

Fargo Forum May 8, 1941



"Seventy Years Old, this log cabin still stands on the Buffalo river 5 miles northwest of Glyndon, Minn., a tribute to its builder, the late Olav Thortvedt, leader and founder of the Buffalo river settlement of Norwegians. It was an addition to the first he built for his family. It contains many relics of pioneer days. Miss Orabel Thortvedt has prepared a series of pen and ink sketches of the settlement and its first inhabitants, which will appear in The Fargo Forum beginning Sunday."

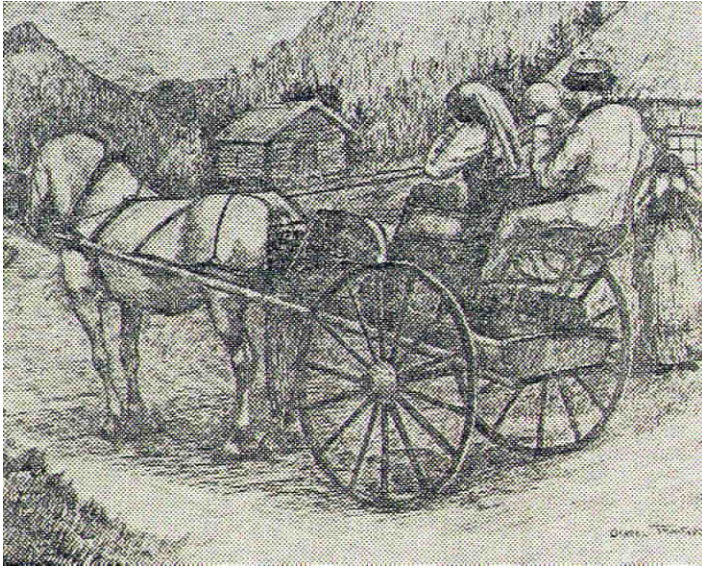
How would you like to glance backward on the pages of history and follow the adventures of the pioneers who came to our prairies some 70 years ago? And see pictures and read stories about some of the most dramatic of their experiences. And discover as you go along that it is a true story you are reading, about real people and real events?

Beginning Sunday The Fargo Forum will begin publication of a series of pen and ink sketches and stories describing stirring events in the lives of a prairie schooner caravan of Norwegians who left Houston county, Minnesota, in 1870 and traveled overland to a point about five miles northwest of Glyndon, Minn., where they founded the so-called Buffalo river settlement of Clay County.

The sketches are by Miss Orabel Thortvedt, granddaughter of the leader of the expedition, Olav Thortvedt. The footnotes also were assembled by Miss Thortvedt, who is well known as an artist. She has lived in the Buffalo river settlement most of her life, knew many of the first settlers and heard their accounts of prairie days first hand.

She has studied many of the articles, utensils and clothing they had. She has seen several of their first log cabins, for they are still standing. And with this to guide her, and old settlers including her late grandparents and parents as counsellors, she has created a stirring and colorful record of the days when the prairie demanded much of its men and women.

The series will run for four consecutive Sundays. Be sure that you don't miss this treat starting next Sunday in the Fargo Forum.



This is the First of a Series of pen and ink sketches by Miss Orabel Thortvedt, Clay County artist, which will illustrate a special series of feature articles to start in The Fargo Forum Sunday. It shows the parting in Norway as a young Norse brother and sister leave home for America. Other sketches, accompanied by the account of the experiences of the pair, their relatives and friends as they came to a point near Fargo-Moorhead to establish homes on the virgin prairie, will highlight the series. Watch for them in the Sunday edition of The Fargo Forum.

Fargo Forum May 11, 1941

Wagons Roll West to the Buffalo River Country

"Someone should have written it down."

"We should have taken some pictures."

These are common expressions as prairie pioneers and their descendants recount the dramatic experiences of the first settlers on the prairie.

But the hard-working first arrivals had no cameras. Few had the time and talent necessary for the writing task.

As a result comparatively little was written of the multitude of events that transpired as the courageous and resourceful settlers brought civilization to the frontier.

And as time passes, memory fades.

Miss Orabel Thortvedt, artist-author descendant of one of these groups of pioneers is one who has given this situation serious thought.

The result is a series of vivid pen and ink sketches of events of the prairie years, accompanied by the story of her adventuring forbearers, their ups and downs, their joys and sorrows.

Today and for several Sundays to come, The Fargo Forum is privileged to present these sketches by Miss Thortvedt, accompanied by historic notes.

Leader's Granddaughter

She is the granddaughter of Olav Thortvedt, leader of a prairie schooner caravan, which came overland from Houston county, Minnesota, in 1870 to found the so called Buffalo river settlement in Clay county. His homestead, located approximately five miles northeast of Glyndon Minn, was the center of the colony, the rest of the entourage settling within a few miles north, south, and east of the Thortvedt place. Miss Thortvedt's father came with the caravan, a boy of 10. Her mother came shortly later.

Much of the material making up the text she heard from her grandparents and other residents of the settlement who came with the original group.

With this information she created pictures to illustrate their story, in many instances studying at first hand the objects and places, and talking with old settlers still surviving.

Thus her pictures reveal the past in authoritative fashion.

Most of her work was done in her little third story garret studio in the old home of her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Levi Thortvedt.

