, dining room and living room. I remember the one in the living room was beautiful, with a large, gold base topped with a good sized red silk shade, trimmed with black silk fringe.

We had probably one lamp per bedroom. If one of us wanted to go upstairs, we'd take an extra lamp from the downstairs to guide us."

The Larson home like many of the homes in the early 1900's was heated by a woodburning cookstove in the kitchen and a heatstove in the dining or living room area.

ELSIE: "I remember when it was really cold, we'd get ready for bed in the dining room by the heatstove, aided by the light of the big kerosene lamp. We'd run up to bed and mother would come up

and tuck the covers in all around the edge of the bed.

If we had to go to the bathroom at night, we would use a big, black wrought iron kettle rather than go to the outhouse. Sometimes it would get so cold in the house that the kettle would be froze over in the morning!"

The farm animals owned by the Larsons served two purposes: (1) provide food and (2) provide income. A discussion of this subject is found under the heading, "Mother's Skills - Cooking."

MASTER CRAFTSMAN

Much of the stone work and brickwork done in the Clare area in the early 1900's was probably done by Ole Larson. No doubt in his early years in Michigan, pursuing his beloved craft was determined by what farmwork had to be done. But as time went by and the children grew, Ole pursued the craft at which he was a master, and he left much of the farmwork to his children.

ELSIE: "From the last frost in the spring until the first one in the fall, dad did stonework around the Clare area.

Dad's making money doing stonework is all that saved our necks. As a skilled craftsman, he could earn twice in a day what a farm worker would. Dad earned $2.50 per day, compared to $1.00 to $1.50 that farmhelp earned."

Ole's work did not go unnoticed around the Clare area. No doubt people who had a chance to admire his work would then hire him to do stonework for themselves. The Clare Sentinel ran two notices of the fine work he did for a Mr. J.L. Oliver of Clare:

July 18, 1913
Local news column:

John Oliver is building a new porch on his residence on East Sixth Street. The stone work is fine indeed and will present a very neat appearance. Ole Larson of Sheridan is doing the stone work and he appears to be a master workman in his line.

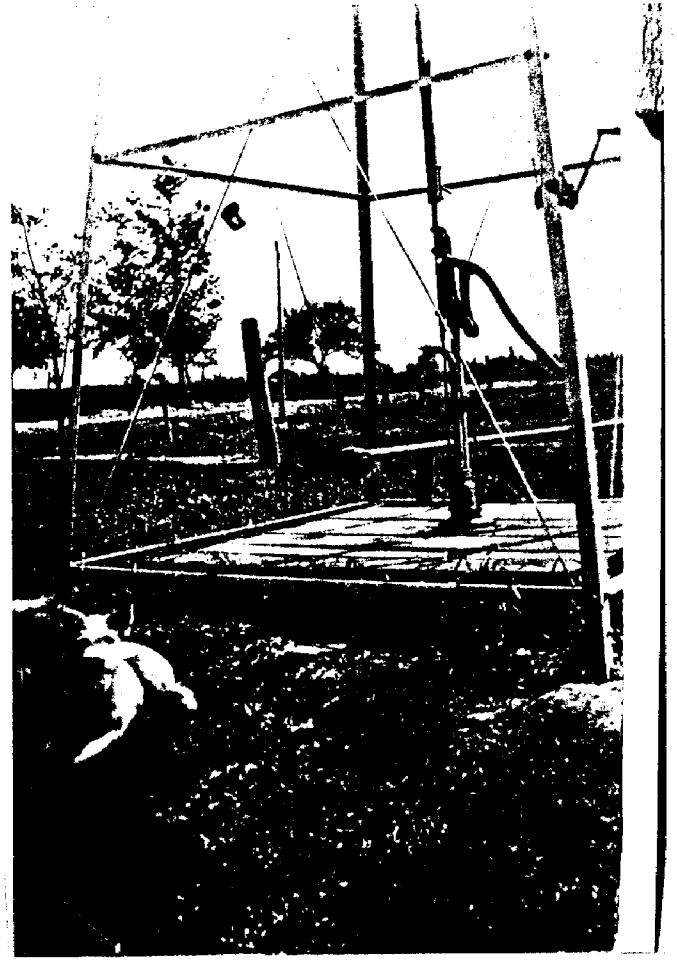
May 15, 1914
Local news column:

J.L. Oliver has completed the fine stone porch which was started last fall in front of his residence on East Sixth St., putting in a cement floor. This and the new coat of paint add greatly to the appearance of the place.

Stuart Bell: "Ole Larson probably built most of the stone barn foundations in Clare and Isabella County. I was a little boy when Ole laid the barn foundation for my father's (John Bell) barn. It was an "L" shaped barn, built in 2 parts at 2 different times.

I recall Ole hurrying my father along by saying, "A little more mud, 'Jŭn' - a little more mud!"

Page 430 of Forrest Meek's Michigan Timber Battleground mentions Ole Larson of Sheridan, stone mason. The year listed is 1906, and I would assume therefore, that the Clare Sentinel contained an article mentioning Ole being a stone mason, since the newspaper is where Mr. Meek obtained quite a bit of his information.

