

From Singsås to America

**The migration from Singsås, Norway,
to the Upper Midwest, 1850-1905**



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Preface

"My own name on a message board on the internet!" The inspiration for this thesis project started with me sitting at home surfing the internet searching for an old internet article concerning me, when I suddenly discovered a message board bulletin posted by an American searching for ancestors of a person who had exactly the same name as I do. It did not take long to decide to send this person an e-mail to check if this identical name was purely coincidental, or if I was related to him. The man's name was Jim Winsness, and he was searching for information about an ancestor who had emigrated from Norway to The US 1905. After a few e-mails back and forth across the Atlantic, he actually proved to be my distant cousin. A short while later he came to Norway to visit his roots in a rural district called Singsås, which is about an hour's drive south of Trondheim, and my "hometown". I picked him up at the airport and drove him up there. He proved to be an amazing guy, and like many older Americans, he was very interested in genealogy and family history.

This all rekindled my interest in genealogy. Earlier I had created some family trees of my own ancestors, and done some reading about them in some books that my grandparents had in their homes. Now this interest in history, and family history in particular, was revitalized.

During this same period, I took some American Civilization courses at the University of Trondheim (NTNU), held by Associate Professor David Mauk, an American who possessed great knowledge about American politics and culture. He became a great inspiration, and really turned a slight interest in the US and everything that is American in to a big one. David offered a course in American Ethnic and Immigration History, and with my renewed interest for this subject; it was natural for me to follow that course.

During this time, I was still corresponding with my relative in the US, Jim Winsness. He was working with the genealogy of immigrants who had migrated from Singsås to America, tracing their descendants in the US. His e-mails and enthusiasm was a great inspiration to me.

All this increased my urge to find out more about my own ancestors, and whether any of them had emigrated from Norway to the US. I found that several of them had, and this knowledge has lead to writing this thesis.

1 Introduction

This thesis focuses on migrants that traveled from Singsås, Norway to America. The focus is on the people emigrating between 1850 and 1905, with a special emphasis on the fifteen persons that first colonized Hendricks, Minnesota¹, and the persons who traveled from Singsås in the consequent years. The fifteen persons who first colonized Hendricks all emigrated from Singsås between 1867 and 1872, through a chain migration process involving Trondheim, Great Britain, Canada, and different communities in the US, including Hesper and Waterloo Ridge, Iowa, and Houston County, Minnesota, eventually reaching Hendricks, Minnesota on July 14, 1873². People who came later followed a similar path, with some exceptions as regards to their travel routes, and some of them settled in Hendricks while others used Hendricks as a stepping-stone to move and settle further west.

Descendants of the emigrants who left Singsås between 1850 and 1905 now live throughout the United States, but many still live in the rural Upper Midwest, where the majority of their ancestors eventually settled after they arrived in the country more than one hundred years ago.

Singsås is a small rural district located in the Gauldalen valley in Sør-Trøndelag, Norway. Singsås is still a rural area with vast unpopulated areas, and has even up to the present, remained mainly economically dependent on agriculture and agricultural products. The population is not huge, staying around 1,600 until the merger with neighboring districts Støren, Budal and Soknedal December 30, 1963.³ During the twentieth century, the lumber industry became more important, and alternative industries like home carpentry, transportation firms and making of traditional food (like “*lefse*”) have broadened the perspective as regards to people’s ability to make a living. The river has also become more important in a somewhat different way than it was during earlier times. Salmon rights are sold at high prices, providing people with an additional income. The road and the railway that run through the valley have been important transportation routes since the nineteenth century, replacing older paths and treks across the mountain regions that surround Singsås.

¹ Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol 1 – Folk og samfunn* (Trondheim, 1966), page 579 **and** Sandro, Gustav O *The Immigrants’ Trek – A detailed History of the Lake Hendricks Colony in Brookings County, Dakota Territory, 1873-1881* (unknown), page 6

² Sandro, Gustav O *The Immigrants’ Trek*, page 17

³ Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol 1*, page 140-141

Hendricks, the most distinctive Singsås settlement in the US, is located in the southwestern part of Minnesota on the border with South Dakota. Hendricks is also mainly a rural area, and has, like Singsås, remained largely dependent on agriculture and agricultural products. Hendricks also has a relatively small population, and people still share names and backgrounds with people in Singsås, Norway.

Many studies have focused on Norwegians settling in the US, and how they behaved and blended in with the rest of the American population, exploring issues such as the development of an ethnic Norwegian-American culture, Americanization and assimilation. Hjalmar Holand did this as early as 1908 with *De Norske Settlementers Historie* and later Odd Lovoll has done the same in his work *The Promise Fulfilled*. This thesis' primary focuses are on the migrants' conditions, both socially and economically, in Norway before leaving, their reasons for leaving Norway and traveling to America, as well as the stages and experiences on their journey from Singsås to their settling in America. Of special interest are the reasons the migrants had for leaving their home community and roots in Singsås, why they chose New York or Quebec as the landing stage to explore the American continent, and how they chose their final destinations. The thesis will only briefly examine the conditions the migrants experienced after settling in America, because this is not one of the main focuses of this project.

During the last half of the nineteenth century, Norwegian agriculture underwent dramatic changes. Farms went from being self-sufficient entities to co-existing with the outside capitalist society, and started to produce more than they needed of the crops that paid the most when they were sold.⁴ At the same time as capitalist society caught up with the traditional self-sufficient farming culture in inland Norway, new machines and more efficient ways to farm the land contributed to the changes. Horses started to do work more efficiently than people had done before, and machines arrived to replace people in the fields. At the same time, there was a rapid increase in population, which coincided with the more efficient ways of farming the land. This all lead to many people being both out of jobs and land to farm, and seeing themselves being forced to find new ways of providing themselves and their families with a livelihood. This population increase and great change in Norwegian agriculture have both been named as important factors to the emigration from Norway to America. Early

⁴ Nerbøvik, Jostein *Norsk Historie 1860-1914* (Gjøvik, 2004), page 28

scholars, such as Norwegian historian Ingrid Semmingsen, even claims that Norway in the latter half of the nineteenth century was facing a demographic crisis, and that the population had become too large.⁵

Singsås was mainly a rural area, where economic and social status was strongly connected with landowning. A bigger farm provided its owner with a higher income, but also a higher social status. Many Norwegian historians, like Tore Pryser, puts Norwegian farmers in the latter half of the nineteenth century into three different groups; big farms (*storgård*), small farms (*småbruk*) and leased farms (*husmannsplasser*). Even though the number of big farms in Norway decreased between 1819 and 1870, from 10,400 to 8,000,⁶ the gap between the big farmers and the smaller ones increased, possibly because of more trade with surrounding areas and urban centers. Singsås, like other districts throughout Norway, had farms of all sizes. While some could acquire hired hands doing the hard work, some had to work on another farm in addition to hard work on their own farm to make ends meet. Life in the nineteenth century was hard for many, and for some every day was a battle to feed themselves and their families.

The population in Singsås increased during the last half of the nineteenth century. During the last part of the nineteenth century, population in Singsås increased from 1,272 in 1845 to 1,610 in 1900, which meant that a huge proportion of the population in Singsås emigrated between 1850 and 1905, and that puts Singsås among the Norwegian districts with the highest relative rate of emigration.⁷ During this period of time 647 persons left Singsås to travel to America, which illustrates that if people had stayed the increase in population would have been much more dramatic. However, even though population increased during this period, Singsås still was a scarcely populated district with vast areas that were virtually unpopulated. Whether Singsås was facing such a demographic crisis will be dealt with in the next chapter, exploring reasons people had for leaving Singsås to start a new life in America.

During the last half of the nineteenth century, Singsås was affected by the changes in Norwegian agriculture and society. Some new ways of making a living emerged, and some started working as teachers or merchants. Still most people were involved in agriculture in

⁵ Semmingsen, Ingrid *Norway to America – A History of the Migration* (Minnesota, 2003), page 100

⁶ Pryser, Tore *Norsk Historie 1814-1860* (Gjøvik, 2006), page 76

⁷ Nerbøvik, Jostein *Norsk Historie 1860-1914*, page 25

one way or another, even though some got other jobs on the side to supplement their income from the land.

The social structure in Norway was another reason for people to emigrate. Though the country, as opposed to many other European countries like Sweden and England, had no nobility except from a few farms,⁸ the social structure was still rigid compared to the New World in America. Some people lived on relatively huge farms and had a lot of land and goods, while others lived on rented land as cotters (*husmenn*) and struggled every day to feed themselves and their families. These cotters (*husmenn*) did not have much influence on society and its development, neither in local nor in national government. This division of society led to much frustration for the ones that struggled, and many became disillusioned or just jealous of the ones who possessed richer and bigger farms than themselves

The people who migrated from Singsås to America settled almost exclusively in rural agricultural areas, which have many similarities with their native Singsås. They were peasants when they lived in Norway, and the majority wanted to continue farming the land when they reached America. This puts the emigration from Singsås in the context of other rural-to-rural migration from Norway to America, as documented by historians like David C Mauk.⁹ Mauk goes on to describe how a remarkable feature of this rural-to-rural migration and remigration was that people moved along a “stepping-stone” of older settlements. People that came to America traveled to people from their home district that they knew, and stayed there for a period to get used to the new life in America or to earn money to travel further west. Then they went further west, sometimes stopping in other settlements that contained people they knew. Eventually they settled further west, typically in Minnesota or the Dakotas, wherever they could get a piece of land.

People from Singsås, settling almost exclusively in rural areas, seem to fit into this migration theory precisely. They came from a rural area, where landowning and farming the land had been the stable way of living for centuries. Many of them also knew other crafts, such as carpentry, knitting or timberwork, but in Norway, these crafts were usually practiced in addition to working on your own farm. It does seem like the emigrants from Singsås were facing a tough decision when they decided to leave, and this might have affected their

⁸ Pryser, *Tore Norsk Historie 1814-1860*, page 19-20

⁹ David C. Mauk, “*Scandinavians*” in Barkan, Elliott Robert, Ed., *A Nation of Peoples* (Connecticut, 1999), page 468

decisions of settling primarily in rural areas. On the one hand farming was all they knew, but settling in a similar rural community as the one they left could also be seen as an attempt to remember and preserve the memory of their home and native district in Norway. Some of the people from Singsås traveled together and settled in Hendricks, Minnesota. Many of the ones that followed later came to Hendricks as well, some of them staying while others used it as a stepping-stone to move further west to get an own piece of land to farm.

This way of transplanting whole communities has been described by many historians, among them Jon Gjerde. A central issue in this “transplantation” is the fact that it is not only people with similar ethnic and geographical background that form a new community in the US, but that they also seem to re-create institutions similar to those in the old country. Such institutions could be schools, churches, bygdelags or dairy organizations. This transplantation seems to be relevant to the people emigrating from Singsås. Immigrants who came to Hendricks started their own school and built a church. Even today, two Singsås Lutheran Churches stand as witnesses of this transplantation. Later it developed through bygdelags and Seventeenth of May celebrations.

The reasons for this transplantation may be vastly different. Primarily, the people from Singsås seem to have stuck together to create an own community, with people speaking the same language and having a similar cultural and ethnic background. They all knew each other, and their names and families were familiar to all of them. As Norwegians in the nineteenth century in general, and people from rural areas in particular, lacked knowledge of foreign languages, this could also be a factor. Starting a new life in a new country is hard enough, and language problems make it even harder. Facing such problems, one solution is to create a community with your old friends and relatives, in which you understand the language, share the same cultural and ethical values and can relate to each other’s problems and joys. Immigrants from Singsås, like many other Norwegian-Americans, seem to have a need to relate to the old country and bring well-known institutions with them to America to make life in the new country easier.

According to some scholars, such as David C Mauk, people who “*faced the harshest socioeconomic reality tended to turn to pietistic forms of Lutheranism...*”¹⁰ Was this true of the people emigrating from Singsås? Was it true when they lived in Singsås? Did it change

¹⁰ David C. Mauk, *Scandinavians*, page 468

when they came to America? At first sight it does seem like some traits, like pietistic Lutheranism, reinforced themselves after the emigrants arrived in America. Singsås was not too pietistic during the nineteenth century, and dancing, drinking, and “loose behavior” were relatively common. There was of course both religious life and religious groups, and the church had a central place in people’s minds. However, people did not seem too strict about it, and the general person from Singsås during the last half of the nineteenth century was not too pietistic.

My hypothesis before starting to look in to these migrants’ lives, was that they left because they had no land to farm and that they went to America because everyone else went there and that there was a kind of “America Fever” in Norway at the time. Several factors to support such a contention. Partly, I assumed that the migrants were mainly people that did not stand to inherit any land to farm, i.e. that they were younger sons or daughters of farmers, as Norway in the nineteenth century had an inheritance system that practiced impartible inheritance among farmers. The most obvious reason was of course that large proportions of Norwegians traveled across the Atlantic during this period, and this must have made it easier for people to make the decision and leave. From Singsås alone almost 40% of the population traveled to America in the course of these years.

The content of “American Fever” at the time that these emigrants left Norway can also be supported by several factors. Since 1825, more than 50,000 persons had left Norway for America, and many of these had sent letters back home to the old country describing their new and improved lives in America. People who left Singsås sent letters back too, but many of these letters have a very realistic description of life in America. Descriptions of themselves as “*thinner*” and that “*I’m still wearing my Norwegian clothes*” shows the realistic way the migrants used when describing their new life in America.¹¹ More importantly, all these emigrants from Singsås left Norway between 1850 and 1905, during a period of intense Norwegian immigration to America. Between 1851 and 1905, 604,146 persons left Norway for America.¹² This made the journey to America easy to arrange for the emigrants, because many firms that sold journeys to America had established themselves in Norway at the time. In Trondheim, two firms, the Allan Line and Anchor Line, were competing to ship people to

¹¹ Rød, Per O et. al. *Singsåsboka Vol 1*, page 578

¹² Departementet for Sociale Saker *Norges Offisielle Statistikk VII. 25. Utvandringsstatistikk* (Kristiania, 1921), page 102

America, and agents from these two lines were involved in something that looks like a war to recruit passengers who left Trondheim in favor of their line.¹³

Sources

The information in this project has been pieced together from a wide range of sources, both primary and secondary. Sources include a letter from the emigrant Nils E Bogen, which is transcribed to the *Singsås Bygdebok*. This information, even though there is only one letter from the earliest emigrants, is very valuable to this thesis, because it is the information that is closest to the original sources, the emigrants themselves, hence it has not been influenced by interpretation, legend, exaggeration or glorification. The only task is then to interpret the information available, and apply it to this project wherever relevant.

Sources in Norway include *Singsås Bygdebok*; a four-volume set which includes both the genealogical history of the people in Singsås from about 1500 AD to the present, and the history of the people and the community. This four-volume set has provided very useful information about the immigrants' backgrounds, both regarding their family ties and their social and economical backgrounds. The genealogical information in *Singsås Bygdebok* is considered accurate, but the information on social structures and economic conditions might be influenced by the author's attitudes and thoughts on the subject. Hence, this has to be used carefully and with a critical approach. The *Bygdebok* contains valuable information though, especially when it gives information of the size of and conditions on the different farms, and when it gives the history of the building and introduction of the railway through Singsås in 1877. Church books for Singsås (and Haltdalen) on Microfilm at Riksarkivet which is at Dora in Trondheim, has provided extra information about religious life in Singsås at the time, and also contain information about marriages, births and who emigrated.

When studying the Norwegian background of the people from Singsås, works by Norwegian historians Tore Pryser and Jostein Nerbøvik, both experts on nineteenth century Norwegian history, have been used. An important additional reference has been Kjell Haarstad's *Bondenæring i støpeskjeen*, which is a description of the changes that happened in the rural

¹³ www.norwayheritage.com Article: *The Anchor Line and Allan Line agents, 1870 newspaper campaign* by Børge Solem, accessed March 21, 2007

district of Selbu during the nineteenth century. Selbu is an inland rural district very similar and close to Singsås, and the findings in Selbu are interesting when studying Singsås. Selbu is actually one of Singsås' neighboring districts. Ingrid Semmingsen's book *Norway to America* has been examined closely, and used as a reference, especially when studying the journey from Norway to America. In addition, works by Ostegren, Mauk and Lovoll have been used as reference.

As this project has been written and information has been gathered here in Norway, the access to sources in America has been limited. However, I have used extensive e-mail correspondence with several descendants of people from Singsås that migrated to the US, including, but not exclusively, descendants of the fifteen original emigrants that first settled in Hendricks, Minnesota. As many studies and books (historian Desmond King's *Making Americans*, writer O. E. Rolvaag's *Giants in the Earth*) before have focused on the lives and fates that the emigrants experienced after they settled in America, this project's main focus is to look into the reasons the emigrants had for leaving Norway, and their experiences on their journey from Singsås to Hendricks, Minnesota. With this in mind, the limited access to American sources can be seen both as a strength and a weakness to this thesis. On the one hand, the parts about Norway and the Norwegian backgrounds of the emigrants are not too influenced through the "glorified lenses" of Norwegian emigrants with romanticized views of their home country, or by the bitter memories of an emigrant driven away from his native country by hunger and poverty. However, useful information from American sources might not be included in this work.

There are many "amateur histories" describing the immigrants' first years in America, including their journey from the first settlements to Hendricks, Minnesota. A book, *The Immigrants' Trek*, describes this journey with wagon train from the first settlements in northeastern Iowa and southeastern Minnesota to Hendricks, made by the people who first settled Hendricks. It goes on to describe the first years of the colony, with people surviving and establishing a community and a society. Martin Ulvestad released his work *Normændene i Amerika – Deres Historie og Rekord - Volume 1* in 1907, describing early Norwegian settlements in America. Ulvestad published Volume 2 of his work in 1913, and this includes a list of the Norwegians in America that have been registered by Ulvestad, among them several immigrants from Singsås. Hjalmar Rued Holand published a similar work in 1908 with his *De Norske Settlementers Historie*. This includes a brief summary of Norwegian descendants in

America since the Viking Era, and contains a description of many Norwegian settlements in the Upper Midwest.