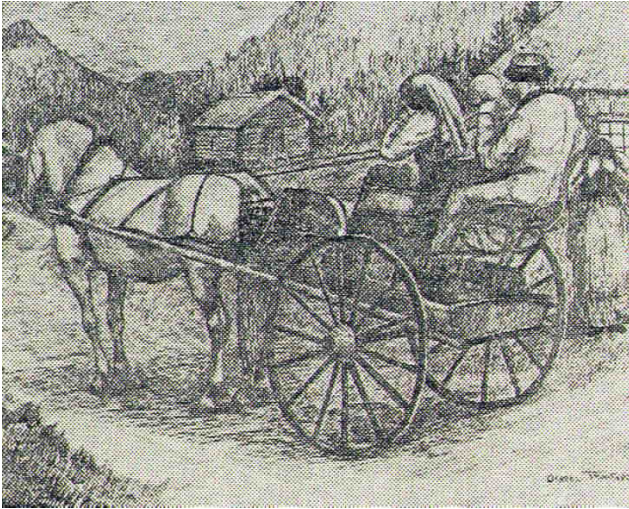
She's On The Scene

The home stands on the same spot where her grandparents and father came in 1870, established themselves and continued to reside until their deaths.

From her garret windows she can look out on the winding Buffalo, the same trees, the high prairie ridge and its rich loam, the very features that attracted her forbears years ago. Several of the log cabins in which they lived the first years still stand.

In her mind's eye she can visualize the arrival of the pioneering band of several families, led by her grandfather, eight years after the Great Sioux massacre that started on the upper Sioux agency, August 17, 1862; their search for the best spot to make their homes, the building of cabins, their first "Indian scare," the first birth, the first death, the prairie fires, an early wedding dance and other picturesque events which will ever be remembered as Buffalo river highlights.

These and other intimate episodes in the lives of the settlers will be described in word and pictures in the series starting in The Forum herewith.



Norway's Fyresdal parish was the scene in 1866 of this poignant leave-taking for two young people who later were to become members of the frontier Buffalo river settlement near Moorhead and Glyndon. The weeping mother in the background they were never to see again. She was Tobjorn Midgarden, at that time a widow. The weeping girl in the cart was her daughter, Ingebor, who later was to become mother of Orabel Thortvedt, who made these sketches. The young man in the cart was her son, Ola, who was to travel into the land of adventure with his sister. The other girl was their sister, Signe, who was to accompany them to Bandakslien, where she was to bid them goodbye and drive the horse, Swarten, back home. Ola was only 16 then...



Later, when Ola Midgarden arrived in southern Minnesota, he rapidly became a man under the rigorous pioneer conditions. This is how he looked in those venturesome days in Houston county when he joined the Olav Thortvedts and others on the trek to the Buffalo river country in 1870. Ola drove Bill and Tom, the oxen of Tarjei Skrei, another member of the party.

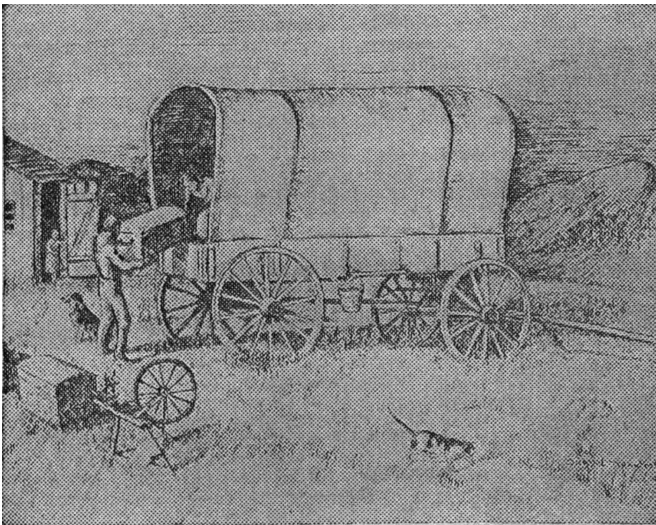
At the age of 20, Ola staked out his own homestead. He was well known and well liked among the pioneers. Few of the old residents ever forgot the chilly day in November of 1870 when he found a stray steer browsing along lonely South branch creek, a tributary of the Buffalo. The animal was slaughtered, divided among the settlers and formed a welcome addition to their larders...

Olav Thortvedt was to take a prominent role as leader of the expedition to the Buffalo River. Here he is shown in Houston county in the act of acquiring a yoke of oxen named Buck and



Bright in lieu of wages from a farmer for whom he had labored, after his arrival from Norway in 1861. Nine years later Buck and Bright were to draw a prairie schooner to Buffalo river, carrying Olav, his wife; their daughters, Joraand, 16; Thone, 13; and Signe, 7; and son Leif Levi, 10, and their personal belongings. Levi later was to become father of Isabel Thortvedt. During his lifetime Levi wrote an account of his experiences as a pioneer boy and man, recalling them with a vividness that came from a boy's impressions of the dramatic events that marked the life of the settlers. In conversations with members of the family he recounted many more details. it was not long

after he acquired the oxen that he began dreaming of the fine day when he and his family would venture further westward into a new land. News of the great Sioux massacre of August 17, 1862, held his plans in check. But Norsemen are a courageous race, and thus it was that in 1870, the Houston county band began thinking of the west again...