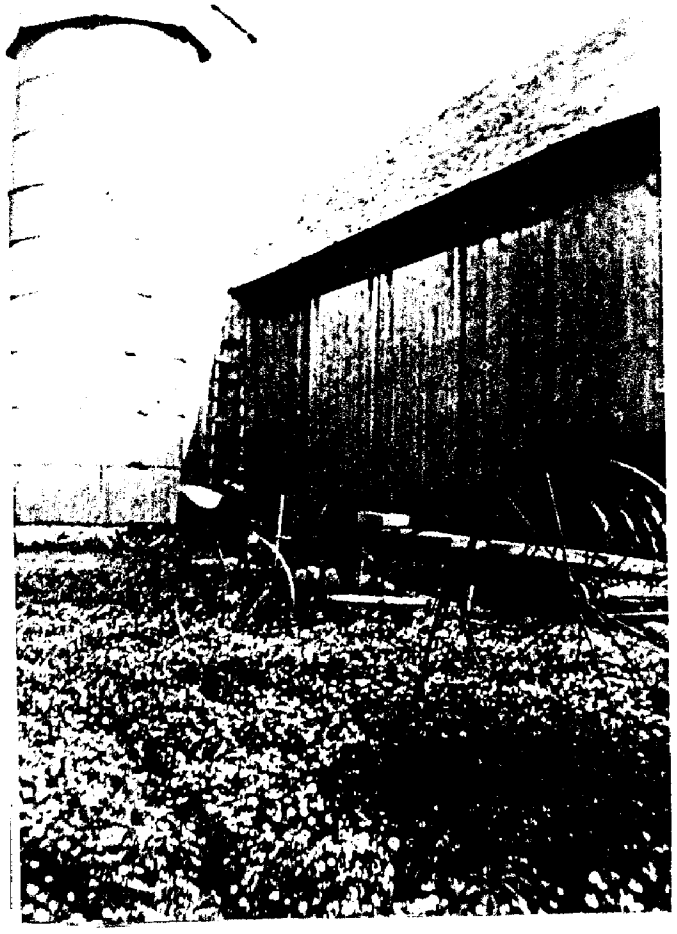


Andrine and George Larson,

Joe Larson with team, Prince (on left) and Ned.

Bringing in the oats. Ole on the ground, George on the wagon.

Larson barn



Larson barn

Larson out-buildings

JACK OF ALL TRADES

Unlike people today, people back in the early 1900s had to be a "jack of all trades." They were not afraid to do for themselves or tackle a new or different task. The following chapters tell of Andrine's many skills, but first, the following tells of another of Ole's skills.

ELSIE: "We had decent footwear because dad knew how to resole our shoes. He had different sized lasts, which are shaped like the bottom of a shoe. They were used as a pattern to cut a new sole out of leather. Dad used to buy square yards of leather for this purpose.

He would choose a last the size of the shoe, put it on the iron standard, which held the last and shoe while the work was being done, then put the shoe on top of the last, upside down. He'd cut a piece of leather to the shape of the sole, then nail it on.

Next, he'd use some more leather to make a heel. After attaching that to the new sole, he'd use a buffing wheel to properly shape it. A little polish and elbow grease and the shoes looked like new!"

EARL: "My dad also resoled our shoes. I still have the standard he used. I remember when rubber heels came into use. Before they did, all heels were made as Elsie described, out of leather."

MOTHER'S SKILLS

SEWING

The Larson children were well dressed due to Andrine's sewing skills.

ELSIE: "Mother sewed all of our clothes and knit our wool socks. She made the boys' cotton shirts for summer and flannel shirts for winter. She also made them denim pants and shirts.

She made our cotton summer dresses and wool dresses for winter. When she was making us a "Sunday dress" she would go upstairs and take one more row of velvet ribbon off of the beautiful cape she'd brought from Norway many years before. Up on the farm there wasn't many places to go to wear such fancy clothes.

Mother always said that her embroidery work was 'patching the overalls.'

When Ruth and I were old enough, mother wanted us to start attending Sunday school, and she made us each a lovely dress to wear. They were white, with a yoke across the front and trimmed with lace and insertia, and adorned with sashes 6" to 8" wide, fastened on each side and tied in back with a big bow.

Ruth and I were very proud of our dresses and that first Sunday, mother followed us out on the porch as we were departing to walk one mile to the Baptist church. Mother told us, 'Now walk off like a pair of girls!' - (don't act like tomboys!)

One year mother figured out the exact amount of material she would need to make some braided rugs. Back then, you couldn't buy carpeting - the only rugs you had were ones you made out of rags. Mother collected all of the rags she had been saving, and dyed certain amounts of the material

one color or another. She then cut the material into sections and folded each over and sewed it, therefore making long strips. Finally, she sewed the end of one strip to another, resulting in a very long rope of cloth. This was rolled into a large ball. Mother spent an entire winter working on this, but the result was well worth her effort.

She took all of the strips of material to Mrs. Robart, an area woman who made a living by weaving rugs. She had a very large loom capable of weaving four and five foot wide sections at a time.

After Mrs. Robart and prepared the sections of rug, mother took them home and sewed them together by hand. The result was enough braided rug to cover the living room, two downstairs bedrooms and the stairs going up to the second floor.

had not "and"

It is amazing how mother knew exactly how to figure out how much material she needed, how much of each color to dye, and what width the strips of each color would be. The main strip was about 1" wide of pink, and then next to the pink strip was a 1" wide section of narrow strips of other colors woven together, such as blue, red and green.

Mother was also excellent at knitting. She would knit woolen socks and sell them to buy groceries in the winter. She also knit long, woolen hose for us girls to wear in the winter, and wool socks for the boys to wear."

"There were times when mother provided the additional income for us to survive. Each winter she would knit wool socks for a woolen company in Clare. They would provide her with the yarn and

she would sit and knit by the hour. She could knit enough socks to earn $2.50 to $3.00 per week. That bought our groceries all winter. The woolen company paid her 25¢ for every two pairs of socks she knit."

I remember mother would sit and knit so fast - her knitting needles flying as she would instruct the older children as to what to prepare for supper or what chores had to be done."