Online resources have been an integral part of this study, as many old immigration and emigration records have been made available online by national governments. These are especially Canadian and Norwegian records, and different foundations, most importantly the Norway Heritage, Castle Garden and Ellis Island Foundations. The Norwegian Digital Archives provide extensive information about everyone emigrating from Trondheim, which was the main port for leaving Norway for people traveling from Singsås to America, from 1867 until today. These records include the names and age of the emigrants; the price paid for the ticket, and for some the occupation when leaving Norway. The Digital Archives also include other statistics like population records and censuses. Canadian Archives provide records of ship arrivals and some passenger lists on microfilm, but they are not as extensive and easy to search as the Norwegian records. The Norway Heritage Foundation has gathered information from a variety of sources, including research papers, official records, ship manifests, records of ships leaving/arriving at ports, and published it on their website. This has been a valuable source of information to this thesis, especially when the emigrants' journey from Singsås to America was to be traced. Ellis Island and Castle Garden have online searchable indexes of passengers that traveled through these offices when they arrived in the US. Both of them contain several spelling errors when it comes to Norwegian names though, but the Ellis Island database is an excellent source of information. A descendant of an emigrant from Singsås mentioned earlier, Jim Winsness, has created a website dedicated to the people who settled in Hendricks, Minnesota. This has been a helpful resource when tracing the route of the wagon train these immigrants chose when they re-migrated from northeastern Iowa and southeastern Minnesota to the Minnesota/Dakota border. Digital sources have been important for tracing the migrants' journey from Singsås to America, both for finding the routes and stops along the way and to figure out what ships they were on.

The secondary sources have helped me form a picture of the general life of Norwegian immigrants in America, and have helped me putting the lives of the emigrants from Singsås, Norway into a broader picture of immigration from Norway to America. The challenge has been to put all these sources together to create an understanding of people that left Singsås, and the reasons that formed their decisions along the way. What made them leave? Why did

they choose America as their final destination? Did the migration itself change them in any way?

Structure

The second chapter deals with the immigrants' lives in Norway. Where did they come from? What were the conditions they were living under, both socially and economically? Why did they leave? In the second chapter, this study tries to evaluate the conditions and the backgrounds of these emigrants, and put them into the broader context of Norwegian migration to America in the same period. Of special interest has been the specific conditions that made these people leave. What made them different from other people living in Singsås at the time that stayed behind? When studying the community in Singsås Norwegian historians have been used as reference. To get a comparative view of the agricultural life of the period, Kjell Haarstad's *Bondenæringen i stopeskjeen* has been used, since this is a study of an inland rural community during the last part of the nineteenth century with many similarities to Singsås.

Chapter three focuses primarily on the journey from Singsås to America. The journey consisted of many stages, and was different for the emigrants depending on when they left Singsås. The first ones that left went by horse and wagon from Singsås to Kristiania or Trondheim, and then by boat to America. Later the route changed, and the emigrants traveled to Trondheim by wagon or by train, and from Trondheim boarded a ship that brought them to the east coast of Great Britain, stopping at some ports along the Norwegian coast. After they had arrived in Great Britain, the emigrants went by rail across the country, and then by boat from Glasgow or Liverpool to Quebec, Canada. There are different sections in the chapter for each part of the journey, continually evaluating the choices for the various routes made by the emigrants. An interesting question is whether this journey changed the emigrants in any way. Did it reinforce their feeling of togetherness and bond with each other? These questions and other aspects of the journey will be dealt with in the third chapter.

Chapter four describes the route from Quebec or New York and inland America. This chapter includes theories on chain migration from both Jon Gjerde and Robert Ostegren, and tries to

see these emigrants' migration in connection with other similar experiences around the same time and put it in a wider context of migration made by other Norwegian emigrants to the US. Chapter three also looks into the conditions and lives that the immigrants faced in the US, and tries to evaluate whether this contributed when they selected their final destination in the US. This chapter also includes work by Holand and Ulvestad, two pioneer Norwegian-American historians, who have written and recorded information about early Norwegian settlements in America. To acquire a good idea of the lives and specific challenges the immigrants faced, this chapter also includes some "amateur histories" written by people to describe the challenges and hardships the earliest immigrants from Singsås experienced after their arrival in the Upper Midwest.

2 Singsås – Living in and Leaving a Community

Singsås is a rural district in Gauldalen, a valley in Sør-Trøndelag, in the central part of Norway. The biggest town relatively close is Trondheim, which is about eighty kilometers north of Singsås. During the nineteenth century, people started leaving Singsås for America. Why did they leave? What were the factors that made these people give up their lives in Singsås and travel into what to them must have been a relatively unknown outside world?

People had been leaving Singsås before people started leaving for America. Many had decided to travel other places to create lives for themselves, in most early cases, to more and more northern parts of Norway. According to an old tale, the oldest known emigration from Singsås took place around the year 1450, however, and involved two brothers who left Singsås to settle in a district called Vingelen south of Singsås. During the eighteenth century, the trend of moving north began when several families from Singsås left for Nord-Trøndelag. In 1825 seven persons from Singsås departed for Målselv, which is a rural district in the far north of Norway. During the last couple of years many more followed, and the migration to the Arctic north continued until 1879, totaling 31 persons who left Singsås for Målselv.¹⁴ Thus a minority in the community joined the exodus to Norway's best known "internal America", newly cleared farm land acquired in the traditional Sami reindeer grazing territory of the country's northernmost region, which attracted settlers from many land-scarce valleys in central sections of the nation.¹⁵

This migration preceding the migration to America is relevant, and shows that people from Singsås both have a tradition for, and are not afraid of leaving their homes to create a new life some place else. However, the emigration to America surpassed this earlier migration significantly, and between 1850 and 1905, 647 persons left Singsås for America.¹⁶ This number might not be that significant in itself, but it was more than a third of the total population.

¹⁴ Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol 1*, page 561-562

¹⁵ Pryser, Tore *Norsk Historie 1814-1860* (Gjøvik, 2006), page 40-42

¹⁶ Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol 1*, page 565-572; Singsaas/Haltdalen Church Books on Microfilm **and** www.digitalarkivet.no Database showing emigrants leaving Norway, accessed between February 1 and May 10, 2007

This significant migration probably had many causes. According to some scholars like Ingrid Semmingsen, the population in Norway grew too quickly forcing many to leave and seek their fortune elsewhere. Due to reduced mortality and improved health and sanitary conditions, the Norwegian population was growing rapidly. This led to an unprecedented amount of people who grew up on the farms throughout rural districts in Norway, and Singsås was no exception. Many sons of farmers either had to establish leased farms (*husmannsplasser*) or were left landless. This, Semmingsen argues, led many to seek fortune elsewhere, and during this era that often meant going to America.¹⁷ Other scholars, like the Norwegian historian Kjell Haarstad, point to economic conditions in both Norway and America as the most important factor. When times in Norway were bad, migration to America peaked, and when times in Norway were good fewer people left for America. He also points to good times in America as a factor that induced emigration, especially in the 1880s and 90s.¹⁸ As Norwegian agriculture became more dependant on outside capitalist markets to sell their crops, the economy of people with agrarian occupations became much more vulnerable to economic fluctuations. This probably increased the impact of the economic fluctuations that occurred during the nineteenth century, and made them more influential on emigration numbers than they would have been had Norwegian farms still been predominantly self-sufficient entities.

Who were the people leaving Singsås? Did they have any similarities, or were they separate individuals without qualities in common? The different backgrounds of emigrants have been explored by Norwegian scholars, among them Kjell Haarstad. Haarstad studied the development of agriculture in Selbu, which is a neighboring district of Singsås, during the last half of the nineteenth century, also reflecting somewhat on migration from Selbu to America. His most significant finding, studying the emigration from Selbu, was that all but five out of the 468 people departing had agrarian occupations. That means that virtually everyone that left were farmers, or made their living in agricultural pursuits. He also found that families dominated among the emigrants during the 1860s and 70s, while single people dominated towards the end of the century.¹⁹ The backgrounds for the people from Singsås might have been similar or different, but were there any patterns? These questions are all dealt with and answered later in this chapter.

¹⁷ Semmingsen, Ingrid *Norway to America – A History of the Migration* (Minnesota, 2003), page 100-104

¹⁸ Haarstad, Kjell *Bondenæringen i støpeskjeen* (Sarpsborg, 1973), page 27-28

¹⁹ Haarstad, Kjell *Bondenæringen i støpeskjeen* (Sarpsborg, 1973), page 26-27

Another interesting perspective is the view of some American scholars, explicitly stated by Nancy Foner *From Ellis Island to New York*, where she argues that an immigrant is “positively selected in terms of ambition, determination and willingness to work and take risks.” She goes on to argue that immigrants to the US are neither the “best of the best” nor the “worst of the worst”, because the best had no reason to leave and the worst lacked the ability to leave.²⁰ This is a view shared by Norwegian historian Nils Olav Østrem, who wrote: “the individuals who left were never among the poorest in the so-called poor country (Norway)”.²¹ This is a very interesting perspective, and is interesting to apply to emigrants from Singsås. Even though the qualities stated by Foner might be somewhat difficult to measure, it is easier to determine whether the people who left were the best of the best, or the worst of the worst. When used in this project, the terms “best of the best” and “worst of the worst” are discussed and related to economic status and the ownership of land.

What were the reasons that people had for leaving Singsås? Was the population growing too fast during this period, forcing people to leave? Were economic conditions too hard for people to make a living, and were they facing better conditions in America? These questions have all intrigued scholars the last century, and many have tried to answer them. This chapter tries to answer what made people leave Singsås, and tries to reveal which reasons for leaving that applied to the people that left Singsås.

Population

Throughout the nineteenth century the population increase in Norway was exceptional. In the 1801 national census 883,603 persons were registered as inhabitants of Norway, and in 1875 this had more than doubled to 1,806,424. The population continued to grow, and by 1920 Norway had more than 2.6 million inhabitants, more than tripling the population in 1801. This shows a very considerable increase in population, and if we take into consideration that between 1865 and 1920 more than 750,000 people left for America, one gets an idea of the dramatic increase in population that occurred during this period.²²

²⁰ Foner, Nancy *From Ellis Island to JFK – New York’s Two Great Waves of Immigration* (New York, 2000), page 14-15

²¹ Østrem, Nils Olav *Myten om Amerika in Daatland and Aarek, Ed., Migrasjon som kultur – Artikkelsamling* (Rogaland, 2003), page 46

²² Pryser, Tore *Norsk Historie 1814-1860* (Gjøvik, 2006), page 30; Nerbøvik, Jostein *Norsk Historie 1860-1914* (Gjøvik, 2004), page 21

Several factors contributed to the population growth in the nineteenth century. The smallpox vaccine became mandatory in 1810, and at the same time, people got more knowledge of important sanitary precautions to prevent illness. Smallpox had led to many deaths, especially children, and preventing this was an integral part of the forthcoming population increase in Norway. The smallpox vaccine was the most important medical contribution, and there was little resistance against the vaccine even though it was not at all without danger.

The number of doctors increased during the nineteenth century, but it is not proven that it had an important influence on the mortality rate. It does seem, however, that more doctors and better health care contributed to making people more aware of sanitary conditions and other precautions that could prevent illness. During the nineteenth century, people also started eating healthier food. Norway, like the rest of Europe, adapted to the outside society at a rate much faster than before, and a part of this was due to importing agricultural goods from foreign countries. This led to people having a much more varied and balanced diet. The most important factor during the nineteenth century was the introduction of the potato. Growing potatoes meant that more food could be produced in the fields, and this led to more food and a more stable diet for the people. Potatoes were also used as food for cattle, and this increased the ability to grow crops and produce meat.²³

Singsås, like rest of Norway, experienced a significant increase in population during this period. As can be read from the table below, population increased from 875 persons in 1801 to 1,610 by the turn of the century. This means that during this period population in Singås almost doubled, which is a record of a remarkable growth. In the period between 1850 and 1905 647 persons left Singås for America, illustrating that emigration from Singås proportionally was amongst the highest from any district in Norway.

Population in Singås:²⁴

Year	Population
1801	875
1815	946

²³ Pryser, Tore *Norsk Historie 1814-1860*, page 36-39

²⁴ Based on numbers in: Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol 1*, page 12

1825	1048
1835	1185
1845	1272
1855	1342
1865	1505
1875	1744
1891	1553
1900	1610

This table shows a stable increase in the population throughout the nineteenth century. Even though there was an increase in population, Singsås was not a crowded place by the end of the century. There were still huge areas virtually uninhabited, and even though many of these areas were mountain regions, there was still plenty of land available. The main problem was that the soil that was best suited for farming was taken, and people who were hungry for land that was easy to farm had nowhere to go.²⁵



This map shows contemporary Singsås, with its population living down in the valley just as in the nineteenth century. You see the railway following the same track as in 1877, and the location of the most important farms. (from www.midtre.gausdal.kommune.no - with permission)

²⁵ Rød, Per O et. al. *Singsåsboka Vol 2 – Næringsliv, Handel, Samferdsel* (Trondheim, 1966), page 61-67

Agriculture

During the nineteenth century, Norwegian agriculture went through significant changes. As population increased, farms had to produce more goods. Despite the considerable growth in population, production in agriculture grew more than the population in this period. Farmers acquired more knowledge about how best to farm their land to get the best results, and the use of fertilizers, potatoes and new vegetables contributed to increased output. New machines and dairy organizations established themselves towards the end of the century, and made farmers able to produce more crops.²⁶

Many Norwegian historians, including Tore Pryser, put Norwegian farmers in the latter half of the nineteenth century into three different groups; big farm (*storgård*) owners, small farm (*småbruk*) owners and cotters (*husmenn*). During the nineteenth century the number of farms increased, and the size of each farm decreased. This has been shown by many Norwegian historians, among them Kjell Haarstad. He proved that the number of big farmers decreased during the nineteenth century in Selbu, and that the number of cotters increased until 1850 when it was at its peak. He also showed that this was true for other districts in the Sør-Trøndelag region (not including Singsås). However, evidence points to the likelihood that Haarstad's findings were true for Singsås as well. Singsås was an inland rural district, much like Selbu, and dependence on agriculture was widespread in both districts. Many cotters established themselves in Singsås during the first half of the nineteenth century, but by the turn of the century many of these leased farms had been left empty or been transformed into small farms.²⁷

Urbanization

Norway remained a predominantly rural country for a longer period than other European countries, like Great Britain, where urbanization happened earlier. When the changes in agriculture appeared there was a growing need for marketplaces to sell agricultural goods produced in the rural areas. At the same time, population grew, and people that had no land to farm or no livelihood in the rural areas moved to the cities. In 1875, one out of four

²⁶ Nerbøvik, Jostein *Norsk Historie 1860-1914* (Gjøvik, 2004), page 27-30

²⁷ Rød, Per O et. al. *Singsåsboka Vol 2*, page 61-67

Norwegians lived in a city or urban area, but by 1900, approximately every third Norwegian lived in urban areas or cities.²⁸

People from Singsås also moved to the city. This migration is worth mentioning as it was part of a pattern of migration to and from Singsås, but migration from Singsås to cities such as Trondheim was not as huge and important as the migration to America. Some moved to the city get jobs, while others moved to educate themselves as teachers or merchants. There are no definite tabulations of the total number of people that moved from Singsås to urban areas between 1850 and 1905, but the number was considerably smaller than the total that migrated to America. Between 1879 and 1890, 318 emigrants left Singsås to travel to America, but in the same period, only two persons are registered as moving to Trondheim.²⁹ These records may not be entirely correct, but they show that the number of people who left for the city was considerably lower than the number who went to America. This reinforces the notion that migrants from Singsås during this era were rural-to-rural migrants, and when seeking new places to live they sought rural districts similar to their own. This also raises the question whether people from Singsås were old-fashioned and opposed to change, or if they wanted to recreate in America the rural culture they and their ancestors had been living for centuries. Norwegian society was changing rapidly. The agricultural changes were the one thing that affected Singsås in the deepest, most profound way. The traditional self-sufficient farms were history, instead farmers had to relate to the outside world and produce crops they could sell in the markets. There were also many new ways of living that could be found as merchants, teachers, factory workers, railroad workers or doctors/nurses. It does not seem that these new occupations appealed to people from Singsås. The huge number of people who went to America can be seen as an old-fashioned group of people that traveled to another country to continue a lifestyle that was becoming old-fashioned in their native country. However, city life or learning new trades could also have been frightening and difficult for people, and when the opportunity to go to America arose many might have seized the moment and go to be able to continue a lifestyle that they knew and were familiar with.

²⁸ Nerbøvik, Jostein *Norsk Historie 1860-1914* (Gjøvik, 2004), page 33

²⁹ *Singsås Church Book 1879-1890* on Microfilm at Riksarkivet, Dora

Communication

Norway have been a nation of sea-farers since well before the Viking Era, but for inland districts like Singsås this was not too relevant as the 60 kilometers to the nearest ocean region effectively prevented people from Singsås from getting much experience with the sea. Since ancient times traveling across the mountain regions that surrounded Singsås had been done by foot. Trails went across the mountains and in the elevated areas avoided big rivers as well as bushy and wet parts of the valleys. Moreover, the people that lived in Singsås in ancient times were semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers, and the first proof of regular housing in the district is in a more elevated region of the district. As people became more and more settled agriculturalists, this changed. Improved farming methods meant that people started settling in the lower regions down in the valley, and new trails emerged. However, it was not until the last half of the nineteenth century that big changes in communications swept Norway, eventually catching up with Singsås as well. The two things that had the heaviest impact on Singsås were the development of the postal service and the railway.³⁰

The postal services developed rapidly during the last half of the 1800s, with America Letters being a big factor in the increase in postal shipments. In 1860, 3.3 million shipments were handled in Norway, but by 1880, this number had increased to 26.7 million.³¹ Postal services in Singsås improved rapidly during the same period. As late as 1850 there was not too much correspondence to carry around, so that it was carried around the district once a week. From 1858, the mail was carried around the district twice a week, and from 1869, mail was carried once a day, as it still is today.³² This effectively illustrates the rapid growth that took place in the postal service in Norway and in Singsås. There was an enormous growth in postal shipments, both due to growing correspondence between people and the increased need to co-exist with the rest of world.³³

The growth in the postal service was important to rural districts like Singsås in several ways. It gave the inhabitants a better and more updated view on what was going on in the world at the time, and gave people new impulses and ideas. Another important factor was that it made

³⁰ Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol 1*, page 78-79

³¹ Nerbøvik, Jostein *Norsk Historie 1860-1914* (Gjøvik, 2004), page 38

³² Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol 2 – Næringsliv, Handel, Samferdsel* (Trondheim, 1966), page 438-439

³³ Pryser, Tore *Norsk Historie 1814-1860* (Gjøvik, 2006), page 130

it possible to communicate with people that had left the district to seek fortune elsewhere. Through America letters, people could hear from relatives who had left for America, and could write back to them with updates from the old country. This must be considered a factor when emigration from Singsås is evaluated. Especially for the ones that left towards the end of the nineteenth century it was an important factor to hear the stories told by emigrants who had left and started new lives in America, and be sure that they had made the journey and that they were doing fine.

