

## **BENRUD FARM AND CHURCH TOUR 2020**

This is a self-guided tour of the original Benrud Family homestead farms and churches. You will see the immigration destination of our ancestors who traveled from Norway to Wisconsin, and specifically to the Portland Township of Monroe County. The information on this tour was initially gathered by Gerald Olson, president of the Benrud Family for the original farm tours in 1980. It has been revised for subsequent reunions by Julie Olson Backus, Iris Jothen Othrow and Marie Peterson Marin, with additional information provided by Greg Olson. Before you begin the tour, please read the background material. More history is included in the tour directions.

The Driving Instructions: Begin your tour at Immanuel Lutheran Church and Moen Cemetery, 30016 County Highway PC, one mile west of Cashton, WI 54619. Drive south on County PC, less than a mile to the cluster of farms in the Cleavedalen area. Continue south to Newry on Highway 27. Cross the highway to visit North Coon Prairie Lutheran Church and Cemetery. Return to the highway and drive to Westby. Just south of the downtown area, turn Left on Old Towne Road. Continue until intersection with Coon Prairie Avenue. Country Coon Prairie Church will be on your right.

Return to Hwy 27 and turn Right to drive back through Westby. Continue north on Hwy 27 until County P. Turn Left and drive down to the valley, Skogdalen Lutheran Church and Cemetery. If you wish to visit Norskedalen Nature and Heritage Center closer to Coon Valley, continue on County P to County PI and the sign. To find the next farm, continue on County P to County X; turn Right to leave the valley. The farm of Lars and Lena Anderson is up on the ridge. Continue on County X to Portland. Turn Right on Highway 33, then Right on Navajo Road. Mapltwin Farms is the location of Olava and Joseph Lee farm. Return to Highway 33, drive to Portland Lutheran Church and Cemetery. Continue on Hwy 33 to County PC. Turn Right to return to Immanuel Lutheran Church.

Please drive slowly on the County Roads. Many Amish families live in the area, and they will be walking or driving with horses and buggies on these roads. Also please respect the families that are living at the homes and farms today. Thank you.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

As you view the beautiful rolling land, and the deep and narrow valleys, you will appreciate the reasons these Norwegian immigrants were drawn to this area. This natural beauty is much like Eidsvoll in southern Norway where our ancestors came from. It undoubtedly reminded them of home.

You will also notice many small rural and village churches. Nearly all of the Lutheran churches were established by the immigrants as Evangelical Norwegian Lutheran Churches.

Services in the Norwegian Language were expected. Our ancestors were members of these churches: Immanuel, North Coon Prairie, Country Coon Prairie, Skogdalen (skog = forest, dalen = valley), and Portland. Also close by in Coon Valley, Westby and Cashton are other churches with backgrounds as Evangelical Norwegian Lutheran congregations. Most of the early churches in this area shared the same minister and some still share pastoral staff.

When our ancestors lived here, there was a large community of Norwegian folks living on family farms. Now the population is more diverse and so are the farms and homes. There are single dwellings, Amish farms, and very large dairy farms with around 400 milking cows and herds of 500 to 600 cattle. You will see fields of corn, hay, alfalfa, oats and soybeans.

Our history is a story of real people, all of whom spent the early years in America within this narrow geographical area before dispersing to Iowa as the Andersons did, or to Minnesota as the Carl Benruds did. Many families also moved to Saskatchewan, Canada in the early 1900's. While we are a large family with 2,292 descendants, we derive our heritage from Peder Pettersen Benerud (born in 1820) and Annie Sophie Jonsdatter (born in 1818) in Norway, the parents of five siblings who lived to marry – Maren, Lena, Anton, Olava and Carl. In May of 2020, descendants in these families number: Carl 219; Maren 428; Olava 462; Lena 587; and Anton 786.

