

Mary Margaret (Rekstad) Gibson
An Excerpt from "The Old Country to the Prairie"
June 13, 1981

In Tingelstad parish (a part of Brandbu parish) in the district of Hadeland lived a cottager named Ole Eriksen. In his lifetime he was variously called Solbjoreie, Dvergsteneie, or Almseie depending upon which farm he was associated with at the time or later on, Badstuen after the cottage, Badstua, in which he lived. He had been born the son of Erik Erikson in 1829 at Solbjoreie. On December 4, 1853 while living at Dvergsten, he married Johanne Hansdatter at Grinaker Church in Tingelstad. Johanne was born in 1832 the daughter of Hans Pederson, a husman at Dvergsten. (A husman was a second-rate hired man who lived in a small cottage on a large farm doing all the odd jobs and being paid in flour, shoes, or cloth.)

Eleven children were born to Ole and Johanne. Randi-1854, Erik-1859, Mary-1862, Hans-1864, Martia-1868, Oline-1870, Johan-1873, Ole-1875, Johanne-1879, and two who died too young to be recorded in the parish records or the census. Johan and Ole died while quite young of scarlet fever; Oline nearly died during the same epidemic. All the children went to school to learn reading and writing; however the girls were not taught arithmetic because it was considered unnecessary. Martia read very well and wrote as fast as she could think. There were no women teachers. The pastors taught the confirmation lessons. She was confirmed October 1, 1882 in a large class of perhaps 40 young men and women. The students stood up along the outside walls of the church and in the aisles. The pastor walked around and asked them questions. One of her fellow confirmands was Erick Anderson who later figured heavily in Martia's life.

When my grandmother, Martia, was little, someone gave her a rag doll. She was so excited because toys were unheard of and she took it with her everywhere. One of the neighbor boys grabbed the doll away from Martia and chopped off its head. Martia picked up the pieces and took them home to her father. He carefully sewed the doll back together and placed a big hunk of a homemade nail in the neck. The next time the boy stole her doll and chopped off its head, he broke a big piece out of his father's axe head. He really got the buttons whipped off his pants.

Martia remembered her sisters and brothers when they were little picking large berries called molte to sell. They were large yellow berries like raspberries only as large as crab apples.

When she was fifteen years old she was sent out to work at Tinglestad, a large farm, where she had the sole care of the cattle. She milked them, fed them, cleaned their stalls, and went with them to the saeter in the spring. She stayed there with them all summer making butter and cheese from their milk. Each week someone from the farm came up to carry back the produce.

Tingelstad had large barns with concrete mangers and Stalls and basements. During the winter manure was scraped into trapdoors where it collected in the basement. In the spring clay was hauled in, mixed with the manure, and the mixture was spread on the fields.

One summer she didn't go to the saeter but stayed on the farm to help cut grain with a curved grass hook. She cut twice as much (twelve measures) as the ordinary workers did.

Martia was satisfied working at Tingelstad. She liked her duties. She had a room of her own, she was paid relatively well, she looked forward to a whole week of festivities at Christmas, and she received ample clothing and shoes.

Shoes were provided by itinerant shoemakers who would come to the farm and work for two or three weeks at a time. The softer leather was used for the daughters of the farm and the cheaper leather used for the girls who worked there. The sympathetic shoemakers would spend extra time working the leather for the working girls so their shoes actually fit and wore better than those of the daughters.

During her Christmas break she and the other hired help would go to neighboring farms (a different one each night) Yulebokking and dance until morning. The evening ended by doing the morning milking.

Martia always sang at her work. Many times over, an old man on the farm would ask her to sing "The Husman's Visa" (a ballad about the lot of the husman). Then he, would say, "That's true every word." and then he would cry.

On the Tingelstad farm there was a welfare boy ut paa legd who lived in the barn. Indigent children were often placed on farms to work. The family was expected to feed and clothe them and provide clean lodging for them. This particular boy was not being treated well and Martia told the authorities. The family never understood why they had been investigated, but conditions improved for the boy after that.

In 1888 Martia's parents, Ole Eriksen Badstuen and Johanne Hansdatter emigrated from Norway to America. They took with them three of their daughters; Martia (20), Oline (18), and Johanne (9). Their son, Hans, had come to America four years before. He worked at the Dvergsten home in Watson, Minnesota and had earned enough money to send passage for his parents and two youngest sisters. (Mr. Dvergsten was Johanne's brother.)

Martia hadn't planned to go along; however, a relative, Gulbrand (Gilbert) Hilden of Watson sent passage, forty dollars, for her saying he couldn't imagine her being left alone in Norway. She was obligated to work for him to pay off the passage debt at a dollar a week. She really didn't care to go because she liked it in Norway and she knew she would have to work just as hard there as she had in Norway. She was certainly right. Hilden's were hard employers. Mrs. Hilden felt housework was beneath her since they could afford hired help so Martia cooked all the meals, did the housework, milked all the cows, and scrubbed all the clothes on a board for the Hilden's and their twelve children. (And Mrs. Hilden was Martia's first cousin.) In her spare time she was to spin. After the forty dollars was paid, Martia refused to work for less than two dollars a week and room and board. Mr. Hilden grudgingly paid it when she threatened to quit and get a job at the Riverside Hotel. Her sister, Johanne, was working there already as a housemaid. After the Hilden's built a new house, they hired an extra girl.

The passage from Christiania to New York City took only three weeks. They traveled by steamboat in which cattle had been hauled the year before. They brought their own food; dried meat, sausage, cheese, flatbrod -in a small round topped trunk. (The round topped trunks were preferred because others could not be stacked on top, thus

one had easier access to one's belongings.) Food was provided on the boat but they used only the potatoes.

The entire family was seasick most of the way over except for Ole himself. He found a card playing buddy in Erick Anderson (*Rekstad*) who was traveling alone and was also bound for Watson, Minnesota. Erick had a bottle of whiskey with him which ensured his friendship with Ole Erikson.

Becoming new Americans meant deciding on a new name for the immigrants. Ole and Johanne took the name of Alm and Erick called himself *Rekstad* after the farm in Norway.

The trip from New York City to Watson, Minnesota by train was apparently accomplished without incident.