

THE ONSTAD FOLKS

The Fjone farmstead in Nissedal lies on the west side of Lake Nisser beyond the old church at Ivet. It to, without a doubt, had been a farmstead in the old days. Here at Fjone in about the year 1780 1680 lived a man by the name of Jon. He was a prosperous man who owned many places and was one of the most popular men in the neighborhood. In addition to that he was a big and handsome man, cheerful and full of jokes, always honest and straight in dealing with his fellowmen in the same manner as many of his descendants have been known to be.

He was not yet married when, on a trip to Arendal, he became acquainted with a Danish skipper named Rasmus and his daughter Maria who had come with her father to see what things looked like in Norway. Maria was a healthy and lively girl and the two young people were together often during the days Jon was in the city. In fact, they came to love each other as Maria thought this active young man of Telemarken was much more attractive and of finer qualities than the boys she knew in Jylland.

It happened one evening as the two sat alone together in the guestroom at the hotel playing cards and talking about this and that, that she said "Now I am putting myself up as a bet, and you, Jon, meet that wager with so many dollars" This seemed like quite a clear hint, but Jon accepted for the fun of it. They played and Jon won. When they separated and Jon should go home she said that if she got permission to accompany her father next year, she would come to Norway again and then take a trip to Nissedal, as she had a strong desire to see the big mountains people talked about and also to see the homes and farmhouses in Norway.

Next summer she came to Fjone one evening, tired and unexpected.

"Good afternoon", she greeted.

Then she said. "Here I put down my bundle and my cane and here I think I shall rest many a day."

Jon was not at home when she came. He was at the Mill grinding. They sent word to him that there had come a girl from Denmark who insisted on speaking to him. Jon knew who it was and he became a little excited, but that soon went over. Love had not rusted away for either of them, but when he told his parents that he was engaged there got to be quite a ruckus in the house. The Fjone people were proud and important folks in the neighborhood and could see no sense in Jon throwing himself away and bringing shame on the whole relationship by marrying an unknown Danish girl. They did, however, agree to keep their peace until further developments.

When they saw she was ambitious and skilled at spinning and weaving it was agreed she could stay for a while, the thought being that she would get lonesome and homesick and go home. Jon's mother then arranged a weave pattern that "Jutska" (that is what they nicknamed her)

should try her skill at. They soon saw that she was very skillful, but she and Jon were together too much to suit his mother so she decided this should come to an end. So one day she cut the woven fabric across and through. But Jutska did not become down-hearted. Almost before the old lady had shaken off her anger Jutska had patched the fabric together again and was weaving as though nothing had happened. It was then concluded that something had to be done. Things could not go on this way. Jon and Maria were so determined in the decision that they could not be torn apart. So the old lady said to her one day that she could have Jon provided she could spin a thread that would reach from Fjone over the Nisser water and up to the Tveit church. This distance is approximately two English miles. Everyone thought this an impossible task except Jutske. She not only spun a thread that reached to the church, but three times around the church and back to Fjone. Now the old people had to give up and let Jon and Maria have their way and they were married in the Tveit church. It turned out to be a happy marriage. To them were born sons and daughters.

The firstborn, a son, was named Rasmus after her father, the skipper, and one of the daughters was named Signe. Rasmus inherited the Fjone homestead after his father and Signe became married to Gunnar Torjeison Lønnegraf in Vraadal. The Lønnegraf people were immigrants from Setesdal. Rasmus Fjone had two sons. Gunnar Lønnegraf was regarded as a rich man in his time. He owned both upper and lower Lønnegref which was a large forest. He also owned Lønnemoen, Gaglann and Naeper in Vraadal; Utbøen and Brauti in Kvitseid. This was quite a few places, but then he also had many children: Tarjei, the oldest, Jon, Birgit, Aadne, Rasmus, Sigrid, Signe and Svein. They all lived to an old age as we shall see.

Tarjei was 85 when he died near Grafton, North Dakota. Rasmus was 85 when he died at La Crosse, Wisconsin, in 1903. Aadne, 91 ½ when he died at Misund in Kvitseid. Signe died in September, 1914, in Milaca County, Minnesota, at the age of 96. Sigrid was 101 when she died at Vearnyrane in Fyrisdal and Svein was 89 when he died at Bidstó. They were Godfearing Christian people. Aadne and Rasmus were lay preachers in their neighborhood and took part in the big awakening which went through the area. Svein was a school-teacher and "Klokker" for about 50 years. The Lord did not forget his promise that the Godfearing shall long live upon the earth.

When Gunnar Lønnegraf was to be married for a second time to Ellen Roholt, it happened that her son also was to be married. Also Rasmus and Signe who were son and daughter of Gunnar. So there were four couples in the same relationship to be married at Vraadal's church at the same time. Signe was married to Halvor Gunderson from Fjaagesund Flaabygd. Halvor then bought Onstad in Treungen in the Nissedal clerical district. They moved there and lived there for 28 years. They had twelve children. Four of them died in infancy and eight grew to manhood. Gunnar, the oldest, who now lives in Seattle, Washington, was not quite twenty-two years old

when he left for America. He had scraped together some money with which to buy timberland to clear. In 1866 he departed from Skien together with his uncle Rasmus and his family. After seven weeks they landed in Montreal, Canada, and went from there to Highland Prairie, Fillmore County, Minnesota. Here he became married to Karen Kristina Blom, bought himself a pair of oxen, and a wagon and struck out for Winnebago County, Iowa. The land he purchased here he held until he traded it off for a business enterprise in Forest City, Iowa. He did business in this County for over 25 years; the last 18 in Leland where he was loaded down with many public offices in school and city affairs. He became tired of this and traded off his business for land in Mille Lacs County, Minnesota, where he stayed for seven years until he moved to Seattle. His wife passed away about two years ago and he now lives with a daughter, Mrs. Jespersion.

They had 12 children Four died prior to 2 years ago. Those who now live are:

Hans in San Diego, California;

Susan in Seattle,

Wilhelm who works for the government in Alaska,

Paul who is dentist in Portland, Oregon,

Ida, Married to Ingel Johnson, also of Portland.

Wilma is married to Roe Engebretson and they live in Milaca, Minnesota, and

Walter is in Craig, Alaska.

Mr. Onstad is now 81 years old and has just returned from a trip to Alaska and he relates many interesting things from there. He is in good health, active and content.

This is translated from a Seattle newspaper article written about 1925. Translated by Milo Dahl.