The introduction of the railway was a giant leap forward in communication, especially for the remote inland communities like Singsås. Norway got its first railway line between Oslo and Eidsvoll in 1854, and in the years that followed an extensive building of railway lines took place. In 1864, a line between Trondheim and Støren was opened. Støren is only twenty kilometers north of Singsås, on the way to Trondheim, and this meant that traveling to the nearest big city became much faster and easier. After a long period of hard work for many workers, on October 13, 1877 the railway line between Oslo and Trondheim, through Singsås, was finally opened, improving communications significantly. This meant an opportunity to travel to the city in a shorter amount of time, and much more comfortably than the older way of going by foot, on a wagon or horseback. This gave emigrants an easier way to leave Singsås, and a faster and safer way to start their journey to America.³⁴

Social Differences

In nineteenth century Norway, and especially in rural areas like Singsås, social status was strongly connected with landowning and the size of your farm. With big farms followed more earnings and money, but also a higher social status in the community. Even though the number of big farms in Norway decreased between 1819 and 1870, from 10,400 to 8,000,³⁵ the gap between the big farmers and the smaller ones increased, possibly because of more trade with surrounding areas and urban centers. Singsås, like other districts throughout Norway, had farms of all sizes. However, during the last half of the nineteenth century farms in Singsås, as in the rest of Norway, got smaller. Farms were divided into smaller entities, and some big farms leased some of their land to cotters.

³⁴ Rød, Per O et. al. *Singsåsboka Vol 2*, page 445-449

³⁵ Pryser, Tore *Norsk Historie 1814-1860* (Gjøvik, 2006), page 76

There have always been poor people in Singsås, and the nineteenth century was no exception. Singsås established its first Poverty Commission in 1790, intended to help poor people with necessities like food and clothing and to prevent begging which was considered a huge problem. Even though measures were taken, people still had to wander the district begging for food and clothes, and in 1847 the parish priest Holtermann wrote an appeal to the people of Singsås, to help poor people, stop begging and improve the conditions of the needy.

Describing the situation in Singsås, Holtermann wrote:

“With the situation we have had in Singsås, and the situation we have right now, the means of the Poverty Commission are not sufficient to help the poor people in their need...”³⁶

Reading this gives a good insight into the life of poor people in Singsås at the time, and it confirms that poverty was a considerable problem in Singsås during the nineteenth century.

In the 1880s, a new custom was introduced in Singsås. Outside the church after the Sunday mass the District Police Chief pronounced that one day during the next week the Poverty Commission would have a meeting, and the people that would be sent to foster care would be mentioned there. This was literally an auction, where poor people were auctioned off to the lowest bidder. This was a good opportunity for some people to acquire cheap labor and maybe get a little money for it as well.

There is no doubt that poverty and lack of food and money lead many people from Singsås to migrate. A family who lived on a leased farm (*husmannsplass*), where once evicted from their home. They had no cattle, but a few goats. These goats occasionally sneaked on to a neighboring big farm’s land and grazed. This was sufficient for the police being ordered to evict the poor family, and so they did. That was a brutal affair. The family was making dinner when the police arrived, but they didn’t have time to eat it. They had to get out immediately. Then their beds were destroyed, and the door was locked and sealed by the police. After this tragic episode the family was scattered, some of them maybe even victims of being auctioned off to someone, as referred to above. Several of the children of this poor family later migrated to America.³⁷ (This family was probably Ole Andersen Rønningsgrind and his wife Ingeborg Olsdatter Rønningsgrind and their three children Magnhild, Anders and Ole.) Families like

³⁶ Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol 1*, page 187-188

³⁷ Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol 1*, page 575-576

this one, living a hard life on small, leased farms were facing an extremely tough fight for survival, and many times emigration to America was an option to get a fresh start. One can only speculate about how they got the funds to pay for the tickets to travel to America. Even though their possessions were probably few and of little value, they most likely had to sell everything they owned to afford tickets. They might even have had to borrow some money from friends or relatives as well, just to afford the journey across the Atlantic.

What Made People Leave?

When considering the specific reasons people had for leaving one must consider both the push-factors, i.e. the factors that induced people to leave, and the pull-factors, i.e. the factors that made people choose America as the landing stage for their new lives.

The push-factors were many, and several have already been explored in this chapter. Population was rapidly increasing, making land available for farming hard to get. Singsås, being a rural area where farming and landowning were the most important factors in providing economic security and stability, experienced the consequences of this. Sons and daughters who did not stand to inherit a farm (big or small) faced a future as hired hands or servants if they were to make a living in Singsås. For some traveling to the city to start working there, or get an education and return could be an option, but this probably proved too much for most. They had their lives in farming and owning a piece of land, and that was what they knew. This lack of good land to farm in Singsås, and the availability of land in America were probably the most important push- and pull-factors for people in Singsås.

Poverty has been mentioned before, and this was also a factor for people leaving. The lack of land to farm, and the increasing number of people growing up on each farm lead many people into poverty, and the fact that public begging for food and clothes was considered a big problem in Singsås during the nineteenth century illustrates effectively that poverty was widespread and a growing problem. Some have claimed that tickets for America were too expensive for the poorest to buy them, but there does not seem to be evidence that poor people did not leave Singsås because ticket prices were too high. Actually, it was the other way around. Many poor people left Singsås, either buying the ticket themselves or being

sponsored by someone who had already left for America. They probably worked hard and saved themselves money for the ticket for a while before they left.

The introduction of the railway, from Støren to Trondheim in 1864, and then from Singsås in 1877 also was a big push-factor. The railway was not a reason to leave by itself, but it made the first part of the journey considerably easier. Singsås did experience increased emigration in the years after 1877, with the years 1878 through 1885 being the years with the heaviest emigration up to date, culminating in 1882 when 46 persons migrated from Singsås to America,³⁸ These years were also years when times in Norway were harder, and according to Kjell Haarstad, this coincided with better times in America to inspire more persons to emigrate to America.³⁹ Probably a combination of these factors made more people leave Singsås. Times in Norway were hard and work and land was hard to get. At the same time, traveling to America was easier, faster and more secure than ever before, inspiring people to make the journey.

Another factor that had come in to play 1880s and 1890s in addition to the railway and the changing times was the fact that people from Singsås had traveled to America and successfully settled and started new farms and new lives in the New World. The Norwegian postal service had many more letters to ship in this period, and many of these went to and from Singsås. Successful settlers had been writing back to their old homes and relatives, describing their new lives. There is no evidence that these descriptions were unrealistic and portrayed a life without worries. Some local evidence in fact supports the opposite, as when, for example Nils E Bogen describes himself and his wife in letter written to his parents and siblings back home as “*the same as we were when in Norway, only a little bit thinner.*”⁴⁰ This shows that they were not bragging about an easy life, but they did write home describing themselves as happy and satisfied with their new life. Especially after the successful colony in Hendricks, Minnesota was established in 1873, with people from Singsås and Støren, people learned from America letters traveling to America would make it possible for them to encounter well-known faces and people who understood their language, customs and values.⁴¹

³⁸ Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol 1, page 568*; Singsaas/Haltdalen Church Books on Microfilm; www.digitalarkivet.no Database showing emigrants leaving Norway, accessed between February 1 and May 10, 2007

³⁹ Haarstad, Kjell *Bondenæringen i støpeskjeen* (Sarpsborg, 1973), page 27-28

⁴⁰ Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol 1, page 578*

⁴¹ Sandro, Gustav O *The Immigrants' Trek – A detailed History of the Lake Hendricks Colony in Brookings County, Dakota Territory, 1873-1881* (unknown), page 36-39

Another factor that pulled people to America was the availability of land. Norwegians in general, and people from rural districts like Singsås in particular, were very interested in owning their own piece of land, and with the Homestead Act of 1862 acquiring land in America had become possible for virtually everyone who could get there and invest the effort to develop it agriculturally. Migrants from other parts of the world could come to America and if they would live on and improve their property they could claim land for free, and start a new life establishing a new farm with their family. This was a big difference from acquiring a new farm in Norway, where land usually had to be separated and bought from existing farms.⁴²

During the last half of the nineteenth century, companies that sold tickets to America established themselves in Norway. In Trondheim, there were two competing companies that sold these trips, the Allan Line and the Anchor Line.⁴³ They competed for customers, were eager to fill the steamboats with migrants, and both had agents that worked on the docks selling tickets to America to migrants that were coming in from the districts surrounding Trondheim. For the migrants this meant that acquiring a ticket, even though it was expensive for some, was relatively easy if they could scrape together the means to do it, and all they had to do was travel to the harbor and then the agents would take care of the rest. While emigrants in the 1850s, 60s and early 70s usually paid for tickets themselves, pre-paid tickets from relatives, friends or companies in the United States not infrequently solved that immediate economic problem for the ones that left later than the mid-1870s.⁴⁴

What Were the Most Important Reasons for Leaving?

Many factors made people leave Singsås to start a new life in America. When investigating reasons like this, one must never underestimate the individual reasons that could be very different. Some left with a broken heart, some were adventurous and some just did not make it in Norway. However, some patterns might be interesting.

⁴² Pryser, Tore *Norsk Historie 1814-1860*, page 59-61

⁴³ www.norwayheritage.com Solem, Børge *The Anchor Line and Allan Line agents, 1870 newspaper campaign* accessed March 25, 2007

⁴⁴ www.digitalarkivet.no *Database showing emigrants leaving Norway*, accessed between February 1 and May 10, 2007

When looking at migration from Singsås to America the most obvious pattern is the family connection. Family emigration has been viewed as an important factor of emigration from Norway to America in earlier studies as well. In his work *From Peasants to Farmers*, Jon Gjerde points to family migration being an important reason for that people chose to travel to America.⁴⁵ In some families, everyone stayed in Singsås, while other families experienced virtually all its members migrating to America. This is interesting and suggests that people from Singsås emphasized family values and that families stuck together and helped each other. If someone left it was a lot easier to follow, and many sent money to get family members to follow in their footsteps. There is no doubt that family migration from Singsås was very common, as both traditional families (husband, wife and children) and relatives (siblings, uncles, aunts) traveled to America, either together or with someone going first and the remaining following later. There are several examples of this, among them the Kirkvoldmo and Dybdalsbak families, who left Singsås in 1857. Both nuclear families were traveling man, wife and four children. Families such as these two continued to leave Singsås together in the 1870s, 80s and 90s. In 1880, the Digrehagen family with its five members traveled to America, while the Singaasmo family (husband, wife and five children) made the journey across the Atlantic in 1890. In 1895, the Tillermo family with its five members left Norway, showing that nuclear families were among the emigrants from Singsås throughout the period covered in this project. An example of relatives who traveled across the ocean on different times is the Troøiens. Nils Troøien left Singsås for America in 1871, while his sister and Nils' son Kornelius followed the same route the following year.⁴⁶ These examples show that family migration took different forms and was an important part of migration from Singsås, just as Gjerde has showed that it was from Balestrand.

The critical importance of family connection also makes people from Singsås a bit old-fashioned. Norwegian farms had for centuries been self-sufficient entities, with the family and family bonds as the major factor that bonded people together. Families had been living together and helped each other make a living for generations, with the family farm being the one important entity that united the family. These values had been an important part of Norwegian communities for centuries, and the old farming culture included families looking

⁴⁵ Gjerde, Jon *From Peasants to Farmers – The Migration from Balestrand, Norway, to the Upper Middle West* (New York, 1985), page 131-132

⁴⁶ www.digitalarkivet.no Database showing emigrants leaving Norway, accessed between February 1 and May 10, 2007

after each other and living together. With the changes in agriculture that happened towards the end of the nineteenth century, these values became less important, as farms had to become more oriented towards outside society. These new ways of farming and change in traditional values might have alienated some people and driven them to migrating to America with hopes and dreams of resisting these forces.

Another factor that seems to be important is the culture for, and need to, owning land. This is also mentioned as “*the Germanic Race’s want and need to own land*” in the Norwegian Emigration Statistics from 1921.⁴⁷ People from Singsås lived in a culture where landowning was the most important measure of economic success, and happiness was often attributed to having a piece of land and using it successfully providing food and clothes to yourself and for a man and his family. As shown earlier, migration from Singsås to urban areas in Norway was virtually non-existent during the nineteenth century, while emigration to America was relatively common. This could of course be explained with people having an adventurous spirit and Norwegians having a long tradition of migration, but the choice of America over closer, more accessible urban areas can only be explained with the accessibility of land in America and that people could get a farm and lead a rural lifestyle which they were used to in Norway.

The latter part of the nineteenth century was also a period of romantic nationalism in Norway, and famous writers like Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and Henrik Ibsen wrote books and plays about Norwegian beauty and hailed the life of Norwegian rural areas. Despite this nationalism sweeping Norway at the time, people emigrated in great numbers. One reason is probably that the life that was often hailed by Norwegian nationalists was the life on the farm on the countryside, and this life was hard to get in Norway during this period because of the scarcity of good tillable land. People wanted to continue their life on the farm, with Norwegian values and romanticized views of farm life. Hence, they migrated to America to preserve this way of life. This can also help explain the Norwegian-American’s strong interest in preserving their ethnic identity and institutions, as expressed by scholars such as Gjerde⁴⁸ Mauk⁴⁹.

⁴⁷ Departementet for Sociale Saker *Norges Offisielle Statistikk VII. 25. Utvandringsstatistikk* (Kristiania, 1921), page 83

⁴⁸ Gjerde, Jon *From Peasants to Farmers*, page 166-167

⁴⁹ David C. Mauk, *Scandinavians in Barkan*, Elliott Robert, Ed., *A Nation of Peoples* (Connecticut, 1999), page 468-469

Even though poverty and lack of sufficient income were important factors for many, the need to own land seem to be very important when one consider the fact that the people left to go to America. Even though there were social and economical problems in Norway at this time, the Norwegian economy was growing rapidly. Despite this, very few people left Singsås for the cities or to find jobs elsewhere in Norway during this period. People had been leaving for other areas in Norway, like Målselv and northern parts of Trøndelag, but these were also rural areas where people could continue farming. When people left, it seems, they left to start farms elsewhere, not to enter non-agrarian jobs or trades in the growing urban centers.

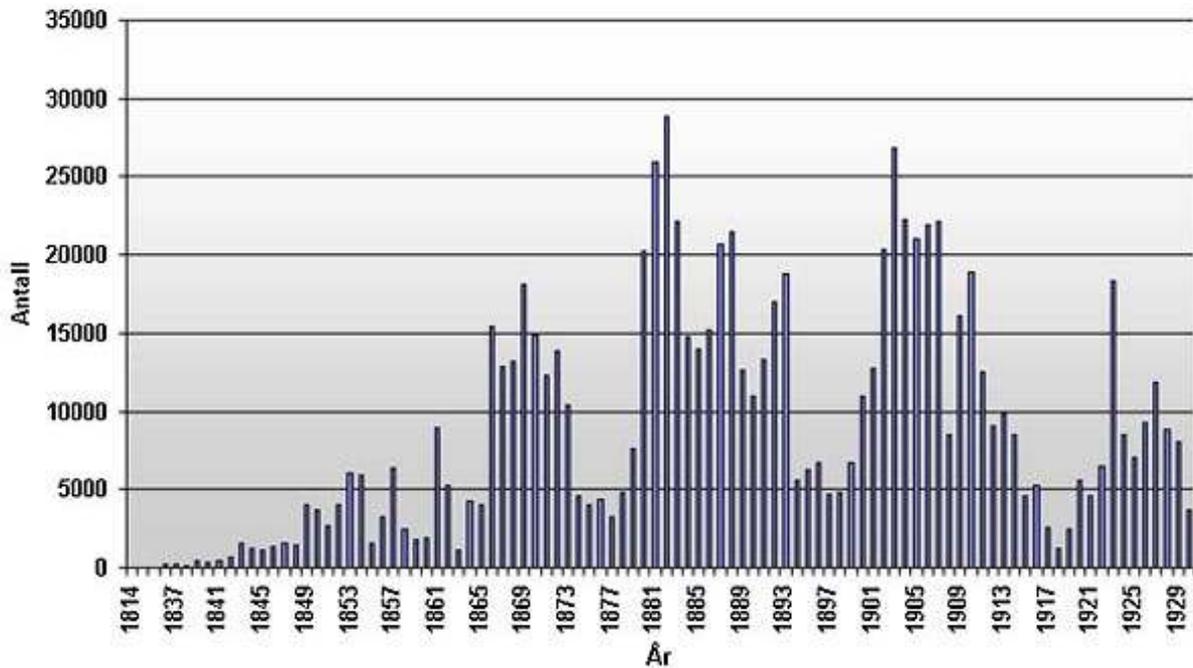
Semmingsen's notion of a "demographic crisis" does not seem to apply to Singsås.⁵⁰ If there was a crisis that crisis was that people did not have land to farm, and that other jobs were either hard to get or that people would not take them. People did have alternative places to go, but they chose to go to America to continue a way of life and an occupation that they knew and were comfortable with. The population did grow rapidly during the whole of the nineteenth century, but there were still vast areas that could be inhabited. Most of them were not immediately competitive farmland, but new areas in Singsås have been developed in to competitive farmland during the twentieth century.⁵¹

There is much more evidence to support Kjell Haarstad's argument that changing times in Norway and America were the most important factor supporting emigration from Norway to America. Looking at the statistics for emigration from Norway to America below, the different waves of emigration during this era becomes obvious.

