
A History of Northland, Wisconsin

by Florence Oligney

Ole Olson Wrolstad came to America a little before 1843 from the homestead “Wrolstad” near Berstock, between Drangedahl and Torday, Telemarken, Norway. He and his family had come to the Norwegian settlement of Muskego. Ole lived there for one year and then moved to Rock River where he lived for eleven years. these settlements were both located in southern Wisconsin.

There being so much illness among the people in Rock River the settlers came to the conclusion that the “dampness” of the area was the cause of their health problems. This promoted the people to explore other locations in which to settle. This move brought Ole to what is now the Town of Harrison in the northern part of Waupaca County. Here the pines were tall and thick and the country wild except for the few indian inhabitants found here and there.

Ole wanted to get into logging operations and bought a section of land around the river which is known as the Flume Creek today. This river is also called the South Branch of the South Branch of the Little Wolf River. Ole built a log cabin for himself and his family to the north of the river and built the sawmill near his home. This was the beginning of Northland.

After the mill was in full operation, Ole was able to get all the logs for his mill close by as the timber in this area was as great as in any township in the state. Ole’s son, John returned home from the Civil War in February, 1865 and took over the logging operations in Northland. Ole moved to Peru where he opened another new mill.

John Wrolstad improved the operations in Northland by building a sluiceway which dammed up the river. They were now able to bring the logs down to the mill and leave them in the water until they were ready to be sawed. John also installed the water wheel and later added steam power to run the mill. A cook shanty for the mill crew was built behind John’s new house and a sleeping shanty was built a little to the south of the mill.

Along with sawing lumber they began to manufacture shingles and lath, as well as cutting fence boards for the wooden fences. These products were hauled by team and wagon to the railroad stations in Rosholt, Norske and iola to be shipped to market. Wrolstad had tried to convince the Green Bay Railroad to extend their spur line which came to Iola further north into Northland by investing financially in the railroad. When nothing came of the plan Wrolstad tried to recover his investment. The railroad company would not pay back the money but they offered Wrolstad and his family free passes on the Green Bay Railroad valid for the remainder of their lives.



In the early days the mill operated summer and winter but in the early 1900's sawing would start in April and continue for the summer and then in the winter the crews with the teams would go and work in the logging camps. The mill was taken over by John's son Alfred who continued the logging operations for several years. By 1920 the timber around Northland was gone and the mill closed. The sawmill was dismantled in the 1920's by Oscar Wrolstad. Highway 49 now crosses the site of the old mill.

The first store which was a hardware store was built by Otto Lund. he also had a blacksmith shop next to his store. Otto closed the store in 1914 when he moved to Cameron, Wisconsin. Ole Buslett built the first grocery store and a second general store was built by John Wrolstad in about 1890.

When John Wrolstad moved to Scandinavia to take over a flour mill, Ole Buslett operated the Wrolstad store until Lorin, John's son completed his education at the Scandinavia Academy and came to Northland to run the business.



Lorin was then selling along with groceries, clothing, farm machinery, animal feeds, sewing machines, silos, buggies, Ford cars and about anything else you would care to buy. Lori also sold some of the first insurance policies, such as Modern Woodman and for the People's Mutual of Beaver Dam. Oscar Wrolstad, a cousin who had worked for Lorin in the store for over 30 years bought the store when Lorin died in 1937. Oscar's son Oliver operated the store for many years and it was closed on September 30, 1978.

A blacksmith shop was also built by Lorin Wrolstad. John Peterson who had been employed in the mill became the blacksmith. Other blacksmiths in Northland have been Gulbrand Nelson and Ole Langdok. The blacksmith shop was sold to the Eastling Pickle Company.

Charlie Anderson who had come from Sweden came to Northland and in 1900 built a dam east of Northland. Anderson utilized the water power to begin manufacturing the “Northland wagons” as well as building other machinery alone with doing blacksmithing.