And here are Olav Thortvedt and his wife, Thone Saangdal Thortvedt in the act of loading their prairie schooner for the trip, the object he is hoisting into her hands being a rosmaala chest, a typical piece of the baggage of the immigrant Norseman. On the ground may be seen another similar chest, the inevitable spinning wheel, their dog, Major, and their cat, Dvarius Jillum. Dvarius was missing next morning when the emigrant party left Mound Prairie in Houston county. There were three families in all, the others being Aanon Gunderson Gjeitsta, brother of Olav Thortvedt, his wife, also named Thone, and their four sons: Gunder, 11; Gustav, 7;

John, 5; and Andreas, 3; and Tarjei Skrei and his wife Gunhild, and their only child, Signe, 4. Single men in the party were Ola Midgarden, Halvor Fendalsveit Salverson, Gunnar Veum, Ola Anderson and Tarjei Muhle. In the party were several covered wagons and some not covered, a team of horses, several yoke of oxen, cows, colts, heifers, 13 sheep, a mule, and 25 chickens in lath crates fastened behind the wagons. Many had special ability for the tasks ahead and together they formed a compact little party which was ready to meet any situation that might face pioneers. Soon the command to start came from Olav Thortvedt and the journey was under way.



Olav as leader drove ahead in his wagon, drawn by his willing team of horses, Jim and Roudy. Next came Tarjei Skrei's wagon, drawn by his oxen, Bill and Tom, with Ola Midgarden driving. The third wagon was that of Aanon Gjeitsta. it was drawn by his old team of oxen, Dick and Spot. The fourth wagon was one of the two owned by Olav Thortvedt, brawn by the oxen, Buck and Bright, with Halvor Fendalstveidt Salverson driving. The fifth wagon was Tarjei Muhle's, drawn by his yoke of steers and driven by himself. The last vehicle was a "democrat" wagon drawn by the mule, Jerry, and driven

by the owner, Gunner Veum. In the sketch may be seen Tarjei Skrei driving the cattle with the help of 16 year old Joraand Thortvedt who was his bare-footed assistant during the entire journey. The cattle were determined to turn homeward to Houston county the first day and it became necessary for the women and children of the party to get out of the wagons and help herd them along. But it was a task in which all joined heartily, forgetful of the rigors of the rough trail, its boulders and brambles. Ahead was a glorious new country filled with promise and the pioneers were willing to share in the hardships to achieve their goal. And aching feet

were forgotten and at the end of each day's journey there was food to eat and a place to sleep and dream of the events of the following day. Even after a hard day on the trail, the women had the food to prepare...



And here is Thone, wife of Olav Thortvedt, with her daughter, Signe, 7, lugging the mushkettle to the fire. This sketch represents camp for the night at North Prairie, near Rushford, Minn., the second day of the expedition. This point was reached after a particularly arduous day's journey over rocky, hilly country during which an axle on the lead wagon broke and was repaired by a blacksmith along the trail. In the background, Olav is unhitching Jim and Roudy, while Leif Levi comes running into the foreground to join Signe, who tugs at the skirts of her mother. The other wagons are just

pulling up. Often Tarjei Skrei would draw his fiddle out of the case after the party had eaten, and play familiar tunes, cheering up the weary party. There was story telling too and poring over such maps as were available, to determine the course of the next day's journey. And in the background, although repressed, were the fears that all early settlers had, of the danger of Indian attacks. And so guns were kept handy. When night fell the dismal howl of coyotes, echoed by the dogs in the party, was not disturbing enough to keep the weary travelers from their sleep. In the daytime there were diversions, such as occasional meetings with other traveling parties along the trail...

Next Sunday: The pioneers meet Indians and oxcart trains, have difficulties of various sorts, arrive in the Buffalo river country, pick land and begin to erect cabins.

Fargo Forum May 18, 1941

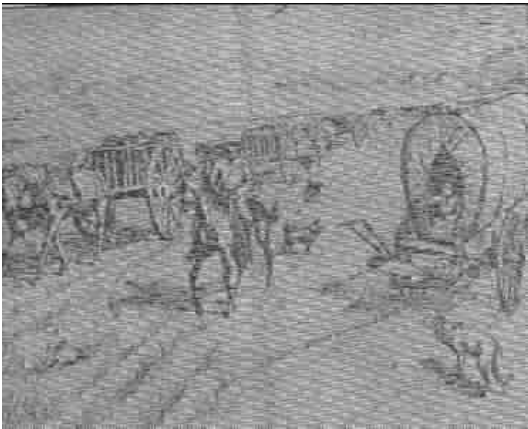
Settlers Reach Their Mecca On The “Finest Land in Minnesota”

What's Gone Before

Early experiences of prairie pioneers, particularly the colony led by Olav Thortvedt, which came to the Buffalo river near Moorhead and Glyndon from Houston county, Minnesota, in 1870, are recounted in these pen and ink sketches drawn by Orabel Thorvedt, Clay county artist and granddaughter of Olav Thortvedt.

Last Sunday the series told of the departure of future Americans from their homes in Norway, of their development in their new homeland, the assembling of oxen and prairie schooners for a westward trek and the beginning of their arduous journey to the Buffalo.

Today's sketches picture experiences of the party along the trail. (Tarjei Muhle was the fiddler in the party, not Tarjei Skrei as stated last Sunday.)