⁵⁰ Semmingsen, Ingrid *Norway to America – A History of the Migration* (Minnesota, 2003), page 100-101

⁵¹ Rød, Per O et. al. *Singsåsboka Vol 2*, page 118-120

Number of emigrants from Norway to America 1814-1930⁵²



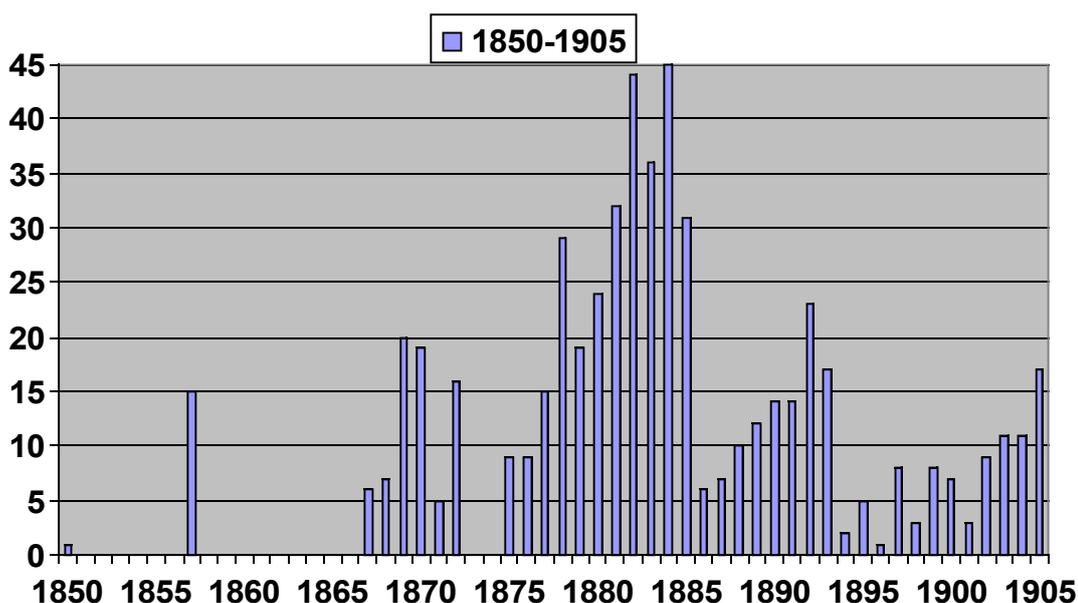
There was one first wave from 1866-1873, then there was one bigger wave that lasted from 1880 to 1893 and then there is another wave just after the turn of the century (1900-1910). Both Haarstad, as mentioned before, and other Norwegian historians like Tore Pryser⁵³ argue that these waves followed bad times in Norway. When there was a recession in Norway emigration peaked, and when times in Norway were good, emigration was reduced.

How does emigration from Singsås to America relate to these national tendencies? Did emigration from Singsås follow similar patterns, or were there differences? To find out this we can first look at the table showing emigration from Singsås to America below.

⁵² www.digitalarkivet.no Article: *Norwegian Emigration 1825-2000* accessed March 20, 2007

⁵³ Pryser, *Tore Norsk Historie 1814-1860*, page 56

Number of emigrants from Singsås to America 1850-1905⁵⁴



The similarities with the national tendencies are obvious. Emigration from Singsås has the same waves as the rest of the country, which supports that economic recessions in Norway contributed to emigration even from Singsås. The most striking difference from the numbers of total emigration from Norway is that emigration from Singsås started to peak again as early as 1877. As noted earlier, this must be seen in relation with the railway through Singsås being finished in 1877. The railway had in the years prior to this employed a great number of people (in October 1873 there were 184 workers working on the railway in Singsås alone), and at the peak there were 2,100 workers working on the railway between Støren and Røros (a distance of approximately 100 kilometers). These workers earned up to one specie dollar a day during summer, which was a good salary at the time. One specie dollar was the equivalent of approximately four Norwegian *kroner* (a somewhat under one US dollar).⁵⁵ This brought good financial times to the district, and people could make money to save for tickets to America. The railway had brought better financial times and provided jobs, but when it was finished, there were only a few jobs left on the stations and watching the lines. While there were fewer jobs, the railway provided an easier way to travel from Singsås to the world. Getting to the big cities like Trondheim and Christiania became easier and much more safe, and the journey to America got significantly easier to arrange.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Based on numbers in: Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol 1*, page 565-572; Singsaas/Haltdalen Church Books on Microfilm and www.digitalarkivet.no Database showing emigrants leaving Norway, accessed between February 1 and May 10, 2007

⁵⁵ Nerbøvik, Jostein *Norsk Historie 1860-1914* (Gjøvik, 2004), page 69

⁵⁶ Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol 2*, page 445

Who Were They?

There were many different reasons for leaving Singsås. Different individuals and families had different reasons for leaving, and some even had several reasons to quit their life in Singsås and travel to America to start a new life. What were the most important factors that induced people from Singsås to leave their native district and start the long, difficult journey to America? These questions also bring us back to Nancy Foner's notion that it was not the "best of the best" nor "the worst of the worst" that emigrated. Were the people from Singsås, as Foner claims, "*positively selected in terms of ambition, determination and willingness to work and take risks*"?

The typical emigrant from Singsås is hard to identify, and the diversity of emigrants from Singsås increased through the period covered in this project. However, emigrants who left during the first wave were somewhat similar. They were relatively young and seem to have been eager to start a new life with a new family in America. Most of them were married when they left, or got married during their first years in America. I have chosen to look at three individuals who migrated from Singsås to America during the first wave of emigration from Singsås (1867-1872), to try getting a better view of what their backgrounds and reasons for leaving were like.

Hans Pedersen Digre

Hans was born in Singsås 1842, on the farm Digre (Oppstu). The Digre farms are not of the oldest farms in Singsås, and hence neither of the biggest and most profitable since they had to plough their farm on less competitive farmland. The farms were probably first ploughed sometimes during the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, the Oppstu farm, where Hans was from, was actually one of the biggest farms in Singsås during the eighteenth century. But when Hans' grandfather Hans Inbrektsen Vinsnes, who was an extraordinary man in many ways, took over the farm in 1810 it started to decline. Hans' father Per was the last Digre to farm the land of Oppstu.

Hans was the third of ten children. Hans' father, Per, was not too interested in farming the land, he was more attracted by hunting, fishing and attending to his job as a teacher. Their mother, Maret Pedersdatter Kirkvoldmo, was not considered an exceptional woman, neither socially nor economically. In *Singsås Bygdebok*, she is partially blamed for the decline of the Oppstu farm. In the end, Maret left her husband Per, and went to America. Out of the ten children, six went to America. The farm was deserted in 1892.⁵⁷ Hans Digre did not have too bright a future in Singsås. The farm where he was from, once a rich and proud farm, was rapidly declining, and his prospects to farm new land and provide himself a living in Singsås were bad. Hans Pedersen Digre migrated to America in 1869,⁵⁸ and after settling in America he married Kari Pedersdatter Troøien in 1874, in Hendricks, Minnesota.⁵⁹

Hans is an excellent example of a child growing up on a declining farm, in a family that was torn apart because of financial ruin. He was probably not a wealthy man when he left Singsås, but had most likely saved money beforehand to get enough for his ticket across the Atlantic.

Ola Pedersen Troøien

Ola was born in Singsås 1838, on the farm Troøyen (Norstu). The Troøyen farms are not among the oldest farms in Singsås. The first one was probably built in the seventeenth century. The Troøyen farms were originally leased farms (*husmannsplasser*), belonging to the Bogen farms. During the nineteenth century they were regularly haunted by floodings, and according to records of 1879 “*only half of the land remains.*”⁶⁰

Ola was the fourth out of five siblings on the Norstu farm. Out of the five, three of them went to America. Ola, his older brother Nils Pedersen Troøien and Ola's younger sister Kari Pedersdatter Troøien all made the trip across the ocean. Ola had an illegitimate child, Anders Olsen Kjeldvold (born 1864), with Inbor Andersdatter Kjeldvold. Anders later took over the leased farm Høggåsbakkænn and lived there until his death. Ola and Inbor never married, and

⁵⁷ Rød, Per O et. al. *Singsåsboka Vol 3 – Gård og grend, ætt og folk* (Trondheim, 1966), page 181-183

⁵⁸ www.digitalarkivet.no Database showing emigrants leaving Norway, accessed between February 1 and May 10, 2007

⁵⁹ Sandro, Gustav O *The Immigrants' Trek – A detailed History of the Lake Hendricks Colony in Brookings County, Dakota Territory, 1873-1881* (unknown), page 28

⁶⁰ Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol 4 – Gård og grend, ætt og folk* (Trondheim, 1966), page 282

Inbor stayed in Norway all her life.⁶¹ Ola later married Guri Olsdatter Osøykjeld, and they migrated to America together in 1869.⁶²

Ola and his siblings from the leased farm Troøyen (Norstu) are excellent examples of several members of the same family leaving. Their oldest brother Ola stayed on the farm and became a cotter, just as his father before him, but for the other siblings the future in Singsås did not look that bright.⁶³ They had no land to inherit, and to continue the agrarian lifestyle their ancestors had led for centuries they had to go to a place where they could acquire good farm land. They, as many others, went to America

Gjartru Elevsdatter Busetgjerdet

Gjartru was born in Singsås 1847, on the farm Busetgjerdet. Busetgjerdet is a “new” farm; it was separated from one of the bigger Buset farms (Oppstu) as late as 1845, two years before Gjartru was born.

Gjartru’s parents, Elev Jonsen Busetgjerdet and Kersti Olsdatter Busetgjerdet, had many children, but only six grew up beyond childhood. Gjartru was the second of these six siblings. Gjartru’s youngest sister Kirsti (born 1856) also went to America, while the others stayed in Norway. Gjartru’s younger brother Jon had two illegitimate children, and the youngest of these, Ola, traveled to America. Jon, being the youngest son and thereby entitled to inherit the farm later took over the farm from their father Elev.⁶⁴ Growing up in Busetgjerdet, being a small farm, must have been hard. The children had to start doing work on the farm at an early age, and hours were probably long. Even though they were six siblings, there could not have been too much time for playing around. Everyone had to contribute if the family was going to have food on their plates.

Gjartru migrated to America in 1872 (together with Kari Pedersdatter Troøien and Kornelius Troøien),⁶⁵ and after her arrival in America, she immediately married Nils Pedersen Troøien.⁶⁶ It is unknown whether they were engaged before Nils went to America 1871, but since she

⁶¹ Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol 4*, page 282

⁶² www.digitalarkivet.no Database showing emigrants leaving Norway, accessed between February 1 and May 10, 2007

⁶³ Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol 4*, page 282

⁶⁴ Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol 4*, page 341-342

⁶⁵ www.digitalarkivet.no Database showing emigrants leaving Norway, accessed between February 1 and May 10, 2007

⁶⁶ Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol 1*, page 580

traveled together with his sister and his son this seems very probable. Gjartru is an example of a young woman growing up on a small farm, with little prospects but to find a good man to marry. Since she came from Busetgjerdet, Gjartru was not considered a good bride for sons from bigger farms, so her options in Singsås were probably limited. On the other hand, she could also have been hopelessly in love with the widower Nils P Troøien, and her choice to emigrate could have been motivated by her love for a man who had left the year before.

Personal Traits

Immigrants from Singsås had different personal traits, as did immigrants from other districts. Emigration from Singsås followed similar patterns from other parts of Norway in many ways. During the first wave, many family and relatives made the journey, and towards the end of the nineteenth century the share of singles that emigrated grew. However, nuclear families migrated throughout this period, making family migration an important factor during this entire era (1850-1905). The fact that the amount of singles was considerably higher around the turn of the century than it had been during the early years could be explained with the increase amount of pre-paid tickets. Around the turn of the century, tickets could be pre-paid by relatives or friends in America, or American companies could pay them if the emigrant offered to work for them for a certain period. This made tickets more accessible for everyone who wanted one, and if you wanted to go, there were several possibilities of getting the necessary funds. Families who left during the 1850s, 60s and 70s, however, probably sold everything they owned before they left, and even though they were cotters or relatively poor, the total content of a household probably provided them with sufficient funds for the journey.

This all brings us back to Foner's notion of immigrants as having "*ambition, determination and willingness to work and take risks.*" This is very difficult to measure, and is virtually impossible to get an exact evaluation of. Her other argument is easier to measure though; that the "best of the best" and the "worst of the worst" stayed while others left. By these expressions, it is assumed that she means people that were either high or low in the social and economical hierarchy. The fact that the "best of the best" stayed is true if one uses this way of measuring the best. No farmers who had big farms left Singsås to go to America, nor did people who were to inherit big farms. People who were highest in the economic and social hierarchy stayed with very few exceptions. These people probably stayed because they had no

reasons to leave. Their futures were bright and they did not face too much hardship by staying in Norway, usually taking over their family farm. For example, the Singsås farms Norstuen and Sørstuen were two of the biggest farm in Singsås when the farms were measured for tax reasons in 1866.⁶⁷ From these two households nobody traveled to America except from one illegitimate daughter of one of the daughters in Sørstuen.⁶⁸

However, there is strong evidence to contradict the argument that the persons who were lowest in the social and economical order stayed in Singsås. Many poor people or people that were chased from their farms left for America. One example is the before mentioned family that had to desert their farm due to eviction by the police. Another example of poor people leaving Singsås is the people from the leased farm Osøykjeld. Guri Olsdatter Troøien (born: Osøykjeld 1850) went to America 1869. She was brought up on the leased farm Osøykjeld, and she faced a hard life on this very small farm. Guri was the younger of two daughters. Guri's father died in 1852, and her mother married another man, Peder P Osøykjeld, in 1853. Guri had on half-brother and on half-sister as well. Guri's older sister Kari, her younger half-brother Per, her mother Enge Nilsdatter and Guri's stepfather traveled to America in 1881.⁶⁹ People living on the Osøykjeld farm had been struggling to make ends meet for generations, and when they got the opportunity the people who lived there migrated to America to start a new life.

Occupational Background

Emigrants from Singsås almost solely came from agrarian backgrounds. Either they had been brought up on and lived on a farm all their life, or they lived on a smaller farm or leased farm and worked other places in addition to working on their own farm. Unfortunately, it is not very easy to determine their occupations based on the sources available, partly because of insufficient records. In the official emigration records, most of the emigrants are stated purely

⁶⁷ Rød, Per O et. al. *Singsåsboka Vol 2*, page 128

⁶⁸ Rød, Per O et. al. *Singsåsboka Vol 3 – Gård og grend, ætt og folk* (Trondheim, 1966), page 222

⁶⁹ www.digitalarkivet.no Database showing emigrants leaving Norway, accessed between February 1 and May 10, 2007; Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Volume 3*, page 134-136

as “*Workers*”, and this is sometimes inaccurate or could be claimed to be outwardly wrong. Many of these so-called workers were cotters, farm helps, servants and/or craftsmen. The fact that all emigrants are stated to be “*Workers*” could be because of the fact that many of the emigrants worked and lived on small farms or leased farms, and to make ends meet they had to take other jobs to get food for themselves and their families. Nevertheless, what one can determine that almost everyone that emigrated from Singsås was involved in an agrarian occupation in one way or another.

Conclusion

Singsås has a history of migration within Norway, both to and from the community, dating back to ancient times. This changed suddenly in 1850, when the overseas destination of America became the predominant target for emigrants, and stayed so until after the turn of the century when people started migrating to urban centers and cities in Norway instead. Even though population in Singsås grew rapidly during these years, there is no evidence supporting a demographic crisis in the district. There was, however, a lack of competitive farmland, and the prospect of acquiring good farmland in America enticed many to emigrate. Instead of moving to the city, people from Singsås traveled to America to start a new life there.

Many historians, like Kjell Haarstad and Tore Pryser, argue that the waves of Norwegian immigrants can only be explained by changing economic times in both Norway and America. This is obvious, and as shown in this chapter, Singsås experienced almost the same emigration patterns as Norway did nationally. When the railway was being built and times in Singsås were good, emigration was low, but before work on the railway had started (1872), emigration had been relatively high. This proves that economic conditions in Singsås affected emigration, and that economic recessions induced emigration. After the construction of the railway had ended in 1877 and the railway was opened, a new wave of emigration swept Singsås.⁷⁰

Nancy Foner’s argument about immigrants to the United States does not apply to the people who emigrated from Singsås. Though she might be correct in the fact that some of them were ambitious, determined and willing to work, this is very difficult to measure, and there exists

⁷⁰ Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol 2*, page 445

no evidence that the ones who left were more ambitious or determined than the rest. The one argument that can be supported is the fact that some of them were willing to take risks. Anders Kirkvoldmo emigrated in 1857 with his wife and four kids, and the first part of their journey was traveling with an oxen and wagon to Kristiania (Oslo). As only one person had migrated from Singsås to America before 1857, this was a clear example of a willingness to take risks. When you look at emigrants from Singsås, moreover, Nancy Foner's argument that the "worst of the worst" stayed is also not applicable. Many of the poorest people from Singsås traveled to America, and there are several examples of persons having virtually nothing who left for America.

The most important factors that made people emigrate from Singsås were the family connections and the desire to own their own land. As shown earlier, family migration of both nuclear families and other relatives traveling together or in successive years, was an important part of migration from Singsås. Some families tended to leave, while other bloodlines stayed in Norway. Family members already in America paid the ticket for some of the ones that left from the 1870s and on, and relatives could also function as a way to get permission from your family to make the journey that one had relatives already living in America.

Improved communication was a major factor for emigrants leaving from the late 1870s and later. Especially the introduction of the railway and improved postal services made it easier for people both to make the journey and communicate with their relatives who were already in America. This made it easier for people to receive word about pre-paid tickets, and it made the journey considerably easier and more comfortable. Traveling by train must have been a lot more comfortable than packing your belongings on a wagon pulled by an ox, and driving for hours to get to the city.

The emigrants from Singsås were probably a bit old-fashioned people, who wanted to preserve their life as farmers and bring with them Norwegian ways and Norwegian values. Inspired by romantic nationalist writers like Bjørnson they wanted to preserve their rural lives and their hard-working farming culture. The most important factor dragging them towards America was the fact that they could acquire land and start their own farms there. Norwegian society was changing rapidly, and for people living in rural areas this must have been a strange experience. Instead of migrating to the city and enter new occupations there, they chose to emigrate to America. The self-sufficient farms that had existed in Norway for

centuries were becoming history, and new focus on machines, profitability and new farming methods were changing rural communities fast. Emigration to America can be seen as a reaction to all this. The community they knew was dissolving, and instead of continuing a hard life in Norway, people chose to emigrate to start their own communities in America instead.