Many people began to leave Norway after 1815 due to the overpopulation of the country. Because most Norwegians were fishermen or farmers, the country was simply not able to accommodate a growing population with only one quarter of the land tillable. In fact, nearly half of the Norwegian people lived in the rolling meadows of southeastern Norway where the Benruds came from. Land was scarce and the young farmer had little hope for independence. So, many Norwegians came to America, particularly after 1840. Many young people heard about the Norwegian settlers in the Midwest and chose to follow their lead. Around 1840, Norwegian settlements sprang up in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin. For example, settlements grew in Muskego (southwest of Milwaukee) and south of Madison in an area called Koshkonong. Later immigrants stopped off at these communities, and when they had recuperated from sometimes exhausting trips across the Atlantic Ocean, they moved further north to less settled land.

By 1867 when Lena and Lars Anderson came to the USA as the first Benruds, their complete journey took about 2 months. They sailed from Christiania, Norway on a fully rigged sailing ship, "Nor", from May 21<sup>st</sup> to July 14<sup>th</sup>. The ship landed at Quebec. Traveling by train to Chicago, they finally arrived in Sparta in Monroe County. The land was the primary drawing card. In 1850, it sold for \$1.25 an acre in central Wisconsin.

The second of the Benrud children, Anton, came to America in June 1871 with Maren's fiancé, Carl Olson. Anton and Carl had tickets only as far as Chicago. So when they got to the windy city, they had to pawn their trunks to get enough money to purchase tickets to Sparta. Before they could return and redeem their belongings, the trunks were destroyed in the great Chicago fire of 1871. They began to do farm work in the summers and cut wood in the winter. Maren came in 1872 and married Carl in April of 1873. In August of 1874, Lars and Carl Olson purchased 170 acres of land in the southern part of Portland Township, not far from Newry. When one considers the Benerud farm in Norway was only 8 acres, these Wisconsin farms were considered an estate by Norwegian standards.

The southern portion of this land became the home farm for Maren and Carl Olson. Lars Anderson sold the northern portion to Peder Pettersen Benerud (the parents) in 1879 after Lars and Lena had moved to Iowa. In 1880 or 1882 Peder sold this farm to Anton.

On June 3, 1875, Peder, Sophie, Olava, Carl, along with another son, Christian, sailed on the "The Trondheim" from Christiania (later Oslo), arriving in Bergen on June 5<sup>th</sup>. Two children, infant Berte Marie and 3 year old Karl Johan, had died in Norway. On June 6<sup>th</sup>, they boarded a combination steam-powered and sailing ship, the Haakon-Adelsteen, and arrived at Castle Garden at the Battery in New York City on June 24<sup>th</sup>. (The more famous Ellis Island was used from 1892 into the 1900's). From there, they came by train to Chicago and Sparta.

In a letter sent back to Norway by Olava in August of 1875, she recounts the trip of the parents and three children to the new world. Here is part of her letter:

"As we sailed out from Bergen, we had good weather and were all in good health, but when we had been on the North Sea a day, nearly all of us became sick, and we lay in bed for three days so sea sick except for father, he has not been sick a day since we left Norway. We had along on the ship a good minister who preached a sermon every Wednesday and Sunday. On St. John's Day we put in at New York in America and you can believe we were glad when we reached land. Off from the ship in New York, we came into an enormously big building and were there overnight. And all of the immigrants each received a new testament to read in and a little book, too. Inscribed on it was as follows: 'People from home's dear strand, welcome to the new land.' We were there for a day, and we got on a train and it went fast. We traveled through many big cities. In Chicago we waited a little while, got on another train, which we were on until Sparta. There we had to wait until our baggage was unloaded. And then we would say farewell to our whole journey and there we stood, because we didn't understand anyone. But luckily a Norwegian came along and talked to us and told us that Lars Anderson Engen had been there for two days and waited for us but had gone home again. That man lived in the city and we got to stay at his place until we got a message to them again. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, they came after us." Olava describes the trip to the farm this way: "It was a little over three Norwegian miles to their farm and we thought the country was beautiful. There were big open spaces, and some oak trees in between and some enormously big wheat fields. Yes, now we are through with this long and tedious journey to our destination. You have probably heard that American journeys are long and that you can also believe, but God be praised and thanked. We all came quickly and safely to our haven and we are all in pretty good health and are getting well established, all together in this new land." Olava certainly paints a beautiful picture of this monumental decision to leave Norway and journey to this country.