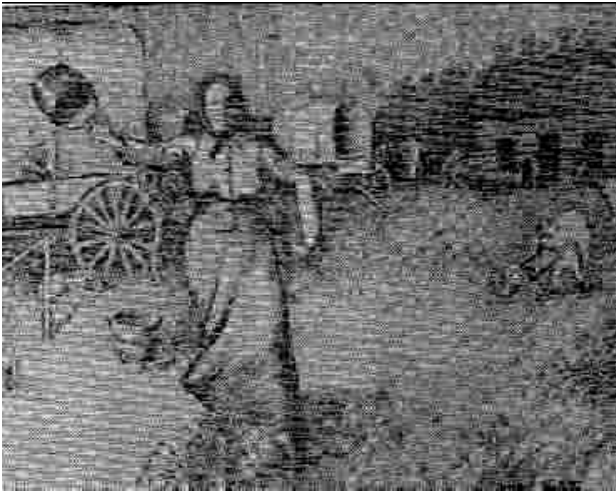
As the caravan crept farther and farther north, it began to meet trains of ox carts drawn by ponies, accompanied by half-breeds, who were transporting furs from the far north to the terminal at St. Cloud. Oxen and dogs in the party distrusted the smells and the strange sight of the Red River carts, swinging away and giving them a wide berth. That is Thone Thorvedt, 13, who is peering furtively from the back of her father's prairie schooner. Note the breaking plow athwart the rear end of the wagon and the dog, Major, sniffing the air suspiciously and watching the numerous curled-of-tail canines that swarmed around

the slow-moving cart train. During the journey the party met many more ox cart trains, some of them containing 90 to 100 carts loaded with buffalo hides, deer hides, bear, beaver, mink and muskrat pelts. Sometimes ponies, sometimes oxen drew the carts. The odor from the trains and the squeaking of the wooden axles in wooden hubs was something not easily forgotten. The carts were a simple affair with two clumsy and rather large wheels but were built so stoutly they easily carried weights of 1,500 pounds. One half-breed on a pony managed fix to six carts. With their long hair, buckskin suits and wide hats, the drivers were an odd looking lot. There were other strange people on the prairie, too, and an exciting moment came when the pioneers arrived at Alexandria...



After traveling in a wooded country for some time, the travelers encountered the beautiful sky blue lakes of Minnesota and were loathe to leave the wonder of this area. They continued on their way, and arrived one night at a well known campsite in Alexandria, Minn., and there they saw Indians, who they were told were "blanket" Indians. Although they had seen other Indians in Houston County, this was a different tribe and with memories of the massacre, the Norsemen could not help but feel alarm. But these seemed to be a rather

peaceful lot, in spite of which women in the caravan were nervous at the sight of the "wild savages." At the camp were a half dozen teepees and among the group one tall, rather old Indian wearing a red blanket. He was under the influence of liquor and was very talkative but neither he nor his band harmed the travelers. Alexandria, incidentally, was in those days the "last chance" supply center for pioneers heading for the Buffalo and Red River valleys. There they obtained flour, sugar, salt, other commodities and farm implements. The Thortvedt party stocked up, spending an entire day acquiring stoves, axes, plows, scythes, whetstones, two inch augers for building log cabins, utensils of many kinds, plus an extra supply of foodstuffs. Some acquaintances were met. Then the party was on its way again...



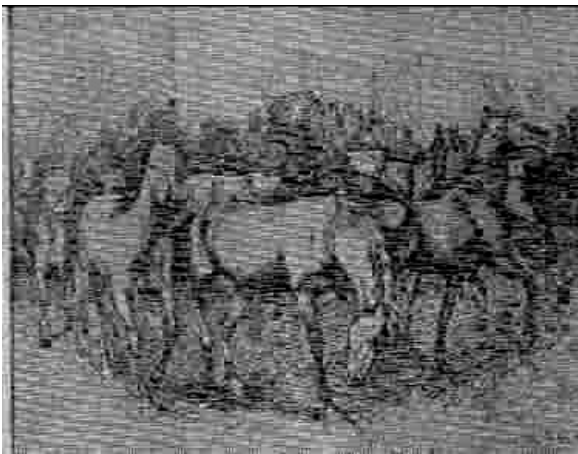
None of the pioneers will ever forget the troubles of Olav Thortvedt's wife Thone, when the party reached the site which was later to become known as the city of Moorhead. While she was engaged in cooking mush over the campfire, mosquitoes thrice invaded the kettle in large enough numbers to spoil the food. Thone finally became so angry she flung the kettle away, as the sketch shows, narrowly missing the head of a nearby grazing calf. The campsite was at a location where Mrs. George Sheffield's home now (*in 1941*) stands at 612 First Avenue North in Moorhead, where a stagecoach station in the form of a log building

had been erected by the Burbank company. Those old logs still exist and form an integral part of the pioneer log cabin now standing in Bowman park in Moorhead. The old Burbank station was built in 1860 by a man named Torgerson who resided there with his family until August, 1862, when a friendly brave warned him that an Indian uprising was brewing. He fled southward on the trail immediately with his wife and children and never returned. The uprising was the one that developed into the great Sioux massacre that started on the Upper Sioux agency, August 17, 1862, which had kept the Thortvedts in Houston County. In the sketch can be seen the Burbank stage station as it looked in that day. Once the object of an Indian attack, its logs were bullet-pocked. The next morning, somewhat refreshed after a night of somewhat fitful sleep, the party continued and soon met an acquaintance...



Not far north of the site of the future Moorhead the party encountered R. M. Probstfield, who had been met previously on the trail and who had told them they were traveling toward a wonderful country. Probstfield was indeed an early settler, having arrived and established his home a few miles north of Moorhead in March 1859, and for 12 years served as factor for the Hudson's Bay Company at its Georgetown post, 12 miles north of Moorhead. When the expedition arrived, they found Probstfield had a well-built log cabin, a stable and several other smaller buildings close to the Red River. His descendants still reside there, along US 75. Probstfield greeted the party jovially

and told them there were thousands of acres of land, still unsurveyed, from which they might pick their future homes. When one of the travelers offered to take over the cultivation of his corn, Probstfield offered to show Olav Thortvedt the Buffalo River country lying a few miles to the east. Thortvedt's horse, Jim, was hitched to Probstfield's buggy, and Thortvedt and Probstfield set out. Aanon Gunderson Gjeitsta put Probstfield's saddle on Veum's mule, Jerry, and they set out to explore. In the sketch this "discovery party" may be seen, with Probstfield gesturing with enthusiasm as he describes the land. When the party reached a particular bend in the river, Thortvedt was so impressed he asked that they stop to look. That point was later to become the Thortvedt home. Traveling down the river they later came to a slough section, populated by hundreds of wild ducks. Returning to the Probstfield field that evening, Thortvedt broke the news. He said he had found the finest land in Minnesota. The next day the caravan moved to the site...



