

## **Younger Brothers Go to College- Rev. Dr. Philip Holtan 2-25-2025**

As I've spent time over the years with our family's genealogy, I've been struck by how often in the early Norwegian-American immigrant community, younger sons in these big families were given the opportunity to go to college and become professionals. Their older brothers took over the farms or found new ones, but the younger you were in the family, the more likely you were to go on for higher education. Sorry, daughters, not so much. In those days there were not so many opportunities, though I'm proud that many did become teachers.

Why do you think? By the youngest the families were better established and had some money to support more education. Land was scarce, and perhaps best of all, not everyone had to be farmers anymore. There was more freedom of choice and vocation as the country developed.

First, I'll share a list, then give more details.

**Dr. John Suby -1872-1925** Stoughton, WI Early death at 53 Fred Suby's brother.

**Dr. Ole Thorvilson 1879-1914** Denbigh and Wildrose, ND Very early death at 35, Julia Gunhild Thorvilson Holtan's brother.

**Dr. Theodore Holtan 1883-1948** Watertown, MN Death at 65 Halvor Holtan's brother

**Isaac Dahlby 1883-1958** –NDSU and Iowa State in animal husbandry, Ruth's uncle

**Carl Thompson 1906-1983** Esteemed founder of Bemidji State University choir- Julia Thorvilson Holtan's nephew, Elmer's 2<sup>nd</sup> cousin.

**Rev. Irvin Suby-** Pastor Janesville, WI Sadie Suby's brother.

**Rev. Walter Holtan** Pastor in Prairie du Chien- Elmer Holtan's brother.

**Dr. Boyd Holtan** son of George Holtan, Stanford's cousin Math education at West Virginia U.

**Dr. Luther Tweeten -2024** Ruth Tweeten Holtan's brother- Ag economist, Oklahoma State and Ohio State

**Dr. Kathryn Tweeten Fraser 1925-2023 and Dr. John B. Tweeten 1928-2023** were Ruth 's 2<sup>nd</sup> cousins, children of Ab Tweeten from Swea City, IA. .

And in 2025, as part of the upwardly mobile slant of the family, we have dozens of doctors around, including 3 among the Stan Holtan children, 4 among the grandchildren and 2 more spouses in-law. Many others with master's degrees and most with bachelor's degrees. Education has been very important.

It seems that a number of the immigrants were teachers already in Norway, so some of that interest in education came from the Old Country. Some of the Mandts, for example, could read and write long before it was common. Phil Holtan has written another article about the pastors/prest in the family. There were many pastors in Norway, many who came as younger dis-inherited sons of noble Danish families. They were very well educated.

**Waldorf College** also played a huge part in our families getting more education, at a time when many families had very little beyond country school, grades 1-8 at best. I at one time, Stand and Ruth counted that about 50 of the Holtans and 50 of the Tweetens had attended Waldorf, including all 8 Stanford and Ruth Holtan children. Now, for many years, Waldorf Academy was more of a high school than a college, but eventually many attended to get their BA. Even Stan Holtan, at about age 83, after taking a variety of art classes at Waldorf in his 70's and 80's, found he had enough credits to graduate, and so he did. He received his degree in Humanities in about 1994. Waldorf was a junior college in those earlier days, so St. Olaf, where many Waldorf presidents moved on, was the next place to go for many of the family.

**Dr. John Suby** - Dr. John was influenced by his aunt Hage SubyTollefson in Wisconsin who financed his medical training at Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Indiana. The Directory of Deceased Physicians lists the Central College of Physicians and Surgeons, Indianapolis, 1900, also the Decorah Institute in IA, and the Highland Park Coll. of Pharmacy in Des Moines, IA. So, Dr. John covered some ground in his education.

Her granddaughter Dorothy Olsen, retired Dean of Women, Concordia College gave this information. Dr. John practiced medicine for his short life in Stoughton, Wisconsin. His only son Howard became a Harvard Medical School professor and a fine violinist. He also died young of cancer.

From Fred Suby Story- Ruth Holtan remembers hearing that one time Fred's brother, Dr. John Suby operated on Fred's varicose veins on the Suby kitchen table.

**Dr. Ole Thorvilson 1879-1914** Dr. Ole was doctor in Denbigh, ND, and then moved to Wildrose, ND. Those were tiny towns far out on the prairie. He was going home for Christmas when he had a heart attack in the Nicollet Hotel in Minneapolis.

**Dr. Theodore Holtan 1883-1948** was the 13<sup>th</sup> child of Hans and Margit Holtan. He was born 24 years after the first child, so he was a generation younger than they were and had many nephews and nieces who were older than he was. He was born in Iowa but moved at a young age to Washburn, ND where he grew up. He eventually became a medical doctor and had a long time practice in Waterville, Minn.

**Isaac Dahlby 1883-1958** - NDSU and Iowa State Uncle Isaac was educated in Agriculture and Animal Husbandry. He attended North Dakota Agricultural College at Fargo and Iowa State College at Ames. It perhaps was at this time he chose to identify with Unitarian beliefs. While he was a student at Fargo, he contracted Typhoid Fever. His mother went by train to care for him there.