## **TOUR DIRECTIONS**

Begin your tour at Immanuel Lutheran Church and Moen Cemetery, 30016 County Highway PC, west of Cashton, WI 54619. This congregation was organized with about fifty families on April 12, 1890 as Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church. They met at the Woodard School. The first church was built and ready for worship services on Sunday, October 26, 1890. Some of the foundation stone was quarried from the Anton Benrud farm. Carl Olson supervised the

work of quarrying and hauling the stone. In May of 1907, lightning struck the church, destroying the the building and contents. It was rebuilt a year later. Peder, Annie Sophie, Maren, Carl, Anton, Maria and Julia are buried here. During Benrud Family Reunions, their graves will be marked by Norwegian flags and a Swedish flag for Carl. Many of our great grandparents, grandparents and parents were baptized, confirmed and married at Immanuel including Annie Olson, Martin Benrud, Ole Olson, Peter Olson, Christian Olson, Elmer Benrud, Henry Benrud, Philip Benrud, Anna Peterson, Ella Johnson, Gustav Benrud, Martina Olson and five of Olava's children: Leonard, Ole, John, Paul, Stella and others.

Driving south on Cty PC, the second farm on the left was the farm of Ole and Mae Olson from 1901 – 1950. This land has been farmed by two of their sons, Walter and Orlando Olson, grandson David Peterson and great grandson Eric Peterson. Now an Amish family farms the land, using methods of farming similar to those of the Olsons and Benruds in earlier times. Notice the one room school house by the long driveway. Eighteen Amish children are students there. Six Amish families live along Cty PC. Please drive carefully, watch for children walking, horses and buggies on the road, and working teams in the fields.

Continue over a small hill to the next farm on the left, 30658 County PC. This was Anton's farm and became the home farm because Peder and Annie Sophie lived out their years with Anton. During the time between 1871 and 1875, Anton had worked on farms in Upper Bostwick Valley where he met his first wife, Maria Dokken, who was born in Valdres, Norway and came to Wisconsin in 1856 at the age of one year. They were married in 1875 and moved to the Cleavedalen area. Two years after Maria's death in 1902, he married Julia Anderson, his neighbor. No doubt, several of the early family picnics were held on this farm as Grandpa Peder lived until 1914. Grandma Annie Sophie in a letter of 1882, informs the relatives in Norway: "Anton surely has enough of everything: of horses he has 4, cows 12, and of hogs he has butchered 4 this fall and still has 11 left, of sheep 200 head, and this fall he got 200 bushels of oats, 400 of wheat, and 200 of barley so he has enough of everything and we live together comfortably because he has a wife who is kind to us old folks." Anton and Maria raised 8 children: Peder, Carl Johan, Anna, Ella, Christian, Martin, Elmer and Henry. Five other children died as infants. Anton and Julia had 2 children: Philip and Leda. Martin, his wife Sophie and their children lived at this farm for many years.

There are two more homesteads in the cluster of farms in this Cleavedalen area. Continuing south, the land on the left side of the road was purchased from Mr. Cleaves, an early settler in the area. This farm, 30972 Cty PC, is where Maren and Carl Olson lived. Maren met her future husband Carl in Norway. Carl walked from Arvika, Varmland, Sweden at the age of 14 to Christiana (now Oslo) in Norway. He worked as a hired man at Vestgarn Aas (short for Vestgaarden, meaning west farm) and met and became engaged to Maren. Maren would spend her summers in Norway at the saeter up in the mountains with the cows and the goats, making cheese and churning cream into butter. Maren wanted to be married in America instead of Norway, so she persuaded Carl to go to America. At age 25, Carl went with her brother, Anton who was 17 years old. Maren gave Anton her ticket. Her father, Peder had given her the ticket, but she was afraid that people would talk if she went with Carl, unmarried! In 1872, after he made some money in the new world, Carl sent Maren money for a ticket to come to America. She came on the "Albion", one of 103 passengers, and along with

5 others, came to Monroe County. She worked for a time in Sparta because she wanted to learn English. On April 15, 1873, Maren and Carl were married in the schoolhouse at Portland Center.

