

What's Our Family Story Geographically

Here's my opinion: Telemark transposed to Mt. Valley Township.

When people ask where our family is from, or what our DNA tells us of our ancestry, they may be amazed we're 100% from Norway. It's much more amazing than that. We are almost entirely from one little county of Norway, Telemark, with just a bit of spillage to the counties around Telemark. The longest distance is 200 miles to Oppland, but within Telemark, maybe 100 miles across that circle. Dahlby's come from a different place, Oppland, near Lillehammer where the Winter Olympics have been held. Mae Dahlby came to Mt. Valley from Dane County, WI, so from a bit of a different route than the Holtans and Tweetens.

It's very appropriate in the right circles to say that we are "Tele," from Telemark. That may be related to the fact that "Telemark" means the "woodland" of the "Theilir," the ancient tribe that inhabited the area.

First, what's unique about Telemark.

Here's what Wikipedia says about Telemark. "Traditional Telemark, i.e. Upper Telemark, is located in the inland and comprises more than two thirds of it according to its traditional definition. Both in medieval times and later, (Upper) Telemark was the region of Norway with the most self-owning farmers. It retained Norse Culture to a larger degree than any other region in Norway, with respect to its more egalitarian organization of society, religion, traditional values and language. Thus, the people of Telemark were often described during the Middle Ages and early modern era as the most violent in Norway. The dialects of Upper Telemark are also the dialects of Norwegian that are closest to Old Norse. The farmers of Telemark were marked by a strong-willed conservatism and belief in their traditional values that often defied the central authorities of Denmark-Norway; for example, they held on to aspects of both Old Norse religion and later of Catholicism longer than other regions in Norway. (Upper) Telemark traditionally lacks cities entirely."

It's amazing, but almost all the family lines come from that very small area in the mountains of Telemark, with some spill from Setesdal, to the west, Oppland to the north, coast Telemark to the south and Akershus to the east. But not much. Quite a few of the early Lutheran pastors came from noble families in Denmark in the 1500's to the 1700's, married local women and became well established here, high and isolated in the mountain valleys.

A recent book I read, >>>>, suggests that the most direct roots to modern democracy are not from Greece, but from Scandinavia, where the "Thing" was the assembly of every free male in the community to talk out their issues and elect their chiefs and kings. For the most part,

leadership was not inherited but elected by all the voters in the “Thing.” That is our legacy, and that egalitarian sense that is very strong in Norway and came to America at a high point in their regaining their national sovereignty from Denmark first, and then Sweden. I think of Mt. Valley as that kind of transplanted yeoman farmer society. It’s true that women were not included early on, but women’s suffrage came fairly early, 1910, to Norway and the rest of Scandinavia and today, there is nowhere in the world where women are more likely to be top leaders in each of those countries.

Politically

Those MT. Valley farmers were mainly Republicans, and conservative at heart. Elmer Holtan was very active in township politics and ran for state representative in ??? what year?? He was proud that he got within just a few votes of the incumbent. Apparently he had sided with a project that was unpopular with some farmers and they organized to defeat him.

Stan and Ruth Holtan began a political journey themselves, with Farm Bureau, property tax reform, installing and supporting Terry Branstad as governor, and even the beginnings of the tea party movement.

Curiously, the North Dakota Holtans tend to be Farmer’s Union rather than Farm Bureau people and therefore Democrats.

What’s Our Family Story Religiously?

All these families had incredible energy for their faith. In the story of each of our immigrant families, the church was at the very center of their communities and since they were very rural, as in Mt. Valley Township, the church, like Winnebago and Beaver Creek, were the cultural and community centers.

The Dahlby’s especially were from a more pietistic background, which showed in Grandma Mae’s aversion to dancing, drinking and card playing. Uncle Stanley caught a lot of that as he loved to dance at the Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake. Several of the Dahlby relatives have moved to the Lutheran Brethren, what we could call the Baptists in the Lutheran family. Fred Suby would have been at the other end of the continuum, along with Leonard Gilbertson family, trying to hold onto the “Synod” church after it was mostly absorbed into the larger “United Church” mix after 1917.