3 A Long Journey

To make a journey from Norway to America during the last half of the nineteenth century was a long process, especially during the 1850s and 60s, when sail ships were still the most common vessels. Unlike today, when people can take a plane and go wherever they want to go in the world in twenty-four hours, the journey to America in the nineteenth century could take several months and consisted of many stages. In the early years, there were many ships sailing directly from Norway to America, but with the introduction of steam-ships, this changed. The most common travel route after this went through Great Britain. First, one had to travel to the port closest to ones home, where emigrants took a ship to the next stop on their journey, usually a port on the east coast of England or Scotland. Then they crossed Great Britain, usually by rail, and finally boarded a bigger ship that brought them to the American continent. The ports of arrival in America for immigrants from Norway, and from Singsås, were most frequently Quebec or New York. Overland, the immigrants followed a route to bring them to their final destinations, and for people from Singsås these destinations were usually somewhere in the Upper Midwest from northern Illinois and Iowa westward into the Dakotas. Some settled in one place for a period, and then traveled further west to settle somewhere else. The whole journey was a process that could take months, sometimes even years. The introduction of steam-ships in the 1860s meant that the trip had more stages at sea, but the new technology dramatically reduced the travel time. While you could use two or three months crossing the Atlantic from Norway to America on a sail ship, the whole journey took only a couple of weeks with steam ships around the turn of the century.⁷¹

This chapter looks at the first part of this journey, from the time the emigrants left Singsås and until their arrival on the American continent. What were their reasons for deciding when to go? Did they travel in groups or alone? The places and the people they met must have been considerably different from the life they were used to live in the small, rural district of Singsås. Did this change them in any way? Were people from Singsås different when they arrived on the American continent, or were they the same people who had lived in Singsås months or years earlier? Again, we come back to Nancy Foner's view of immigrants as

⁷¹ www.norwayheritage.com Article: *Statistics concerning the transatlantic crossing* accessed March 20, 2007; www.digitalarkivet.no Database showing emigrants leaving Norway, accessed between February 1 and May 10, 2007; www.ellisland.org *Passenger Records Database* accessed March 21, 2007

“positively selected in terms of ambition, determination and willingness to work and take risks”. While there is little, if any, evidence to support such an argument when the emigrants left Singsås, these could have been traits that were developed during their journey. The migration itself might have changed people’s perspective of life, and given them new ideas on how to behave and what to do to become successful and create a good life for themselves and their families.

When deciding to travel to America, how important was family migration to the immigrants? Historians and scholars, like Jon Gjerde and Kjell Haarstad, have found that family migration was an important factor in the early migration during the 1860s and 70s, but that the amount of singles increased towards the end of the century. Was this true for Singsås as well? During the stages of their migration from Singsås to America, persons from Singsås met new people and laid eyes on and experienced things they had never done before. Did this change them in any way? Did this contribute and make them turn to what David C Mauk refers to as *“pietistic forms of Lutheranism”*?⁷² There is not too much evidence to support the notion that the emigrants from Singsås were very religious people before they left Norway, but their experience together after leaving might have made them turn to religion and reinforced their faith and trust in the church as a social and religious institution.

Leaving Home

There must have been many tears and sad scenes when the emigrants left their homes and relatives to travel to America. Some left with the intention of returning, but most of them left to start a new life and never again return to their homes. Parents, siblings, spouses, children, boyfriends or girlfriends could be standing on the porch of emigrants’ old homes to say goodbye, and for many it was very hard to leave. According to a story from Singsås, one emigrant was so depressed and full of grief about leaving that his father had to hold his hand and lead him out of his old home for him to start his journey to America. Leaving home proved to be very difficult for him, and he had lost his desire to leave his home and his community. Eventually he left anyway.⁷³

⁷² Mauk, David C, *“Scandinavians”* in Barkan, Elliott Robert, Ed., *A Nation of Peoples* (Connecticut, 1999), page 468

⁷³ Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol 1 – Folk og samfunn* (Trondheim, 1966), page 575-576

Many stories have been told throughout Norway about heartbreaking scenes when emigrants left their homes and family. One of the most heartbreaking stories from Singsås is the one told by Anne Fløttum Bjørgen, who was the closest neighbor of Ingebrigt Talsnes when he left his home in 1891. Ingebrigt is said to have cried and sobbed so hard when he left that it was painful to listen to, and Anne never forgot it.⁷⁴

Hjalmar Rued Holand describes the day when the emigrants left their homes in Norway as “...the most bitter day in their lives. Many of them had not known what love for their native country meant until that day.”⁷⁵ This was probably true for many of the emigrants. Even though they had dreamt about leaving and traveling to America for a long time, and had wanted it from the bottom of their hearts, the time to really say goodbye and leave must have been very tough.

To leave for America meant that many had to leave precious things behind. Only the most necessary belongings reminding them of their past lives were brought on the long journey; clothes, shoes, food and maybe a bible or a Norwegian history book. On the other hand, leaving home meant that a lot of necessities for the journey had to be acquired and packed. Many families emigrated together, and this meant huge amounts of both people and goods. The biggest family to leave Singsås was Hans Johnsen Raaen, his wife Marit Johansdatter Raaen and their seven children, who left Singsås in 1882.⁷⁶ That makes a total of nine people leaving Singsås and traveling together to America. Not only will they have had to carry along with them a lot of clothes and necessities for the journey, but also a considerable amount of money to buy tickets and food for everyone throughout the trip. Traveling with nine children between two and seventeen years old must also have been a challenge! When they left, in 1882, the railway had been extended through Singsås, and it probably made their journey easier that they could take a train all the way from Singsås to Trondheim and then board a ship when they got there.

It was not that easy for Anders Kirkvoldmo and his wife Anna Kirkvoldmo who left with their four children in 1857. Their oldest daughter, Berit, was fourteen years old, while the youngest son, Ole, was only five. They left on a wagon pulled by an ox for Kristiania (Oslo), which is a

⁷⁴ Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol 1*, page 574

⁷⁵ Holand, Hjalmar Rued *De Norske Settlementers Historie* (Wisconsin, 1908), page 55

⁷⁶ Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol 1*, page 576

distance of almost 500 kilometers. This part of their journey probably took several weeks. On arrival in Oslo Anders had to sell the oxen and the wagon to get a few specie dollars for food and tickets across the Atlantic. Subsequently they had to locate a sail ship and buy tickets and prepare for the long journey at sea. Anders was a cotter (*husmann*), and just the fact that he managed to buy tickets for himself and his entire family is impressive and shows that even those who were in the lowest economic class in Singsås were among the first emigrants to America. Before Anders and his family, only one man from Singsås (Jens Hansen Mahlum, 1850) had traveled to America.⁷⁷ This must have meant that Anders and his family's knowledge of what to expect in America was limited, and the journey and the decision to emigrate was probably a huge risk to take for them, as they ventured into something they must have known very little about. This gives them one of Nancy Foner's traits for an immigrant, i.e. *the willingness and ability to take risks*.

Persons migrating from Singsås to America started their journey in the spring or early summer. 600 of the 647 emigrants that left Singsås for America left Singsås between March 15th and July 10th.⁷⁸ There were probably several reasons for this. Traveling in the summer months was a lot easier than traveling in the winter, both due to the climate and the longer days. Norway is a country far to the north, and Singsås is relatively close to the polar circle. This means that days are considerably longer during the summer months, and this makes traveling and all outdoor activities easier during the summertime. In addition to this there was of course a much more agreeable climate then. Temperatures were higher, which meant that the emigrants did not have to wear or bring so much clothing. Higher temperatures and more stable weather also reduced the risk of getting sick, which always was a serious danger on crowded trains and emigrant ships.

Family migration was common throughout this entire period from Singsås, as it was in Norway as a whole, and many even traveled together in larger groups, like the Raaen and Kirkvoldmo families. Others traveled separately, but it was more common for married couples to travel together than to travel alone. As emphasized in the last chapter, Singsås was an old-fashioned Norwegian farming community, and people were accustomed to viewing the family and the farm as the institutions that kept people together and alive. While married couples often traveled together, it was even more common that relatives, neighbors and

⁷⁷ Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol 1*, page 565

⁷⁸ *Singsås Church Books on Microfilm at Riksarkivet, Dora* and www.digitalarkivet.no Database showing emigrants leaving Norway, accessed between February 1 and May 10, 2007

friends traveled together. A good example of this is the five bachelors leaving Singsås in March 1905. They were all between 18 and 23 years old, four of them were from the Vinsnes farms in Singsås, and they were all close friends. They stated four different final destinations in America, but migrating together probably felt safer and assured them that they had someone they knew and could trust on the long journey across the Atlantic. This all puts people from Singsås into a long tradition of family migration from Norway to America, already documented by studies made by Jon Gjerde and Kjell Haarstad. Gjerde and Haarstad both documented that family migration played a huge role for Norwegians, and the fact that other family members decided to migrate to America induced many others to make the journey as well.⁷⁹

Getting to an International Harbor

The first part of the journey from Singsås, which is an inland district, was to get to a harbor for overseas traffic and board a ship. The closest international harbor from Singsås is Trondheim, and most of the people who left Singsås to travel to America left through Trondheim. In the database showing information from the emigrant protocols that registered people who left from Trondheim, 542 persons living in Singsås are registered as leaving the city between 1867 and 1905 (there are no official records prior to 1867).⁸⁰ This number could have been higher, since some people seem to be missing from the files. They could have disappeared from the files, someone could have forgotten to register them, or they could have left through another port. Some people, like Anders Kirkvoldmo and his family who emigrated in 1857, departed the country from Kristiania (Oslo).⁸¹ Nevertheless, the number that is registered in the protocols indicates that almost 90% of the total departures noted in other sources went from Trondheim, and this number was probably even higher, because Trondheim was obviously the easiest accessible port when you traveled from Singsås.

Before 1860, only sixteen persons had migrated from Singsås to America, and they might all have traveled the first part of their journey to Kristiania (Oslo). Anders Kirkvoldmo and his

⁷⁹ Gjerde, Jon *From Peasants to Farmers – The migration from Balestrand, Norway, to the Upper Middle West* (New York, 1985), page 131-132; Haarstad, Kjell *Bondenæringen i støpeskjeen* (Sarpsborg, 1973), page 26-27

⁸⁰ www.digitalarkivet.no Database showing emigrants leaving Norway, accessed between February 1 and May 10, 2007

⁸¹ Rød, Per O et. al. *Singsåsboka Vol 1*, page 574

family did, and the same year (1857) another family, Anders Andersen Dybdalsbak with wife and four children left for America. They probably chose the same route as Anders and his family. Both families counted six members, and if they followed the same pattern of family migration as other early emigrants from Singsås, they traveled together to Kristiania, and then from Kristiania to America. Leaving home with your whole family and all your belongings on a wagon pulled by a couple of oxen must have been both exciting and terrifying. Many challenges and hardships waited before they could set their feet on American soil. Upon arrival in Kristiania, they first had to bring all their possessions to the harbor, and then they had to sell their oxen and wagon, get money for the tickets, food, and provisions for the journey.

The railway from Støren to Trondheim was finished in 1864. This made it significantly easier to travel from Singsås to the closest city, which was Trondheim. This also affected the migration from the local community to America, and after this virtually everyone that traveled from Singsås to America made the first part of their journey from Singsås to Trondheim.

From the year 1867 emigration from Singsås to America reappeared, and by now the railway from Støren to Trondheim was finished. This probably meant that the first kilometers of the journey had to be made by foot, horse or wagon, depending on what the emigrants had access to, and how much they brought on the journey. A family brought more provisions and luggage than a single person, and they probably had to get a wagon of some sort to bring all their goods. The trip from Singsås to Støren is between twenty and forty kilometers; depending on from where in the district they were traveling. The Kjelden farms are only twenty kilometers from Støren, while the Almaas farms are forty kilometers away. Friends or relatives probably accompanied some migrants on the first stage of the journey, either to give them a ride on a wagon and help them, or just to keep them company on the first kilometers.

When they arrived at Støren the majority took the railway from Støren to Trondheim. For some this might have been a bit expensive, and hence they might have chosen to walk or ride a wagon the entire way. Despite this, the majority took the railway, because this brought them safely and effectively to Trondheim. From the railway station in Trondheim to the harbor was only a short distance, and now the travel on the ocean started for the emigrants from Singsås. Some of them might have visited Trondheim before, but a journey beyond Trondheim was a new experience for all or nearly all. In 1877, the railway line between Trondheim and

Kristiania (Oslo) was finished, and the tracks went straight through Singsås. This meant that emigrants who left Singsås later than 1877 probably took a train all the way from their home to Trondheim.

Trondheim

In Trondheim during the 1860s and 70s, several agents worked for companies that sold tickets to America. Two companies dominated this business locally in the 1860s and 70s, the Allan Line and the Anchor Line. These two argued about each other's way to approach the emigrants, and each thought that the other companies' agents used foul play. Several accusations against the other company were made in newspaper advertisements at the time. This shows that shipping emigrants from Norway to America was big business and the selling of tickets to America an important source of income for both agents and companies. The two companies and their agents settled their dispute and put in an advertisement together where they announced that they had become settled their differences.⁸²

Below is an advertisement in the local Trondheim newspaper *Adresseavisen* from 1869, put in by the Anchor Line. This was before the argument with the Allan Line started, but it is a good example on how lines and agents sold their journeys to the emigrants.

⁸² www.norwayheritage.com Solem, Børge *The Anchor Line and Allan Line agents, 1870 newspaper campaign* accessed March 27, 2007

Den bedste, sikreste og mest direkte Vei
for Passagerer fra

Norge til Amerika.

Ejerne af den berømte
Anker-Linie
for
de transatlantiske Dampskibe
bestaaende af følgende første Classes store og hurtigseilende Dampskibe
Cambria Columbia Hebernia Britannia Europa Jowa Caledonia
United Kingdom,
som ere indrettede med det størst mulige Hensyn til at sikre Passagerernes Bequem-
lighed, Behagelighed og Sikkerhed og afgaa regelmæssig hver Uge mellem
Glasgow og New-York,
befordrer Emigranter herfra til Newcastle eller Liverpool med de dertil gaaende første
Klasses Dampskibe
Norway, Schweden og Damaskus
og videre uden Ophold til Glasgow ved 2 Timers Jernbanereise. Passagererne med
denne Route blive hele Veien ledsagede af Liniens Betjente. For al Slags Bedragerie
beskyttes.
Passagererne vil endvidere erholde fri Kost og særskilt Sovekøje paa hele Reisen.
Fragten er ansat ligesaa billig som med ethvert andet respektabelt Selskabs Skibe.
Norsk Tolk og norske Folk følger Skibene fra Glasgow.
Enhver Oplysning vil beredvillig blive given ved Selskabets Agent
Hans L. Dahl,
boende hos Handelsmand P. Johnson ligeved Ravnkloen.

Advertisement for the Anchor Line in the local newspaper in Trondheim, *Adresseavisen*. Reprinted from www.norwayheritage.com (with permission)

The advertisement, which claims that the Anchor Line steam ships are the best and most comfortable way of crossing the Atlantic, is a bit confusing, because first it lists the Anchor Line ships that operated between Glasgow and New York, then it goes on to say that steamers Norway, Schweden and Damaskus bring emigrants from Trondheim to Liverpool or Newcastle. It then further states that after arriving in Newcastle emigrants will be brought to Glasgow by rail in a two hours train ride. The Anchor Line ships either went from Trondheim to Newcastle or Leith (Edinburgh), but according to this advertisement they went to Newcastle in 1869. A Norwegian interpreter was to follow the ships from Glasgow to America. It is also stated that passengers would be protected from fraud and theft during the entire journey. This was an impossible task, as theft was common especially during the stops in Britain, where professional thieves operated among the migrants traveling through various places in Britain. The advertisement also states that all passengers would get free food and provisions and a sleeping bunk each. The part about food and provisions is probably accurate, but the part about a sleeping bunk each seems to be an outright lie judging by the reports

made by emigrants on the ships. Only the First Class passengers got a sleeping bunk each, and the ships offered accommodations to far less than the number of emigrants traveling on each journey. The SS Norway, for example, had accommodations for 120 passengers, but on its journey leaving Trondheim April 21, 1870, it carried 402 emigrants.⁸³

As we shall see, ticket prices were relatively high in the 1860s. Norwegians that left in 1869 paid 47 specie dollars pr ticket for adults, while children paid half or less depending on their age. This must have been a huge expense for many, and some probably had to work and save up money for years to manage this. In 1877, the new currency, *kroner* (crowns), was introduced in Norway, which is still the currency in Norway today.⁸⁴ From 1869 to 1881, ticket prices increased, but from 1881 and towards the turn of the century prices fell somewhat.⁸⁵ Leaving April 19, 1881, Peder P Osøykjeld and his wife Enge Osøykjeld had to pay 218 kroner each for tickets to America. With them, they brought Enge's daughter from her first marriage Kari Osøykjeld and her illegitimate son Ole, who was four years old at the time. Kari paid the same as her parents, while she had to pay 57 kroner for her son Ole.⁸⁶ This must have been a huge expense for the Osøykjeld family. They had probably sold almost everything they owned, and saved up for the trip for years. In the years preceding this, there had been much employment with the construction of the railroad through Singsås, and during a good summer's day with hard labor, one could earn one specie dollar, which was considered a good pay at the time.⁸⁷ Perhaps Peder had contributed to the building of the railway line in order to get enough money to travel to America with his family? This shows that traveling to America at this time was an expensive affair, and that most people very likely had to sell most of their possessions and save money a long time to manage to go. The people from the Osøykjeld farm had been amongst the poorest people in Singsås for a long time, however, and yet they managed to buy tickets for themselves.