The first night in their new home was discouraging for man as well as beast. With no adequate shelter they suffered severely from the stings of hordes of mosquitoes. The men built huge smudges to give relief to their families as well as the stock. The poor beasts milled around all the night long attempting to shake off their relentless enemies to little avail, as the sketch shows. The following day there was much skirmishing about as each family tried to decide what space it should occupy. The single men in the company said, "You people with families pick your ground first. We will find land as close by as we can." It was

not difficult to choose sites for there were thousands of acres of virgin prairie, free of stones and trees, except for the trees along the banks of the Buffalo. There was elm, oak, ash, box-elder and basswood trees, and chokecherry and plum, thorn apples and grapes, and a river teeming with fish. One of the first meals enjoyed by the settlers was catfish, described as being extremely fat and enjoyed by all. Olav Thortvedt was given a central location in the little colony for a very good reason. He owned the only grindstone. He unloaded the stone and set up his family's stove under a large stooping elm. Here also he set up his blacksmith bellows and placed a tree stump for the anvil. This was the family gathering place. In compliance with law, Olav Thortvedt first broke five acres of prairie. Then he built a hay rack and brought in a supply of wild hay. Next he cut logs and with the help of his neighbors built his family's permanent home...



Here is the first Buffalo river home of the Olav Thorvedt family. Olav's wife, Thone, may be seen carrying a pail of water up the hill from the river to the newly built cabin. Little Signe may be seen at play, running by her mother. To the left stands the important grindstone. The frame for the stone was made out of the fork of a tree, with a hand-hewn wooden trough to hold the water. Elm bark was placed on roof logs of the cabin. The prairie sod was cut with an axe into square chunks and placed on the rough side of the bark. Packed tight, this made a water-proof house. The building had a

small attic, a door in the center of the south wall and a full window on the west. There was a half window on the north wall. Hewed basswood boards were used in constructing a doubledeck bed. That it was a well-constructed building can be seen by the fact that it still stands on the Thortvedt farm. During the autumn, Thortvedt found a large set of elk horns on the prairie and bolted it on the projecting cabin roof ridge log on the west end. There it remained for a number of years, a fitting ornament for a home of those days. After Thorvedt finished the cabin he went to work on the stable, cutting elm logs and hauling them to the site with horses and oxen hitched together. During those days, Thortvedt's faithful wife, Thone, labored beside him diligently, although she said when they came that 10 years on the Buffalo river would be enough...

Next Sunday: Sketches of some of the prominent people of the colony, a view of a cabin interior, of supplies being transported by men on skis, of the birth of the first baby, a visit from a great personage, of the colony's first death.

Fargo Forum May 25, 1941

Pioneer Women Shared Courage of Their Menfolk

What's Gone Before

Trials and triumphs of pioneer families in 1870 are recounted in this series of pen and ink sketches by Orabel Thortvedt, Clay county artist, granddaughter of Olav Thortvedt who led a caravan of prairie schooners from Houston County, Minnesota, to the Buffalo river near Moorhead and Glyndon.

Previous sketches in the series pictures breaking of home ties in Norway, preparations for the westward trek, adventures along the oxcart trail, selection of land and beginning of the construction of cabins and other buildings. Today's group of illustrations tell of the efforts of the settlers to establish themselves, of their ways of getting food and mail, of the birth of the first baby, of a visit of a great man to one of the cabins and of the colony's first death and funeral.



Thone Saangdak Thortvedt (in the sketch above) was courageous, frank and charitable. She was widely known for her frequent gifts to needy families, usually a sheep or a bag of wool. She liked nothing better than to sit at her loom and weave cloth. In order to do that she also had to shear the sheep and spin the yarn. She knitted many garments and went into the fields with her husband and helped bind sheaves of grain. Whenever she had a moment of leisure, she would read. It was a big day for her when her only newspaper, published in Iowa, arrived from the Hudsons Bay post at Georgetown. The paper was called "Ved Arnen." On Sundays Thone would read from the old family Bible, while members of her family listened. When she died one of her neighbors said, "Now the kindest woman along the Buffalo river is dead." In this sketch Thone is shown in the finest garb that pioneer women of those days knew. Her hair was

parted in the middle as was the custom of the day. Her granddaughter, Orabel Thortvedt, has sketched several fine likenesses of this pioneer mother. None of the modern conveniences of today's kitchen were in her home...