John Wrolstad build a creamery in 1902 and 35 farmers signed the agreement that they would bring all their milk they could spare from their families to the creamery. John would then make butter to be salted and packed in tubs. The salt and tubs were furnished by Wrolstad and delivered to the lola railroad station for 3 cents a pound. the creamery burned after three years but was rebuilt the next year. Erick Hermanson was the first butter maker, R.C.Cleaves, Eddie Olson and Robert Anderson were the other butter makers. Lorin operated the creamery and after his death it was sold to a Mr. Swantze from Marion, Wisconsin. Swantze operated the creamery as a cheese factory



and was about to begin making ice cream but ended up selling the building equipment a few years later.

Ole Buslett established the first Post Office in 1890 as any mail before had been brought over from Peru. Ole named the settlement Northland simply because it lay in that direction from Iowa and Scandinavia. A mail route went out from Northland twice a week. The first carrier was John Rierson with his route being five miles long. Otto Lund served as Postmaster from 1893-1896 as well as being the mail carrier. Ole Langdon was also a carrier.

Ole Buslett and his wife lived in Stevens Point before coming to Northland. They often walked to Hitterdahl from Stevens Point to visit Mrs. Buslett's parents. After moving to Northland to become Postmaster and operate a grocery store, Buslett became a correspondent for several Norwegian newspapers in different parts of the United States. He wrote and published short stories and poetry which he sold to publishers. He also wrote several books, one called the "history of the Fifteenth Regiment of the Civil War". This book is a complete history of mostly Norwegian soldiers who fought in the Civil War.

Company 1 of this regiment was recruited at Scandinavia, Wisconsin. Many of Ole Buslett's works were donated to the St. Olaf College Library at Northfield, Minnesota after his death by his widow. Ole had the honor of being one of the early Norwegian writers in America as well as being a politician. Buslett held many town, church and school offices along with serving in the State Assembly for two terms. He ran for the Senate also but lost. Together with Pete Halverson a local musician, Ole wrote the words and music to the song, "Air Castle" which was published by the Havilland Music Company, New York in July 1911. Buslett knew more about law than most of the settlers so he was called on to do legal work for both the rich and poor of the local neighborhoods.

As more people moved north into the town of Harrison to take up farming the mail delivery was increased to every day. When Ole Buslett died in 1924 the Post Office was moved into the Lorin Wrolstad store and Lorin became Postmaster, after Wrolstad's death Jessie Weimann became Postmistress. The Post Office in Northland was closed in 1939 and the mail went into the Iowa Post Office and was delivered from there.

In 1907 a Norwegian Lutheran Church was built in Northland. As those early settlers who had come to this area continued to speak in their native language it was only natural that church services were only to be conducted in the norwegian language.

The carpenters who build the church were Ole Barikmo, John Reiersen, Otto Halverson and the masons were Theodore Torstenson and hans halverson. The rough lumber was donated by the Wrolstad Mill. The Northland congregation was fortunate to have as a member, John Barikmo who was a cabinet maker. John came from Norway when he was 21 years old. At the age of seventeen, Barikmo was an apprentice to a cabinet maker near Telemarken where he learned the art of wood carving. As well as building the church he carved the beautiful altar which has merited much praise from all who have seen it. The altar is still in the Northland Church today.

An article in the lola Herald which was written by Malcom Rosholt, noted historian, says about Barikmo:

“Mr. Barikmo was called a partner but this covered only the surface of the man. Hidden behind the carpenter’s bench was an artist. He was not a commercial success because of the things he made were sold for little of their true value. His most native creations were the “Kubbestoles”. The word “kubbe” in norwegian suggests a “stole” means a chair. The kubbestole was very common in Norway but few immigrants attempted to make them because commercial chairs were more readily available. Barroom also carved tables, sewing boxes, clothes closets and even a bedroom set on special order”.

Barikmo had claimed that he had a carved clothes chest in every state of the United States but two. Any of those articles are of great value today. Barikmo is listed as one of the great Norwegian wood carvers by the Norwegian Historical Society of Deborah, Iowa.