Many people sold personal or family possessions to afford to leave, but many also got their tickets paid in America, either by friends, relatives or companies which paid tickets for people in exchange for them working for them for a few years. In total 215 persons who left Singsås

⁸³ www.norwayheritage.com *SS Norway, Allan Line* accessed April 15th 2007

⁸⁴ Nerbøvik, Jostein *Norsk Historie 1860-1914* (Gjøvik, 2004), page 69

⁸⁵ www.digitalarkivet.no *Database showing emigrants leaving Norway*, accessed between February 1 and May 10, 2007

⁸⁶ www.digitalarkivet.no *Database showing emigrants leaving Norway*, accessed between February 1 and May 10, 2007

⁸⁷ Rød, Per O et. al. *Singsåsboka Vol 2 – Næringsliv, Handel, Samferdsel* (Trondheim, 1966), page 445

got their tickets paid by companies, relatives or friends that were already in America. This means that 35% of all emigrants that left Singsås for America did this on a pre-paid ticket. This way of buying tickets for someone was often considered a loan, and many worked hard when they arrived in America in order to pay their friends or relatives back or to pay their dues by working for the company that bought their ticket. This way of getting tickets is another factor supporting the claim that even the poorest had the chance to leave Singsås if they wanted to. If friends or relatives paid their ticket, this meant everybody who knew someone who would do this could go. Another option was getting an American company to pay for your ticket, and in return work for them for a certain period to pay them back.⁸⁸

Family migration, which constituted a huge part of emigration from Singsås, was either one family or relatives traveling together, or some members, usually a male (husband) traveling first and then paying the tickets for the rest of the family a year or two later. This was a common practice for people from Singsås, especially during the earliest years of emigration from Singsås to America. Several families who all traveled together have already been mentioned, such as the Kirkvoldmo, Dybdalsbakk and Raaen families. Nils P Troøien, who left Singsås in 1871, left his sister and son in Singsås when he left for America. The following year they followed him across the Atlantic and joined him in America. This shows that different kinds of family migration occurred from Singsås, and that people had to adapt to find a way that suited their family best.

Experiencing the Ocean for the First Time?

Even though Norway has been a nation of seafarers for centuries, the journey to America was the first experience with the ocean for many Norwegians that lived in the inland, rural districts. Everything, from the ships and customs to the smell of salt water, was unfamiliar to the emigrants. People from Singsås had vast experience with farming land, logging timber, fishing and hunting, but traveling on the ocean was an experience they had not tried before. Many of them might have gotten their first glimpse of the ocean when they arrived at the harbor in Trondheim as they started the first stage of their sea journey to America. This was one of many new impressions that would dominate their lives for a while.

⁸⁸ As described by Jim Winsness, e-mail correspondence April 19, 2007

From the time of the earliest Norwegian emigration that started in 1825, sailing-ships were used to cross the Atlantic. These ships had been used for centuries, and were still considered reliable and cheap. However, on a sailing-ship you depended on the weather as to how long you would spend to cross the Atlantic Ocean. With favorable winds, the journey could be made in relatively short time, but if there were no favorable winds crossing the Atlantic could take a long time. The journey could take between twenty-five and one hundred days, depending on the weather,⁸⁹ and the journey was no pleasure trip for most people who were steerage passengers. The food and sanitary conditions were bad, and epidemics often plagued emigrant ships. On sailing-ships emigrants in steerage had to bring their own food, and prepare it themselves below deck.

Many ships combined the use of steam and the use of sail, making it both an effective and relatively cheap way of travel. Tickets on steam ships included food for the whole trip, and agents normally boasted that representatives from the company would accompany the passengers at all times during their journey to the American continent.

The advance from sail to steam was important for many reasons. Ships became a bit more comfortable, departure and arrival times got much more trustworthy, but the most important factor was the reduction in travel time. While an average sailing-ship spent 50 days on the trip between Norway and America,⁹⁰ a steamer managed the trip between Great Britain and America in approximately ten days in 1870.⁹¹ Even though both sail and steam ships were crowded and sometimes dirty, the transformation into steam ships was an enormous advantage to the passengers. Reducing the travel time reduced the risk of suffering from food poisoning or seasickness, as well as the danger of epidemics and illness amongst the passengers.

⁸⁹ www.norwayheritage.com Solem, Børge *Statistics concerning the transatlantic crossing* accessed March 28, 2007

⁹⁰ www.norwayheritage.com Solem, Børge *Statistics concerning the transatlantic crossing* accessed March 28, 2007

⁹¹ www.collectionscanada.ca Database: *Passenger Lists, 1865-1922* accessed March 25th 2007

Steerage

Most emigrants from Norway, belonging to the middle or lower classes, were steerage passengers. People from Singsås were no exception, and based on ticket prices paid one can see that all registered emigrants from Singsås traveled as steerage passengers.⁹² Steerage originally means between decks (in Norwegian: “*mellomdekk*”), because of its location on the original emigrant ships. Sailing-ships were originally intended for bringing cargo, and they had a compartment for cargo in the bottom of the ship. Above this, there was space for passengers traveling first class. Steerage passengers were either stored in temporary compartments in the bottom of the ship amongst the cargo, or on a between-deck that was between the first-class compartments and the cargo. The between-deck on sailing vessels had a standard height of six to eight feet.⁹³ This was both crowded, dark and provided little air for the emigrants. If the ship experienced bad weather, the hatches to the lower decks were shut and the air could get really foul. There were no doctors on these ships not unless, by coincidence, there was a doctor among the passengers. When steam ships took over much of the traffic between the European and American continent, the term steerage was used for any part of the ship where the passengers who paid the cheapest rate were allotted. Around the turn of the century, most liners termed their cheapest tickets Third Class, and some even had Fourth Class tickets.⁹⁴

Norwegian ships traveling to the American continent were over-crowded during the 1850s and 60s, and Canadian authorities criticized conditions on Norwegian ships both in 1861 and 1862. Eventually the Norwegian government passed laws to restrict ship’s passenger traffic to other continents (1863). This helped improve the treatment and conditions of the passengers, and together with improved sanitary conditions, it lead to slightly improved conditions on the ships across the Atlantic Ocean for Norwegian emigrants.⁹⁵

Conditions on emigrant ships improved over time. Around the turn of the century, there were doctors on the ships, and some lines even had matrons to help the passengers. This, and of course the much faster crossing time across the Atlantic, were the major contributing factors

⁹² www.digitalarkivet.no Database showing emigrants leaving Norway, accessed between February 1 and May 10, 2007

⁹³ www.norwayheritage.com *The Transatlantic Crossing, Chapter 2* accessed April 10, 2007

⁹⁴ www.norwayheritage.com *The Transatlantic Crossing, Chapter 2* accessed April 10, 2007

⁹⁵ Semmingsen, Ingrid *Norway to America – A History of the Migration* (Minnesota, 2003), 60-62

to improved conditions. Even though there were, by modern standards, little space and few activities on the ships, the emigrants themselves did not feel that the standard was too low. In *Norway to America – A History of the Migration*, Ingrid Semmingsen wrote that “to judge by letters and other accounts the passage was often remarkably easy.”⁹⁶ This was true for the emigrants from Singsås as well. If the conditions on the journey across the ocean had been very bad, this would have become a topic in their correspondence with the people back home, but judging from letters and other sources, this was not the case. Emigrants were generally content with their journey across the Atlantic, and probably just believed it a necessity in their project of getting to America. This might be due to the fact that letters and correspondence often centered around the fact that the emigrants had made the journey safely across the ocean and that they had found a place to settle, not about their experience on the ships. There is no evidence to support the idea that persons from Singsås suffered in any way on their journey across the Atlantic.

The *SS Tasso*

April 28, 1880, the *SS Tasso* left Trondheim for Hull. Two weeks earlier *SS Tasso* had left Trondheim with nineteen persons from Singsås on board. On board April 28 were two people from Singsås, Ola Pedersen Osøykjeld and Karoline Andreasdatter Hafdalsås. Karoline was originally from Frosta, which is in Nord-Trøndelag, but she was registered as living in Singsås when she left Trondheim that April.⁹⁷ According to the official records from Trondheim they were both single when they left, but according to local sources in Singsås they were in fact married.⁹⁸ To add to the confusion they are registered with different destinations in America in the official records. Ola is registered as traveling to Canby, Minnesota, while Karoline is registered as going to Marshall, Minnesota. Nevertheless, they were both on board the *SS Tasso* that left Trondheim on the 28th of April 1880.

In Kristiansund a woman named Ingeborg Olsdatter Øye boarded the *SS Tasso*. She wrote a diary that has been published in a book by Dordi G Skuggevik called *Utvandringshistorie fra Nordmøre*. According to Ingeborg’s diary there were about 400 emigrants on board the *SS*

⁹⁶ Semmingsen, Ingrid *Norway to America – A History of the Migration* (Minnesota, 2003), page 60

⁹⁷ www.digitalarkivet.no Database showing emigrants leaving Norway, accessed between February 1 and May 10, 2007

⁹⁸ Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol 1*, page 567

Tasso, and the weather was a little rough during the first couple of days. Many became seasick, which led to a terrible mess on the ship. Ingeborg thought that the *SS Tasso* was better than she expected. The food was good, and if the ship had not been that crowded it would have been very nice, according to Ingeborg. The *SS Tasso* arrived in Hull May 3, 1880 at three in the morning, a little late due to strong head wind during the crossing of the North Sea.⁹⁹ This is an example of how conditions on board could be satisfactory to the emigrants, and how most of them may have had a good experience on their journey across the ocean. The thoughts of the emigrants from Singsås were probably quite similar to Ingeborg's, both for Ola and Karoline who were on the same ship, and for the nineteen who left Trondheim on the *SS Tasso* two weeks earlier.

Great Britain

Great Britain was commonly the first stop on foreign soil in the migration for Norwegians traveling to America, especially after the transition to steam-ships in the 1860s. Great Britain was experienced by 530 of the 542 passengers from Singsås registered as leaving for America through Trondheim. The ships from Norway arrived at a port on the east coast of Britain, which was usually Newcastle, Leith or Hull. From Newcastle, Leith or Hull they traveled by train across Scotland or England, and arrived at Glasgow or Liverpool to board bigger ships which would take them across the Atlantic to America.

Emigrants from the entire European continent traveled through Hull during this period. After 1875 this was the case for the people from Singsås as well. The harbor in Hull and the transport from the harbor to the railway station was the emigrants' first experience of a country where they spoke a foreign language. Emigrants from Singsås tended to travel in groups, and this experience of a new language and masses of unknown people must have reinforced their sense of togetherness and increased both the family and friendship bonds that already existed between them. According to Ingeborg Olsdatter Øye it was a great sight to lay eyes on Hull, but she did not find the town beautiful. The buildings of brick and stone and the

⁹⁹ Skuggevik, Dordi G *Utvandringshistorie fra Nordmøre – Stangvik og Surnadal prestegjeld* (Gjøvik, 1986), page 329

smoke and dust from coal and other pollution made Hull an unusual and not a very beautiful sight for a Norwegian emigrant from a rural part of Norway.¹⁰⁰

The stops in England involved waiting for trains and ships. Sometimes emigrants were held up in Hull, either waiting for a train to take them to Liverpool or in quarantine because someone on their ship had become sick. The train ride across Britain did not take too long, and the expectations and the anticipation of their new life probably kept the spirits high among the emigrants. Arriving in Liverpool must also have been an impressive sight. People from Singsås, a small, rural district in Norway, had no prior experience with huge cities, and Liverpool towards the end of the nineteenth century was a growing metropolis.

Routes and ships

The routes from Trondheim to the American continent varied over the years. To show the changes in routes, ships and travel times, the following sections show routes and ships that emigrants from Singsås experienced.

1868

Six persons from Singsås left for America in 1868, all traveling through Trondheim and everyone traveled on the same ship. The bark *Franklin* left Trondheim harbor on the 30th of April 1868 and set sail for Quebec. It arrived in Quebec without any major problems on the 4th of July 1868.¹⁰¹ *Franklin* was a bark, and it sailed across the Atlantic from Trondheim to Quebec between 1868 and 1872. The travel time spent in 1868 of 65 days was a little more than the average crossing time for a sail ship during this period. The Captain of the *Franklin* was Christian Winsnæs, a young Captain from Skien, Norway.¹⁰² Three of the emigrants from Singsås shared the same surname as Captain Winsnæs, and that was Peder Winsnæs (original spelling Vinsnes), his wife Sigrid Olsdatter and son Ingebrigt Pedersen.

¹⁰⁰ Skuggevik, Dordi G *Utvandringshistorie fra Nordmøre*, page 329-330

¹⁰¹ www.digitalarkivet.no Database showing emigrants leaving Norway, accessed between February 1 and May 10, 2007 and www.collectionscanada.ca Database: *Passenger Lists, 1865-1922* accessed March 19, 2007

¹⁰² www.norwayheritage.com Article: *Bark Franklin, Chr Paus* accessed March 25, 2007

1869

Twenty-one persons from Singsås are registered as leaving Trondheim on the *SS Norway* on the 15th of April 1869. Among them were Ola Pedersen Troøien, Guri Olsdatter Troøien, Nils Pedersen Winsnes and Hans Digre who, through a chain migration process, were among the first people from Singsås to settle along the shores of Lake Hendricks (South Dakota/Minnesota).¹⁰³ Their destination in America in the records is stated to be Lansing. This was probably Lansing, Michigan, the state capital. According to the ship's log, the *SS Norway* left Trondheim for Newcastle (via Bergen) April 16, 1869.¹⁰⁴ Another source, an Allan Line advertisement in the local Trondheim newspaper *Adresseavisen* on March 1, states that the *SS Norway* was to leave Trondheim on April 22. This may, however, be only an intended date, and it could have been changed due to bad weather or other causes.

The *SS Norway* was used by the Allan Line for a Scandinavian feeder service, which means that it carried passengers from Norway to Great Britain. It operated this route between 1869 and 1872. From these ports, the emigrants then traveled by rail across Britain and boarded other ships in Glasgow or Liverpool, and from these ports mainly went to Quebec or New York. All emigrants from Singsås that traveled on the *SS Norway* between 1868 and 1872 probably went to Quebec. The *SS Norway* had accommodations for 120 passengers, but usually brought many more on the journey from Norway to Great Britain. On the voyage leaving Trondheim April 29, 1869, it carried 402 emigrants.¹⁰⁵

After their arrival in Newcastle (or Leith (Edinburgh)), the passengers were brought across Britain in trains to Glasgow, and some might have traveled to Liverpool. Most probably the twenty-one emigrants who had left Singsås at the same time, arrived in Leith and took the railway across Scotland to Glasgow, where they boarded a ship that brought them to Quebec.

1875

In the year 1875, a new ship operated the Scandinavian feeder service between Trondheim and Great Britain, stopping at various ports on the west coast of Norway. This new ship was the *SS Tasso*, and it operated this route between 1871 and 1886. The most significant change

¹⁰³ www.digitalarkivet.no Database showing emigrants leaving Norway, accessed between February 1 and May 10, 2007

¹⁰⁴ www.norwayheritage.com Article: *Trondheim - Christiansund - Aalesund - Bergen - Newcastle in 1869* accessed April 5, 2007

¹⁰⁵ www.norwayheritage.com Article: *Trondheim - Christiansund - Aalesund - Bergen - Newcastle in 1869* accessed April 5, 2007

occurring for the eight persons leaving Singsås for America in 1875 compared to the ones who had left earlier was that they were brought to Hull, on the east coast of England. From Hull, they were transported by rail, either to Liverpool or Glasgow. Most traveled from Hull to Liverpool. From Liverpool or Glasgow, they then traveled across the Atlantic to Quebec or New York.¹⁰⁶

1892

April 27, 1892, six emigrants from Singsås left Trondheim to create a new life for themselves in America. They left Trondheim on the *SS Domino*, and traveled down the west coast of Norway, stopping at a few ports to carry more emigrants. Then they crossed the North Sea and arrived at Hull in the beginning of May 1892. From Hull, they crossed England by train and arrived in Liverpool a few hours later. In Liverpool, they boarded the *SS Gallia* and crossed the Atlantic arriving in New York (Ellis Island) May 12, 1892. Hence, they had made the journey from Trondheim to America in only seventeen days, which was considerably less than the 65 days on the ocean spent by the six who left in 1868 (only twenty-four years earlier). Another proof that times were changing was the fact that of the six leaving in 1868 all paid the tickets to America themselves, while three of the six leaving April 27, 1892, left with tickets paid in America.¹⁰⁷

1905

March 22, 1905, five single men from Singsås left Trondheim to travel to America. They were all between 18 and 23 years old, and had grown up close to each other in Singsås and were probably good friends. Two of them paid for their tickets themselves in Trondheim, while the other three traveled with tickets that had been paid in America. They left Trondheim on the *SS Salmo*, and after stopping at a few ports along the Norwegian west coast, they arrived in Hull. In Hull, they were guided on to a train and then went by rail across England to Liverpool. In Liverpool, they boarded the *SS Oceanic*, and they arrived in New York (Ellis Island) April 6, 1905.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ www.norwayheritage.com Article: *Trondheim - Christiansund - Aalesund - Hull in 1875* accessed April 5, 2007

¹⁰⁷ www.digitalarkivet.no Database showing emigrants leaving Norway, accessed between February 1 and May 10, 2007 and www.ellisland.org Passenger Records Database accessed March 21, 2007

¹⁰⁸ www.digitalarkivet.no Database showing emigrants leaving Norway, accessed between February 1 and May 10, 2007 and www.ellisland.org Passenger Records Database accessed March 21, 2007

Arriving in North America

Most Norwegian emigrants between 1850 and 1905 first laid eyes on the American continent in Quebec or New York. Emigrants from Singsås were no different, and while Quebec was the most frequent entry point during the 1850s, 60s and 70s, New York then took over as the most frequent one towards the end of the century. Emigrants from Singsås, like many other immigrants to America, arrived in Quebec harbor and the Castle Garden, Barge Office or Ellis Island immigration centers in New York.



The picture shows the landing stage in Quebec, as shown on an old engraving from 1872. In that year, several emigrants from Singsås came to Quebec, and this was probably their first experience with the American continent. (Source: www.norwayheritage.com, with permission)

After 1892, almost every emigrant from Singsås first saw the American continent arriving at the famous US immigration facility on Ellis Island, and on their arrival to New York, the immigrants could see the Statue of Liberty and the rapidly expanding skyline of New York

City and Brooklyn before them. The landing and the different routes inland the American continent will be dealt with in the following chapter.