Here you may see the double-deck bed where part of the Thortvedt family slept, the old kitchen stove, the spinning wheel, the only table, the stockings drying on a string behind the stove. Thone Thortvedt is seen carrying a hot dish from the stove to the table, where her husband, Olav Thortvedt sits, pulling away on his pipe. Little Thone, their daughter, stands behind him and at the right, another daughter, Signe, tugs at the arm of her brother, Leif Levi (later Orabel Thortvedt's father), urging him to come and play, but he is loathe to leave the warmth of the stove. Another cat has joined the family circle to take the place of Dvarius

Jillum. On the table may be seen a homemade candle casting its feeble beams about the cabin. The settlers had no candle forms so Thone tied twisted cotton rags onto a stick for

wicks and while they hung suspended between two chairs poured sheep tallow over them. As soon as one "pour" had hardened, a second was poured on, until the candles had the proper thickness. The settlers also used "grease" lamps for lighting, candles usually being reserved for special occasions such as Christmas. Christmas trees were not in use in those days and the pioneers usually "shot in" the festive day. One of the men would go outdoors, point his gun into the air and pull the trigger. The horses, cattle and sheep were given special rations while the families dined on the best food in their larders, read the Bible and sung hymns. There were many cold and stormy days...



Despite the weather, the men made excursions by turn to the Hudson's Bay post at Georgetown to bring mail and supplies. In the sketch may be seen Ola Midgarden setting out for the post. On his back he carries a bundle of furs, mink and muskrat, which he will exchange at the post for high-priced sugar, tobacco and other frontier luxuries. He is warmly clad in homespun clothes of wool, with a muskrat cap on his head. The skis, too, are homemade. They proved a popular and necessary method of travel during the winter months. Return of the man from the post was awaited eagerly. He often brought a letter from

the old home across the sea and at stated intervals the Norwegian publication, Ved Arnen, in which in those days was being published a popular serial, *Prairie's Hvide Hest* (The Prairie's White Horse). It was a romance read with avid interest by all that could read and listened to eagerly when read aloud. There were other important expeditions, too, particularly those from Buffalo river to Alexandria for other food supplies such as flour, coffee, matches, tobacco, and windows for the cabins, and to the land office to file claims. The trip to Alexandria took two weeks when a wagon and oxen were used. The return of such food expeditions was awaited joyfully and was followed by big bakings of bread and biscuits, much to the delight of the younger people. Life soon began to settle into routine along the river and there was talk of intimate events about to occur...



In this sketch may be seen the interior of the cabin of Tarje Skrei and his wife after the arrival of their son, Theodore, first white child to be born along the Buffalo. The date was December 15, 1870. Thone Thortvedt acted as midwife and can be seen in the sketch holding the baby, while his father, Tarjei Skrei, scrutinizes him with paternal interest. The mother, Gunhild Skrei, is the figure in the corner bed. There were no doctors in those days but the people were resourceful and met their problems with fortitude. This was the second child in the Skrei family, the other being a daughter, Signe, 4. Other children arrived as

the years passed. In 1940, several survivors and many descendants of the colony gathered near the old Thortvedt homestead and re-enacted the arrival of the pioneer party on the 70th anniversary. There was an improvised prairie schooner, horses, cows, chickens in a lath

crate and the children of the pioneers all dressed up in clothing reminiscent of early days. Many of the utensils and other articles possessed by the original party were displayed. The modern Buffalo river people closed the evening's celebration by dining on the same kind of food eaten by their forefathers on that day. It was prepared over a campfire. Many interesting events occurred during the early settlement days. Among them was the infrequent arrival of strangers ...



It was in April of 1871 that two fur-clad strangers in a cutter drawn by a chestnut mare arrived at the door of Olav Thortvedt's cabin, asking for food and lodging for the night. They were made welcome and their request quickly granted. After they had eaten they conversed with the family, and occasionally spoke to each other in French. Thortvedt brought in a huge armful of hay which he placed in one corner of the cabin. On it the men spread their buffalo robes and went to sleep. Leif Levi, 11, son of Olav, stared at the strangers with interest. One of them was James J. Hill, destined to

become known as the "Empire Builder" and builder and head of the Great Northern railway. Dreaming of the days when he might span the prairies with rails, he traversed much of the frontier by horse and buggy, looking for routes and sites. In 1912 there was a grain growers convention in Fargo with Hill a speaker. Leif Levi went to hear him. During his address he said, "In the spring of 1870, I stopped with a homesteader over on the Buffalo River." *(1870-1871 date discrepancy in the original)* It was then that the Thortvedts first realized who one of their guests had been. In 1870, one of the pioneering party, Aanon Gunderson Gjeitsta, had become alarmingly ill, suffering from a serious malady, making it difficult for his wife, also named Thone, and their four young sons. Others in the settlement helped out the sad wife, attending to various tasks the father could not undertake. As Aanon's illness became more acute, the neighbors took turns sitting up with the sick man. He died March 25, 1871...



Aanon Gunderson Gjeitsta is believed to have been the first white man to die along the Buffalo. He was laid to rest in a crude coffin constructed by his brother, Olav Thortvedt. It was made from wood taken from a wagon box. There was no preacher in the settlement. Olav took over the duty. In this sketch he may be seen reading the Lord's Prayer and leading the singing of a hymn, Her Modes Alle Vele (Here All Paths Meet). It was a grey, sleety day in March. Flood water in the Buffalo was rising rapidly and the settlers were worried about their stock. In the sketch, the mourners, beginning at the left, are Thone Thortvedt, attempting to

comfort her sister-in-law, Tone Veum Gjeitsta, whose two sons, Gunnar 11, and Gustav, 7,

are clinging to her. Olav Thortvedt is reading Scripture. Ola Midgarden is taking his turn at the spade, as was the custom; little Leif Levi Thortvedt, sad of face, is standing at the foot of the grave watching the clumps of earth fall on his uncle's coffin. The others are Tarjei Skrei, Tarjei Muhle, Gunhild Skrei and Halvor Fendalstveidt. Aanon was buried on the banks of the river. It was about this time that word came that more settlers were coming. A letter came from Olav Thorvedt's brother, Bendik Gunderson, that he had sold his Houston county farm and was coming. So was another of Olav's brothers, Ole Lee. Others were coming too ...