John Gill from Jondalen, Norway was Northland’s first and only dentist. He became a very popular dentist because of his unique ability to make dentures. He had customers coming from Chicago and other large cities. He practiced dentistry in Northland for over 20 years but never had a state license. An lola

dentist turned Gill in for not having a license and he was sentenced to a jail term. Gill died in 1936 and his neighbors and friends all claim he died of a broken heart.

In 1912-1918 Northland boasted of having an exceptional baseball team that played the teams around the circuit. Alfred Wrolstad was the team manager. An invitation was presented to major league player, Hanus Wagner, the Pittsburg Pirates shortstop by Alfred who had met Wagner on a fishing expedition. Alfred asked Wagner to come and play with the Northland Club and the conclusion of his season, the bait was the excellent trout fishing in this area. Mr. Wagner, an ardent fisherman, had accepted the invitation but unfortunately for Northland the Pirates won the pennant that year and played in the World Series thus there was no time to come to Northland. Hands Wagner was an early member of Baseball's Hall of Fame.

The Northland one room school was organized in 1887 with Miss Chapin as the teacher for \$26 per month. Members of the first school board were Rier Leer, John Wrolstad and John Ellefson. The school was closed in the late 1940's after the consolidation with the Lola School District.

After the sawmill was closed, Martin a son of John Wrolstad, started farming around the mill pond. Martin was one of the large Guernsey farmers in Waupaca County. Here at Northland some of the largest gatherings of area farmers were found at the annual Guernsey Picnics which were held at the Wrolstad farm.

Lorin Wrolstad built a feed mill on the dam after the logging operations closed down. He also installed a dynamo to generate electric power in 1924. The small electric plant supplied electricity to four home, the store, church, barn and even a couple street lights. Martin Erickson ground the feed at the mill that as brought in by the farmers. The feed mill and water wheel have since been torn down.

Northland had a garage operated by Harvey Olson which has closed and Joe Helgeson built a barber shop at his home which he operated until his death in 1962.

A group from Ripley's Believe It or Not came to Northland to interview Harold Bergslien who was called "the man with the photographic mind". He had

memorized 40,000 photographs which he could identify by seeing only a tiny portion of the facial image. Harold's picture was entered in the Believe It or Not Column. Bergslien offered his services to the FBI to help combat suspected subversive agents and their activities. His qualifications were "I never forget a face".

My Parents

Sophia Therese Jacobson was born on December 25, 1877. After completing the eight grade at the hellestad school she attended Scandinavia Academy for 1 1/2 year. She attended six weeks summer school which was held at different places (Waupaca, Scandinavia, Manawa, Clintonville & New London). She taught the Lashua School in the town of harrison for 2 years, her wages are \$24 per month for the fall and spring term and \$28 a month for the three winter months.(At that ime school was in session only seven months of the year.) She taught the Hellestad School for 4 years. The first 3 years she was paid \$30 per month and the last year \$32 per month. She was also employed at the E.C. Lean Furniture store for 2 years.On November 30, 1905 she was married to John Lorin Wrolstad at the Scandinavia Church with Rev. Nelson Officiating. Five children were born to them, Russell Lavern. Evelyn Minerva, Vernon Monroe, Florence Elaine and Belva Ardale. Sophia passed away on December 19, 1976 lacking a week of being 99 years of age.

John Lorin Wrolstad completed the eighth grade at the Loberg school in Northland. At the age of 15 he moved with his parents to Scandinavia. He attended Scandinavia Academy, graduating from the two year commercial course in June of 1896. Following graduation he was employed as a clerk at the Nels Johnson store in Iola. He operated the store and creamery at Northland for 35 years. He was chairman of the town of harrison , town treasurer, school clerk, director of Central Wiscon College and the Scandinavia Telephone Company. He was Postmaster at Northland for 15 years. Lorin passed away on january 24, 1937 after an illness of a week at the age of 58.