Traveling together

When people emigrated from Norway to America they often traveled together with friends or relatives from the same region. This made the journey easier to endure, and meant that the emigrants always had someone they knew and easily could communicate with who shared the same values and beliefs. When people from Singsås migrated to America, especially from the 1850s through the 1870s, they traveled in groups, usually between five and fifteen persons traveling together across the Atlantic. They were family and friends, neighbors and relatives, who made the journey across the Atlantic Ocean together. The fact that it was common for people from Singsås to travel in groups with families and friends was no coincidence. The apparent reason is that it was practical to travel with someone they knew and trusted, and who could keep them company on the journey. Singsås in the nineteenth century still had strong ties with the old farming system in Norway, which had a focus on family values and togetherness and had the family entity as the cornerstone of surviving. Family was supposed to help and support each other, and, most importantly, cooperate to make each other live well and survive. Only a handful of the 647 emigrants from Singsås traveled alone, the vast majority traveled with family and/or friends. Traveling together made the long journey safer as they could help look after each other, and everyone could help each other if someone were sick or had any kinds of problems. Making the journey together in groups with friends and family, reinforced the friendships and family ties that already existed among the people from Singsås, and it strengthened the feeling of togetherness that had already made them emigrate together.

Did Migration Change Them?

When persons from Singsås decided to migrate to North America, it was a giant step for them. It was not only a decision to leave their homes and embark on a long journey to a new

continent, but it was also a decision to start a new life in a new place. This must have been both exciting and frightening at the same time, and it must have been with great anticipation and many different expectations that these people crossed the Atlantic in crowded ships to start this new chapter in their lives. Did this migration itself change these emigrants in any way?

Once again, we return to the traits that Nancy Foner gives immigrants to America; that they are *"positively selected in terms of ambition, determination and willingness to work and take risks."* One could claim though that the ones that left were ambitious, as they did not seem to be satisfied with their place in Norwegian society, but the argument could also be made that they left because they took the "easy way out," since America in the nineteenth century was rumored to be a place where you could get rich quickly and easily. Ultimately, there is no evidence that point to people leave being more ambitious when they left, but the journey and the fact that they arrived in America together with thousands of other immigrants, could have made the immigrants more ambitious and determined to succeed in the New World.

Conclusion

Leaving home must have been a tough experience, especially when the emigrants realized that they probably would not see many of the ones they said their goodbyes to for the rest of their lives. In addition, a long journey, especially for the ones leaving in the 1850s and 60s, contributed to the first months in the new lives of the emigrants being a test of will. For most of them, determination grew, and the will and need to succeed in their new homeland overshadowed the hardships they encountered on their way to America. For some though, the hardships and the longing for their home district became too much, and they opted to turn back. They became return migrants, which have not been a focus of this study.

For most, the journey across the ocean was a satisfying experience. Even though ships were sometimes crowded, trains across Britain were small and uncomfortable and encountering different nationalities was sometimes terrifying, the trip was a necessity they got through. They had chose to go to America instead of somewhere else themselves, and standing on deck seeing the American continent before them for the first time must have been an awesome

experience. They had reached one of the goals of their journey, and that was reaching America. Now they were ready to step on to the American soil that they had heard so much about, and they were ready to continue from the big ports on the east coast and travel deep into the Upper Midwest.

4 Reaching a new home

Arriving in the New World must have been a new and perhaps even frightening experience for the Norwegian immigrants. Immigrants from Singsås, growing up and living their entire lives in an inland, rural district, had little or no experience with ports and ships, and arriving at the huge ports of Quebec, New York or Boston must have been a new and unfamiliar experience. Some had perhaps heard tales about these huge ports and were partially prepared for the massive amounts of people, huge ships and virtual chaos that awaited them by letters from friends or relatives who had immigrated before them, but for many it was probably a new and totally unexpected sight. On the journey they occasionally might have had to communicate with people who spoke different languages from themselves, and when they arrived in the New World, even the native tongue was totally new and unknown to most of them.

As mentioned above, people from Singsås, as did most emigrants from Norway, arrived in three different destinations when they reached America; Quebec, New York or Boston. During the early half of the nineteenth century, New York was the major port of entry for Norwegian immigrants, but by the time the first records for people from Singsås appear (1868) this had changed. Now Quebec was the dominant port of entry for Norwegians in general,¹⁰⁹ and the same applied for people arriving from Singsås. Even though this changed for most immigrants to America, several immigrants from Singsås stated Quebec as their destination on the American continent as late as the 1890s.¹¹⁰

There are several historical studies of Norwegian settlements during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Hjalmar Rued Holand published his work *De Norske Settlementers Historie* in 1908. The book is an amateur, but exceptionally well-informed history of the Norwegian immigration to America and some of the different Norwegian settlements in the US. The book starts with a brief summary of the history of migration, and then goes on to describe Norwegian immigration to the US. A few chapters are dedicated to the earliest Norwegian immigrants, like Cleng Peerson and Ole Rynning, who later have been described

¹⁰⁹ www.norwayheritage.com Swiggum & Solem *Hunting Passenger Lists, Chapter 2* accessed March 26, 2007

¹¹⁰ www.digitalarkivet.no Database showing emigrants leaving Norway, accessed between February 1 and May 10, 2007

by other historians, such as Ingrid Semmingsen. The main part of the book deals with different Norwegian settlements in the Midwest, and their founding and early history. Holand's book is deeply colored by his admiration for the early pioneer immigrants, and their importance to Norwegian immigration in the years that followed them. His book was written in 1908, but Holand describes contemporary trips across the Atlantic as

“you accommodate yourself in a cabin, get nice, fresh and warm dishes served three times a day, pass time by reading books and magazines in soft chairs, enjoy dance and music, and in about a week you arrive in America.”

This strikes the reader as being an outward exaggeration. The conditions for steerage passengers around the turn of the century were still crowded ships and questionable food and sanitary conditions. Holand's views of the trip fifty years earlier are entirely different:

“At that time it (the journey) often took three or four months, and you had to bring your own food. If you would ever get there was very doubtful. Aboard small rolling sail ships the emigrants were packed tightly together in great misery, sick and despondent, sad and insecure.”¹¹¹

Here he is guilty of exaggerating the hardships of the original pioneers. Even though Holand implies something else, the majority of the immigrants from Norway arrived in America alive and in relatively good health. The average time spent on a sail ship was fifty days,¹¹² which is a little under two months. In addition to this he uses adjectives to describe the earliest immigrants as sad and despondent, to create a feeling that they were much worse off than Holand's contemporary fellow nationals (1908). These comparisons show that Holand, like many others who have written about the first Norwegian immigrants to the US, perceived the original pioneers and settlers who came to America as heroes with unlimited bravery and courage. Despite this, Holand's work is valuable for the history of the different settlements, and his views are an example of the reigning contemporary view on early Norwegian immigration to America.¹¹³

Another amateur historian, Martin Ulvestad, published a two volume work in 1907 and 1913 called *Nordmændene i Amerika – Deres Historie og Rekord*. The first book is a summary of Norwegian settlements throughout the US and Canada. Ulvestad's book is more thorough than Holand's, and supplies more information about the early settlements. The Second Volume is a listing of all recorded Norwegians in North America at the time (1913).

¹¹¹ Holand, Hjalmar Rued *De Norske Settlementers Historie* (Wisconsin, 1908), page 58

¹¹² www.norwayheritage.com Article: *Statistics concerning the transatlantic crossing* accessed March 20, 2007

¹¹³ Holand, Hjalmar Rued *De Norske Settlementers Historie*, page 55-64

Ulvestad's work, much like Holand's, is colored by a glorified conception of early Norwegian immigrants to America. However, Ulvestad's work is more extensive than Holand's, and his writing is not as colored by personal opinions as Holand's. This is partly due to the fact that Ulvestad's book is a summary of the different settlements involving Norwegian immigrants, and that it does not involve a meta-analysis of Norwegian immigration to America and tales of the original Norwegian pioneer immigrants like Peerson and Rynning. Ulvestad's work does include tales of immigrants' experiences on the journey to America and after settling there, but Ulvestad does not emphasize the first immigrants and the Norwegian presence in North America throughout the Viking Era as much as Holand.

Both Ulvestad and Holand believed that Norwegian Vikings stayed in North America for centuries, and they back their views by referring to rune stones and other archeological findings that supposedly are from the Viking Era. This view has been strongly contended by later historians, and there is not sufficient documentation to support their contention that the Norwegian Vikings stayed in North America as long as they assert or visited the Midwest via Hudson's Bay and Canada. Seen in relation to the fact that they tended to glorify Norwegian immigrants and pioneers this is another proof that Holand and Ulvestad's works are not entirely objective, but nevertheless they are important historic documents, an important part of the tradition for documenting Norwegian immigration to the US, and perhaps most of all, they are demonstrations of Norwegian-Americans' powerful need to assert their legitimacy as Americans every bit as authentic as New England Yankees.

What is remarkable about these early recordings of Norwegians in America is the fact that they are written by two Norwegians who migrated to America themselves. Holand arrived in the US from Akershus in southeastern Norway in 1884, when he was only twelve years old.¹¹⁴ Ulvestad, on the other hand was an adult when he came to the US. He arrived in America in from Volda in the western part of Norway 1886, when he was 21 years old.¹¹⁵ Both of them had personal experience with life as an immigrant, and this makes it much easier for them than for later historians to imagine and understand the views of other Norwegian immigrants to America.

¹¹⁴ www.nb.no *Biography Hjalmar Rued Holand* accessed April 15, 2007

¹¹⁵ www.nb.no *Biography Martin Ulvestad* accessed April 15, 2007

Of more special interest to migration from Singsås to America are the histories and papers written by the local amateur historian Gustav Sandro, especially *The Immigrants' Trek*, which describes the journey of the wagon train from initial settlements in Iowa and Minnesota to the permanent Singsåsbygg Norwegian settlement in Brookings County, Dakota Territory, and the first eight years of this colony. This colony centered around Lake Hendricks, which is right on the border between South Dakota and Minnesota.¹¹⁶

When studying immigrants' movements and travel routes in their earliest years on American soil, past studies of migration from Norway to America have been used as reference. Did people from Singsås, like the other Scandinavians studied by Gjerde and Ostegren, move in a pattern of chain migration and explore new land until they found their final destinations? This chain migration could involve immigrants staying in one settlement for a while and then traveling further west to explore new land, and ultimately traveling even further west until they arrived in a place where they settled and stayed. Immigrants arriving in America later could also be involved in this chain migration. They could travel through various settlements where friends and/or relatives were situated and stay there for a while before they traveled further west to join friends and/or relatives in other settlements. Did immigrants from Singsås who arrived around the turn of the century use earlier settlements where friends and relatives from Singsås had settled as stepping-stones to travel even further west and settle where no immigrants from Singsås had settled before, as described by historian David C Mauk?¹¹⁷ Finding cheap or free good land, still so open that they could settle beside people from the same local district in Norway was important to many immigrants from Norway, and whether this applied to immigrants from Singsås will be dealt with later in this chapter.

Another aspect of the migration from Singsås to America is in which areas the emigrants who had left Singsås settled. Did they fit into Mauk's characterization of most Norwegians as people who wanted to farm the land and were therefore involved in rural-to-rural migration, settling in rural, agricultural areas? Or did the people from Singsås for the most part, like the Norwegians in maritime trades from southern Norway that Mauk studied in another project, move to the American cities like New York, Boston, Chicago or Minneapolis and search for employment and settle down?¹¹⁸ These interesting questions could help document the

¹¹⁶ Sandro, Gustav O *The Immigrants' Trek – A detailed History of the Lake Hendricks Colony in Brookings County, Dakota Territory, 1873-1881* (unknown), page 17-19

¹¹⁷ Mauk, David C, "Scandinavians" in Barkan, Elliott Robert, Ed., *A Nation of Peoples* (Connecticut, 1999), page 468

¹¹⁸ Mauk, David C *The Colony that Rose from the Sea* (Minnesota, 1997), page 12-16

intentions emigrants from Singsås had when they left Norway. Did they leave just to find new jobs and live somewhere else, or were they traveling across the Atlantic to find cheap land and settle in a rural area to continue the lifestyle that had been common in Norway for centuries?

Jon Gjerde, studying migration from Balestrand, Norway to America found that Norwegians tended to transplant whole communities to their settlements in America. This meant that people with similar cultural, ethnic and geographical background not only settled together, but that they transplanted whole sets of institutions to their settlements in the New World. These institutions could include churches and congregations, schools or societies for regional sub-cultures (*bygdelag*).

David C Mauk has made the conclusion that people from Norway tended to turn to “*pietistic forms of Lutheranism*”¹¹⁹ after their arrival in the United States. Since there is not much evidence to support that the persons migrating to America from Singsås were very religious people when they left, this must be something that has reinforced itself and become more characteristic during their migration or after their arrival in America. People from Singsås always traveled together, and this must have lead to a huge sense of togetherness and friendship among the migrants. This, in turn, probably led to a reinforcement of the common grounds and values that these migrants possessed. During the nineteenth century, Norway was a country with a Lutheran faith, and churches were important institutions in local communities. Even though people were not necessarily all that strict about their religion and religious beliefs, the church was still an important religious and social institution. When they were migrating, the traits that were common between the persons from Singsås must have become more evident to them as they encountered people from other cultures who had values and beliefs that differed from their own. One common heritage shared by the people from Singsås was Lutheranism, and even though many of them were not too religious when they left, this heritage probably became more obvious to them when they met people with different faiths and beliefs than themselves. The emigrants gathered around their common values and beliefs, amongst them Lutheranism.

¹¹⁹ Mauk, David C, “*Scandinavians,*” page 468

These people were, as mentioned above, generally not very pietistic people when they lived in Norway, but many of them went to church and used the church as an institution and for important rites as baptisms and confirmations. Did they bring this tradition to the US, or did the Christian feelings and religiousness of these immigrants strengthen and reinforce themselves as they traveled across the Atlantic Ocean and into the New World?

First Steps on a New Continent

The first steps on the American continent by immigrants from Singsås were typically taken in Quebec, Canada or New York or Boston, USA. Quebec got the position as the most important entry point to America in the 1850s.¹²⁰ This was probably due to many factors, but the most important one was the fact that it was easier to travel to the Midwest from Quebec. Traveling the rivers and canals up to the Great Lakes and then by rail to Chicago brought you to the brink of the “promised land” fast and safely, and hopefully without too many hardships. By the 1850s the western frontier had moved so far west that immigrants had to travel to Chicago and then go further west to reach new Homestead land, and this contributed to Quebec being more suitable for landing than Boston and New York. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, New York and Boston also welcomed many Norwegian immigrants, among these people from Singsås. Quebec gradually faded out as the major arrival point for people from Singsås, but people still made their journey through Quebec as late as the 1890s.¹²¹

Immigrant ships usually had to wait in the harbor for a day before the passengers could leave the ship. This was partly due to the authorities having problems processing the immigrants, but could also occur because of fears of epidemics among the immigrants on the ships. All ports had quarantine stations where ships with sick passengers on board had to wait until it was found to be safe for them to board. When they stepped onto American soil, immigrants were met by customs officers who inspected their bags and chests and checked whether or not the content were legal. Then they had to undergo a medical examination by doctors, and if they did not pass the medical test, they were quarantined or sent home. Not many people were sent home. Immigration was welcomed by the authorities until late in the nineteenth century

¹²⁰ www.norwayheritage.com Swiggum & Solem *Hunting Passenger Lists*, chapter 2 accessed March 26, 2007

¹²¹ www.digitalarkivet.no Database showing emigrants leaving Norway, accessed between February 1 and May 10, 2007

because of the need for labor in the cities and Homesteaders were needed to secure US expansion westwards.¹²²

When arriving on the harbor in Quebec or Boston immigrants had to endure meeting the agents who sold tickets on train and riverboats that carried the immigrants to the western frontier. Facing these agents was a necessity for the immigrants, because they sold precious tickets that would take them westwards into the frontier. The agents could be Norwegian immigrants themselves, who made their living selling tickets to fellow Norwegians arriving in the New World. Agents sometimes sold immigrants false tickets, or pretended that the ticket could be used for the entire journey when it really was just valid for a small part of the journey. Holand had nothing good to say about these agents, and according to him, they were swindlers who tried to trick hard working immigrants.¹²³ This seems to be another exaggeration from Holand, possibly to increase the perception of hardships encountered by the early immigrants from Norway to America. Surely all the agents were not swindlers, and even though some tricked the immigrants to buy false tickets, many of them possibly helped the immigrants in their quest to get to the western frontier.

Even though ports of entry for Norwegian immigrants to America varied over the years, they arrived in New York, Boston and Quebec during this whole period. The general rules for Norwegian immigrants applied for persons from Singsås too. When Quebec was the most important port of entry, immigrants from Singsås mainly landed there, but when New York reestablished itself as the major port towards the end of the century, the majority of the people from Singsås chose New York as the landing stage to the American continent. This partly depended on the routes the lines operated between Great Britain and America, and to some degree on the immigrants' final destination.

¹²² Norton, Mary Beth et. al. *A People and a Nation – A History of the United States* (New York, 2001), page 479, 521

¹²³ Holand, Hjalmar Rued *De Norske Settlementers Historie*, page 65-66

Routes from Quebec to the Midwest

During the 1850s and 60s Quebec was the dominant port of entry to the American continent, and the first immigrants from Singsås who appear in official records (1868) arrived in Quebec. In 1857, fourteen emigrants left Singsås, and it is very likely that they arrived in Quebec as most Norwegians during this period arrived there.



This map shows the route immigrants traveled from Quebec to the west in the 1850s.

Source: www.norwayheritage.com (with permission)

The route from Quebec to the west during the 1850s followed the same path. From Quebec immigrants traveled on a river boat down the St Lawrence River through Montreal and on to Lake Erie. Then they traveled by lake steamer across Lake Ontario and through the canals to Buffalo, USA. In Buffalo, they boarded a lake steamer to Detroit, and from Detroit went by rail to Chicago. After arrival in Chicago, immigrants were faced with the question of where they wanted to go. Some went almost due north on a boat to Milwaukee and then into Wisconsin, while others headed almost due west into Iowa and Minnesota. From Chicago or Milwaukee immigrants had to continue their journey on a covered wagon.