Next Sunday: About the arrival of more settlers, one of whom is to campaign for the erection of the colony's first church, pioneer women fighting prairie fires, experiences in a prairie blizzard, of a fire which destroyed the colony's largest cabin, of a gay wedding dance, the final sketch in the series.

Fargo Forum June 1, 1941

Pioneers Met Problems With Staunch Determination

What's Gone Before

How pioneer families fared in their efforts to found the Buffalo river settlement near Moorhead and Glyndon is recounted in this series of pen and ink sketches by Orabel Thortvedt, Clay county artist and granddaughter of the founder of the colony, Olav Thortvedt, who led a caravan of prairie schooners to the area from Houston County, Minnesota, in 1870.

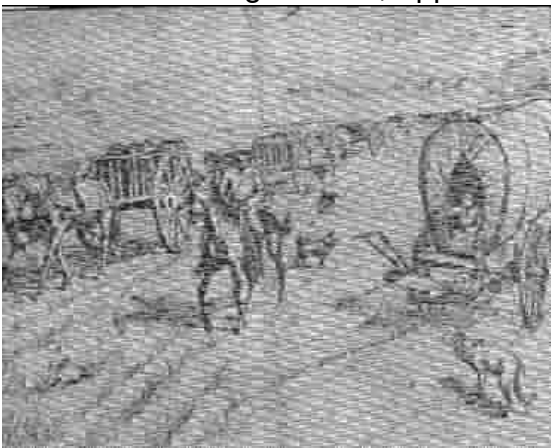
Previous sketches have described the departure of Norwegians from their native land, their trek to the Buffalo river, establishment of their homes, the first death and birth.

Today, in the last of the series, is pictures the arrival of more settlers, the early struggles with prairie fires and blizzards, the destruction of the largest log cabin in the colony, and the gay wedding of Leif Levi, son of Olav Thortvedt, and Ingebor Midgarden.



Bendik Gunderson, brother of Olav Thortvedt, had heard about the wonderful fishing in the Buffalo River and of the fertile soil along its banks. The original settlement was then a year old. Bendik sold his Houston county Minnesota farm, yoked his oxen to his "star" wagon, loaded up his family, and began the migration with other settlers in 1871. Bendik Gunderson was civic-minded and later he was to work for the first church in the new settlement. Bendik and his brother, Olav, were very fond of each other and shared a mutual love for horses. Young Leif Levi, 10, Olav's son, was enthusiastic about the coming of the Gundersons. It would give him an additional playmate in Bendik's son, Ovel, who had been his companion in Houston County. One day the Thortvedts received word that the Gundersons had reached Alexandria. The Buffalo river folk set out to meet them...

Somewhere along the trail, approximately 10 or 12 miles south of Moorhead, the parties met



in the late spring of 1871. In the sketch Bendik Gunderson may be seen raising his ox whip in greeting. His wife, Anne Bendik, waves from the wagon. Leif Levi Thortvedt, sitting in the wagon behind his father, Olav Thortvedt, is excited and happy over the prospect of again seeing his cousins, especially Ovel, his pal of Houston county days. In the Gunderson party were their other children, Gunder, Joraand, Andreas, Olaus and Andrew; "Gamle" Jordan Gjeitsta, the mother of Bendik Gunderson; Ben Lee, brother of Bendik Gunderson and Olav Thorvedt, and his wife Asshar, and their three children, Gustav, Julia, and Olaus. Also in the

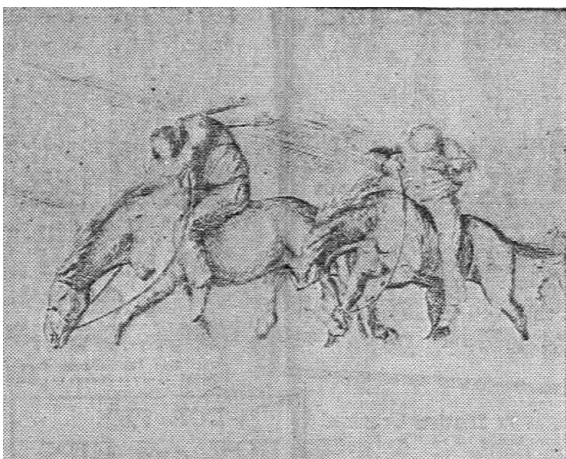
party were Vetli and Gunild Lisland and their children, Gonlaug, Guro, Aanon, Kjetil and Gunild. Another daughter, Signe, came with her husband, Gunnar Svenkeson, and their two daughters, Caroline and Gunild. Others of the travelers were Gunleik and Gonvor Spokeli, Talleid Nelson and wife, Sigri, and four single men, Gunder O. Lee, Ola Aanison Midgarden, Aani Breiland, and Tarjei Brevik. Gunnar and Ingebor Muhle and their children came a few

days later. The youngsters were Ola, Chester, little Ola and Kari, who settled in Moland township. Bendik Gunderson found upon his arrival that land reserved for him had been taken. But he was able to produce \$100 in currency and acquired the land. There was rejoicing. It was then possible for the brothers, Olav Thortvedt and Gunderson to live close to each other. Trials and tribulations came and went...