In 1875, they moved to this farm in Cleavedalen where they lived for 50 years. Maren and Carl's baby daughter, Annie Sophia ( born in 1874), and Lars and Lena's most recent baby, Annie Sophie, both namesakes of their grandmother, Annie Sophie, were part of the growing family to welcome grandma Annie and grandpa Peder when they arrived in 1875. However, grandchildren were not reported in the two letters sent back to Norway that have been returned to our family. In the letter of 1882 to Norway, Grandma Annie Sophie reported that Carl and Maren, too were prospering. "Carl and Maren live only some yards from us – we see them all the time and they now have it very good. They have three horses, six grown cows and they own it all themselves. So they have enough of this world's stuff." This homestead was farmed for many years by descendants of Carl and Maren, including grandson, Immanuel. It was the first home of Julie Maren Olson Backus, member of the board for many years, keeper of the family tree and president from 2005-2010.

A very interesting story was shared by Esther Bakke about her grandfather, Carl Olson. He was called "Svenska Carl" by the neighbors because he was the only Swede in the vicinity. The Indians who camped at the Benrud springs just north of his farm, called him the "good man" because he would let them put their ponies in his barn when the weather became inclement in late fall, as they traveled back and forth between their campgrounds in spring and fall. Maren and Carl had 6 children: Annie, Ole, Peter, Caroline, Martina and Christian.

Across the road to the west is the first homestead of Carl Pederson Benrud, 30977 Cty PC. Carl worked for a time in Portland for a German farmer. In fact, he learned to speak German before he learned to speak English. He also worked for the railroad, and drove horses to Minnesota where he sold them. While working in Goodhue, MN, he met Gunhild (Gena) Knutson who he later married. Her parents had come from Norway in 1857. In 1883, Carl purchased this land in the Cleavedalen area ( across from his sister Maren ) from his brother Anton. Carl and Gena lived there until 1886 when they moved to Goodhue. The current owners indicated that the original building still forms the frame for part of the house. Like some of the family members, he used the name Pederson and did not change until he moved to Goodhue. According to his grandson Charles Benrud, first historian for the Benrud Family, because there were so many Pedersons in Goodhue, the postman asked Carl if there wasn't some other name he could use. So he adopted the name of the old home farm in Norway – Benerud. Carl and Gena had 6 children: Gustav, Hannah, Ole, Kenneth, Paul and Mina.

Continue to drive south on Cty PC to Newry. North Coon Prairie Lutheran Church or Melby Church is across Hwy 27. This congregation was organized in March of 1875. (Melby and Moen referred to the farm families who sold land for the churches and lived adjacent to them.). Many members of the Benrud Family – Lees and Petersons were members of this congregation, and descendants still are.

Drive south on Hwy 27, thru Westby to Old Towne Road. Go left 0.5 miles. Turn right on Coon Prairie Ave. Go 0.5 miles to Country Coon Prairie Church. This congregation was organized in 1852. It was the Mother Church from which 22 congregations in western Wisconsin began, all being served by Coon Prairie pastors. The first church building was

completed in 1857, the first church in Vernon County and the first Lutheran Church in western Wisconsin. A second Country Coon Prairie Church was built in 1878, but was destroyed by fire on Easter Sunday, 1909. The present structure was built the same year.