One day Thone, wife of Olav Thortvedt, saw huge volumes of dark smoke to the south. All the men were away for the day and fear filled her heart. She began worrying over the fate of Gunhild Skrei nearby. She was alone with her two small children, Signe and Theodore, first white child born in the colony. Gunhild's husband Tarjei's precious haystacks were in the path of the flames, with no firebreaks plowed around them. So Thone sent her daughter, "little" Thone, and her son Leif Levi, to the Skrei place. courageous Gunhild with the help of the Thortvedt children began the fight to save the haystacks and

cabin. The sketch shows Gunhild carrying pails of water while "little" Thone and Leif Levi, with the resourcefulness of pioneer children, fought the flames with wet sacks. "Little" Thone ran for a mop in the cabin. This proved to be very effective too and after a hard struggle, the trio won. Prairie fires were frequent as more and more settlers came, bringing their quota of pipe smokers and campfire builders. It was a virgin prairie and the rank grass, never cut, had grown thick and high. This thick mat of grass is no more to be found on the prairie and prairie fires are not common anymore. But in the early days when a fire started, driven by a high wind, the flames often were 20 feet high. Much time was spent by the settlers in plowing firebreaks, particularly around their buildings and hay stacks. The railroad arrived, bringing with it a motley assortment of strangers. But cheaper transportation costs and the fact that the long trail trips to Alexandria were over meant a good deal. The storms of winter proved terrible at times...



Few of the Buffalo River folk experienced a worse winter storm than that of 1873. It came in the early part of January. The day dawned beautifully and Gunder Lee and Ola Midgarden took the Olav Thortvedt horses, Jim and Roudy, and drove to the J. P. Farmer homestead to help thresh grain with the flail method. Tarjei Skrei also was in the party. In the afternoon the sky became leaden. Soon heavy snowflakes began to fall. The three men laid aside their flails and set off for home. It was none too soon. The temperature dropped fast and the wind came in from the north with biting ferocity, the icy blast all but taking the breath of the men. Their

eyebrows, eyelashes, and beards became stiff with icicles. They could not ride fast (see sketch) for Tarjei Skrei was on foot and they were afraid of losing him. It was not long before they lost the trail, but they kept on doggedly and finally recognized a familiar landmark, the Skrei "slua" or slough. They followed the timber and were home, a thankful group of men. Despite the ferocity of winter storms, there is no record of any Buffalo river folk losing their lives. They were alert to changes in the weather and frequently glanced skyward as they

went about their tasks. Their warm homespuns kept them comfortable and they struggled on. One of the most exciting events in the colony occurred December 17, 1899....



In 1874, Olav Thortvedt had found his small cabin inadequate and in that year built a new log house, large for those times. It was 26 by 23 feet, and 16 feet to the eaves. He felled the straightest and tallest trees. These he hewed, then engaged the four best timber-cutters in the settlement: Gunnar Svenkeson, Lars Svenkeson, Johan Danielson, and Olaus Kristoferson. They each had a corner of the house to build and there was keen competition. From the then booming town of Moorhead, Olav brought the rest of the materials, such as 26 windows with 12 panes each, six-inch floor boards, bricks, tin stove pipes, square-headed

nails, etc. Olav made one mistake. Instead of having the brick pipe reach from top to bottom, he had it extend only to the floor of the attic. From there on and down, tin pipes were installed. On the evening of December 16, 1899, Olav Thorvedt brought in some wood. It was used for fuel the morning of the 17th, and Ingebor Midgarden, who had become the wife of Leif Levi Thortvedt, had no difficulty in frying the pancakes to a delicious brown. The children caught the odor of the "pannekaker" and came downstairs. Alpha and Dora had pushed their bed and straw-filled mattress against the tin stove pipe, and blithely left it. The mattress caught fire. Goodwin, a lad in his teens, started up with a pail of water. Little Ole ran to the stable, bridled a bay morgan mare, Gamle Steady, and galloped to the Gundersons and Skreis for help. Neighbors came running on foot, by sleigh and on horseback. A brisk south wind sprang up and soon the house was an inferno. Burning shingles blew a mile across the fields to the Nikalsen homestead. Only a few heirlooms were saved. But there were happy events...



This was the wedding of Ingebor Midgarden, who left home and mother in Norway in 1866, and Leif Levi Thortvedt, who came to Buffalo river in 1870 from Houston County, Minnesota with his father, Olav Thortvedt. The marriage took place February 22, 1883, the sketch showing the wedding dance, in Olav Thortvedt's commodious two-story cabin. Old Buffalo river folk will easily recognize the participants, who, left to right, are Bendik Gunderson; Osmund Thomas, the best man, dancing with Signe Thortvedt Miller, now residing in Canada; Jorand Bendikson and Ole Midgarden; Leif Levi Thortvedt, the bridegroom, fondly swinging his bride, Ingebor;

Mitchell Daly, playing the flute (he later gained prominence as a nurseryman and created Moorhead's smallest beauty spot, little Daly park, which until 1940 was located at the junction of Third and Fourth streets on the south) [name missing in article] playing the violin; the late Mary Grover, the little girl standing alone; Ingeborg Muhle, holding her young daughter, Carrie, later Mrs. Tom Fitzgerald of Moorhead, and Thone Thortvedt, mother of Levi. For the guests there was an abundance of homemade ale and large quantities of food, with everybody having a good time. Every member of the settlement attended. Leif Levi and Ingebor Thortvedt reared a fine family of children. They lived to see the prairie country completely civilized and modernized and in their later years saw such miracles as airplanes. The well-loved couple died a few years ago.



The Fargo Forum is the daily newspaper for the Fargo-Moorhead area.

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