To continue the tour, return to Westby, drive north on Hwy 27 to County Road P. Turn left, drive 2.2 miles past the Snowflake Ski Club (site of 2005 Reunion) and continue 3.4 miles to Skogdalen Lutheran Church. John Baglien donated the land for the church. It was completed in the summer of 1900 for a cost of \$1200.00. The church was built entirely of stone from a nearby quarry. It measures 30x50 feet, with an 85 foot steeple. Just before the church, the small building on your right was the church hall. The adjacent farm was the Baglien farm where Anton's son Christian came to farm. On March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1912, Christian married Minnie Baglien (1884-1967), and they farmed in the Westby area until around 1919, when they moved to the Bethlehem area near Hawarden, Sask. Christian farmed there until 1924 when they moved back to Wisconsin; he farmed the Baglien farm in Timber Coulee until his death in 1953. He was deacon at Skogdalen Lutheran Church, and also custodian for 23 years. His son, Paul, along with his wife, Esther and their daughter Karen, farmed here until Paul's death in 1973.

At the cemetery at Skogdalen Lutheran Church are the graves of Christian and Minnie Benrud along with some of their children, Paul, Carl, Valborg Jothsen and her husband, Joseph.

If you choose to visit Norskedalen, please continue on County P until PI and the sign to Norskedalen. To continue the church/farm tour, take County P to County X, 1.3 miles. Turn right and leave the valley. Continue to the home of Lena and Lars Anderson on the ridge, about 3.7 miles on your right.

Lena and Lars were married in Norway in 1867 and came to America on their honeymoon. The tickets were a gift from his mother. After arriving in Sparta, they had only one dollar between them. Lars went to work as a farm hand and Lena as a dishwasher in a hotel. They raised enough money to buy this farm in 1871, now 29062 Cty X. Carl Olson (Maren's fiance) and Anton (Lena's brother) stayed on this farm for a time, too. In 1874, they moved to the Cleavedalen area and after a few years they moved to Sparta. Following a brief stay in Sparta, Lars and Lena moved to the Ventura area of Iowa in 1877 where the family has grown and prospered in the rich prairie land. Their children included Albert, Matilda, Ann Sophie, Oscar, Clara, Elmer, Conrad, Otto and Emma.

Continue on County X to Portland. Turn Right on Hwy 33, drive a short distance to Navajo Road. Turn right & go 0.4 to the home of Jon and Sandra Peterson – Mapltwin Farms on the right, 28521 Navajo. This was the home farm of Olava and Joseph Lee. They were married March 7, 1876. Olava did not arrive in America until the summer of 1875. The Lees and Benruds had been neighbors in Norway. Olava liked to tell how she, as a little girl, had lost her shoe in a shallow mountain stream, and Joseph, nine years older, retrieved it for her after some teasing. She always believed that this incident, which she vividly remembered, foretold their eventual happy marriage. Joseph had come to America in 1869 and lived with an uncle. In 1872 he purchased this land and set out to tame it. In fact, the History of Monroe County in a 1912 report said the land was so wild that he had to grub the stumps in order to build the foundation for his house. The original base of the home site can sometimes be seen when the lawn is wet from rain. It must have seemed like manna from heaven to have this land, because they had been forced to do without in the old country. In fact, in the letter in 1882 to

the relatives in Norway, Annie Sophie (Olava's mother) said the following: "from Olava and Joseph we can tell that all goes well, they have good health and live well, and of this life it looks like they have enough because they have four horses, nine cows and about 20 hogs and of chickens and turkeys they have no number for. Yes, when one thrives here, then can a person have it good for want is not known here, because a common man can live every day as on Christmas Day in Norway." Olava and Joseph raised nine children: Leonard, Aletta, Ole, Emma, Lenora, John, Louis, Paul and Stella. One son, Johann died as an infant.

Return to Hwy 33, turn right, drive 0.5 to Portland Lutheran Church. This congregation was organized in 1874 as Portland Norwegian Lutheran Church. Olava and Joseph are buried at this cemetery. Drive on Hwy 33 1.3 miles to County PC; turn right, go 0.7 miles to the intersection with Oakdale. The acre of land at the northwest corner was the site of Woodard School. At least 3 generations of Benruds and Olsons attended this school before it burned on February 22, 1958. They walked up and down these hills to get to school.

To complete the tour, drive the last half mile to Immanuel Lutheran Church. We hope you have enjoyed this experience!