By the 1860s, the Grand Trunk Railway System (a merger of several Canadian railway companies) had built a line from Quebec to Sarnia on the US border. This line was finished by 1856.¹²⁴ From Sarnia, there was a ferry service across the St Clair River to Port Huron, Michigan. From Port Huron the railway stretched all the way to Chicago, and by the Civil War it had been extended from Chicago all the way to Prairie du Chen, Wisconsin.¹²⁵ In

¹²⁴ www.collectionscanada.ca Article: *The Grand Trunk Railway Company of Canada* accessed April 1, 2007

¹²⁵ www.mrha.com Article: *A Brief History of the Milwaukee Road* accessed April 15, 2007

Prairie du Chen immigrants purchased wagons and traveled the rest of the way to their settlements with covered wagons. These first settlements that we know included people from Singsås were in southeast Minnesota and northwest Iowa. The massive building of railroads continued, and by 1879 the lines had been extended into Brookings County, South Dakota, which was the most important Singsås settlement in the US at the time.¹²⁶ This meant that by the years of most heavy immigration to the US from Singsås (early 1880s), railroads had been extended deep into the western frontier, making the trip considerably easier than for the immigrants arriving only a decade or two earlier, who had to make the last part of the journey on covered wagons pulled by oxen.

Routes from New York/Boston to the Midwest

There were several ways to move westwards from New York. During the 1850s immigrants took a steamboat up the Hudson River to Albany. From Albany they traveled west on the Erie Canal, which was 3,600 kilometers long, and connected the Hudson River with Lake Erie near Buffalo, New York.¹²⁷ From there immigrants traveled on lake steamers to Detroit. The earliest immigrants then had to travel up north through Lake Huron, and then south again a little further west on Lake Michigan. After weeks or months they arrived in Milwaukee or Chicago, but their journey was still not over. In Chicago or Milwaukee they purchased covered wagons and oxen and headed further west into the western frontier to find land they could claim and start farming.

Railway sections were finished during these years between New York and the Midwest (and from Boston to the Midwest), and by the 1870s the New York Central Railroad, through their Water Level Route, operated between New York/Boston and Chicago. Some still took lake steamers across the Great Lakes, but trains transported more and more immigrants from the east coast ports and into the Upper Midwest.¹²⁸ The railroads and the massive expansion of it during the last half of the nineteenth century was very important to the immigrants, making the journey from the east coast to the settlements on the western frontier easier, safer and more convenient.

¹²⁶ Sandro, Gustav O *History of Brookings County* (South Dakota, 1936), page 15-16

¹²⁷ Holand, Hjalmar Rued *De Norske Settlementers Historie*, page 68

¹²⁸ Norton, Mary Beth et. al. *A People and a Nation*, page 476

Early Settlements

Unfortunately there is no evidence as to where the immigrants from Singsås who arrived in America earlier than 1867 settled after their arrival in the US. This is partly due to lack of official records in both Norway and the United States, and because of lack of source material in the US. The only records that have been found on the earliest emigrants leaving Singsås are in Church Books from Haltdalen, which shared a Congregation with Singsås at the time.

The earliest settlements that we know involved people from Singsås are Houston County, Minnesota, Hesper, which is in Winnishiek County, Iowa and Waterloo Ridge, which is in Allamakee County, Iowa. These were all settlements that had a large amount of Norwegians, and were established Norwegian settlements by the time people from Singsås arrived there in the late 1860s and early 70s.¹²⁹

In 1867 Jens Hansen Kjelden and his wife Berit Arntsdatter Kjelden arrived in Houston County, Minnesota. Nils Pedersen Winsnes and Hans Pedersen Digre accompanied them in 1869, and by Nils Eriksen Bogen in 1870. Ole Eriksen Bogen arrived in Hesper, which is in Winnishiek County, Iowa in 1868, and Ole Pedersen Troøien and his wife Guri Olsdatter Troøien joined him the following year. Nils Pedersen Troøien arrived to settle with his brother Ole in Hesper in 1871, and the following year their sister Kari Pedersdatter Troøien came to Hesper together with Nils' son Kornelius Nilsen Troøien and Nils' future wife Gjertru Ellefsdatter Busetgjerdet. These people are the earliest immigrants from Singsås whose first place of settlement in America is known. Even though all these immigrants did not originally settle in the same place, they did settle in counties that are in close proximity to each other.

The choice of settling in these adjoining counties seems to have been natural for the immigrants from Singsås. Wanting to settle in the rural Upper Midwest, the choice of these three places was probably driven by many factors. Immigrants from Singsås must have sought the security of fellow Norwegians when they arrived in America, and all these counties were established Norwegian settlements when the Singsåsbygg arrived. This probably made it

¹²⁹ Ulvestad, Martin *Normændene i Amerika – Deres Historie og Rekord Volume 1* (Minnesota, 1907), page 62, 76-77 and 97-98

easier to settle there and learn what their new homeland could give them. These counties were also close to Indian country, and the immigrants chose the safety of established settlements over traveling into more scarcely populated areas.

Remigration

The early settlers from Singsås, settling in rural areas in Minnesota and Iowa decided to travel further west. According to *The Immigrants' Trek* the immigrants from Singsås who came in the late 1860s and early 1870s after a few years found the land in their original settlements “already well populated”, and decided to move again, this time so far west that they could find good Homestead Act land they could claim as their own. This is another example of these first settlers’ desire and wish to find land they could claim and farm as their own, and continue the agrarian lifestyle that their ancestors had led for centuries. According to *The Immigrants' Trek* the settlers who went on this journey in covered wagons came from “near Trondhjem, Norway”.¹³⁰ This is a vague and inaccurate geographical description. From an article written by Cornelius N Troøien, which was published in *Trønderlagetets Årbok 1930/31* and is included in *Singsås Bygdebok*, we know that they all came from the rural districts Støren and Singsås, which are in Gauldalen, Sør-Trøndelag. The group counted 31 persons. Of these 12 were from Støren and 19 were from Singsås.¹³¹ These people had originally settled in different places in Minnesota and Iowa, as already mentioned before in this chapter.

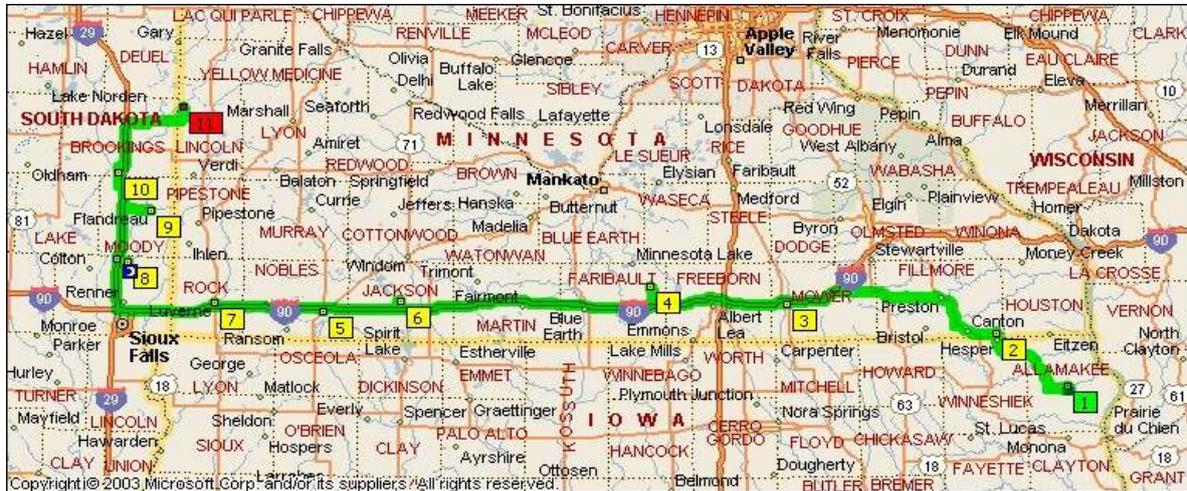
The immigrants planned the trip to the west together, and set a time and place to meet up and travel west together. The place where they met is where Mabel, Minnesota is now situated, and they started their journey May 15, 1873.¹³² The whole trip is described in detail in the book “*The Immigrants' Trek*,” but a few details are worth mentioning here. The immigrants traveled the whole way in covered wagons pulled by oxen, and several times they had to cross streams and rivers to continue their journey west. Repetitiously they were held up by wetland that slowed down the oxen or by dangerous crossings of waterways that crossed their path. There is no doubt that this journey was a hard one, and that the immigrants had to go through hardships and difficulties to complete their journey into Dakota Territory. Nevertheless, on

¹³⁰ Sandro, Gustav O *The Immigrants' Trek*, page 5-7

¹³¹ Rød, Per O et al. *Singsåsboka Vol I – Folk og samfunn* (Trondheim, 1966), page 579

¹³² Sandro, Gustav O *The Immigrants' Trek*, page 5-7

July 14, 1873, they arrived on the shores of Lake Hendricks, in what is now Brookings County, South Dakota.¹³³



The map shows the route taken by the immigrants from Allamakee County, Iowa to Lake Hendricks in Brookings County, South Dakota. Map courtesy of Jim Winsness (www.lrwma.com/hendricks)

The Immigrants' Trek is filled with glorified conceptions of these immigrants' hardships, and the style of writing is much the same that is used by Ulvestad and Holand a few decades earlier. Many stories are told to show that the immigrants were courageous people who were searching for a better life for themselves and their ancestors. The writer of this book, Gustav O Sandro, was presumably a first- or second-generation American who wanted to glorify his own ancestors and contribute to the reigning conception in the Norwegian-American community that their ancestors were courageous, heroic people who put themselves on the line for the sakes of themselves, their family and their descendants. Claims can be made that Norwegian-Americans did this in order to improve the reputation of their own ethnic group, and thereby improve their own situation. In addition, they were trying to underline their own role in the development of the western frontier.

The Immigrants' Trek also deals with the religious conceptions of these immigrants from Singsås and Støren. "In passing it might be mentioned that that these pioneers were thoroughly religious, a result of the deep religious sentiment that was common among the

¹³³ Sandro, Gustav O *The Immigrants' Trek*, page 7

masses of their home communities in Norway."¹³⁴ The claim that they were seriously religious people is mentioned "in passing," but from the tone and diction of the sentence it sounds important to the writer to get this message across. There were many religious and pietistic groupings in the US at the time, especially among the earliest immigrants to the country, and the assertion that these people were religious could have given them more credibility in the eyes of other immigrants and old-stock Americans. How deeply religious the masses in Norway were towards the end of the nineteenth century is highly debatable, and the argument of a deep religiousness among these immigrants is questionable at best, and could be claimed to be outwardly wrong. Norway was a Lutheran country during the nineteenth century, but the degree of religiousness that existed in the Norwegian population at the time is questionable and very hard to measure and varied significantly from region to region. Traditionally the inhabitants in western parts of Norway had more organized religious groupings and were considered to be more religious, while other parts of Norway were not that strict about religion. As already implied, this all seems to be an outward idealization of the pioneers and an attempt to portray this group of immigrants as role models for later generations of Norwegian-Americans.

Stepping-stone patterns

As immigration from Singsås to the US continued, new immigrants used the existing settlements as stepping-stones to move further west. The immigrants who moved along a stepping-stone pattern arrived in the US in the 1880s, 90s or after the turn of the century and most of them eventually settled in the Dakotas. There are many examples of immigrants that arrived in the US during this period who spent some years on their migration process moving westwards, eventually settling in the Dakotas. Jens Jensen Vinsnes and John Estensen Vinsnes immigrated to the US in 1905, and when they arrived in the US they stayed a couple of years in Wisconsin to pay off their debt to a lumber company that had paid their tickets from Norway to America.¹³⁵ They probably stayed there for a few years, and then possibly traveled through other Singsås settlements until they ended up farming the land on the plains of North Dakota in 1910.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Sandro, Gustav O *The Immigrants' Trek*, page 8

¹³⁵ According to descendant Jim Winsness, e-mail correspondence April 19, 2007

¹³⁶ Gjerde, Jon *From Peasants to Farmers – The migration from Balestrand, Norway, to the Upper Middle West* (New York, 1985) page 153-154 and Mauk, David C "Scandinavians", page 468

Hendricks, Minnesota

The settlement that had the highest amount of residents from Singsås around the turn of the century was Hendricks, Minnesota. The origin of this settlement was the colony centered around Lake Hendricks that was started by 31 immigrants from Gauldalen, Norway, of whom 19 were from Singsås. Lake Hendricks is right on the border between South Dakota and Minnesota. The settlement in Hendricks, Minnesota was a typical place for people from Singsås to settle. Most of the immigrants from Singsås who came to the US settled in rural areas like Hendricks, and the majority worked in agrarian occupations like farming or in the lumber industry. The areas of settlement were predominantly in the Upper Midwest, they commonly had Homestead land where the immigrants could settle, and they preferably had inhabitants from Singsås already living there or in settlements nearby.

In *Nordmændene in America – Deres Historie og Rekord, Volume 2* that was published in 1913, Martin Ulvestad listed 48 immigrants from Singsås who lived in different settlements in the US. This list is far from complete, however, because by then more than 600 persons had immigrated to America from Singsås, and Ulvestad's list includes only males and even some immigrants who did not emigrate from Singsås. Nevertheless, this is the most complete list of immigrants from Singsås that exists from this period. Of the 48 immigrants claimed to be from Singsås on the list, 37 of them are registered as living in Hendricks, Minnesota.¹³⁷ While showing that the settlement in Hendricks probably was the most important one around the turn of the century, this also shows that Ulvestad's records are far from complete. Hendricks, however, being the most distinct Singsåsbygg settlement around the turn of the century attracted many immigrants from Singsås. Some came to settle in Hendricks themselves, while others used it as a stepping-stone to move further west into the Dakotas. Many emigrants are stated with destinations close to Hendricks when leaving Norway, and some of these do not appear to have settled in Hendricks. They probably went through Hendricks, and then continuing their quest further west.

As already mentioned, the settlement in Hendricks was very important because 19 of the original 31 settlers of the Hendricks settlement were from Singsås, Norway. The other twelve

¹³⁷ Ulvestad, Martin *Normændene i Amerika – Deres Historie og Rekord, Volume 2* (Minnesota, 1913), page 745

were from the adjoining rural district Støren. After these original settlers several others from Singsås followed in their tracks, but in the official Norwegian Records only two persons stated Hendricks as their final destination. There could be many reasons for this. When stating their destinations to the Norwegian officers emigrants stated their intended port of entry to America (Quebec, New York or Boston) or the end of their journey by public transportation (i.e. boats or trains), or they could make the journey as a chain migration stopping in other settlements while working their way west in the US. However, several immigrants that had stated other destinations in the US appear on Ulvestad's list as living in Hendricks; for example Peder Osøien (stated destination: Decorah, Iowa) and Peder Digre (stated destination: Marshall, Minnesota). There can be many explanations for this. The immigrants could have traveled through these places on their way to Hendricks. A more likely explanation, however, is that they traveled to these places to visit friends and/or relatives who had already settled there, and then traveled further west when they noticed that all the good farm land was already taken.

Even more interesting is the fact that several of the immigrants from Singsås who arrived in America before 1873 are stated as living in Hendricks by the time Ulvestad wrote his list. Among these were Lars Ingebrigtsen Fjeseth, who left Singsås in 1867, John Eriksen Hindøen and Nils Nilsen Hinsverk, who both left Singsås in 1869.¹³⁸ This proves that several immigrants from Singsås who traveled to America settled somewhere in the west and then traveled further west to acquire better land a few years later. This puts these immigrants into a chain migration pattern similar to many other Norwegian immigrant groups, for example immigrants from Balestrand as shown by Jon Gjerde.¹³⁹

When immigrants from Singsås settled in the US they settled in groups, staying close to family and friends. Hendricks, Minnesota is an excellent example of this, as both the nineteen original settlers and the people from Singsås who came later to settle there settled close to each other. The picture shown below is an excellent proof of the custom immigrants from Singsås had of building their farms in close proximity to one another. This shows that family and friends were important to this people, not only during their travel across the Atlantic, but just as much after arriving in the New World.

¹³⁸ www.digitalarkivet.no Database showing emigrants leaving Norway, accessed between February 1 and May 10, 2007

¹³⁹ Gjerde, Jon *From Peasants to Farmers*, page 131-132



The picture shows the Kosberg, Winsness and Fjeseth farms in Hendricks, Minnesota. Photograph courtesy of Jim Winsness/Lorencia Scott.

When one looks at the selected part of the Hendricks Plat Map from 1897 shown below, one can see that people settled close to friends and family. Names of immigrants from Singsås are clustered together, and family members are often found in adjoining homesteads. The following names are recognized as belonging to immigrants from Singsås: Troøien, Digre, Digrehagen, Kirkvold, Kjelden, Bogen, Forseth, Reppe and Winsnes. However, many of the homesteaders are registered without their family names from Norway, which makes it more difficult to prove whether they really were from Singsås or from another part of Norway. Another point to notice is the appearance of immigrants from Singsås on the Plat Map who are not Ulvestad's list, such as Ellef J Reppe and A P Winsness, proving that Ulvestad's list does not offer a complete picture of all immigrants from Singsås who had settled in Hendricks by the time the list was written.



1897 Plat Map of the settlement in Hendricks, Minnesota

In Hendricks the immigrants from Singsås and Støren started a congregation, which was founded October 26, 1874, and it was called Singsås Lutheran Congregation because people from Singsås were a majority of the population. This congregation built its first church in 1884, and later built one more.¹⁴⁰ On February 26, 1876, the settlement established their own Post Office called Prairie Farm, and Hans Pedersen Digre was elected postmaster. By 1877 the immigrants had founded their own Public County School District, and in 1879 the first school term was held in a little schoolhouse the immigrants had erected themselves.¹⁴¹ From this we see that people from Singsås who arrived in Hendricks transplanted the community

¹⁴⁰ Rød, Per O et. al. *Singsåsboka Vol 1*, page 592

¹⁴¹ Sandro, Gustav O *The Immigrants' Trek*, page 36

from their old rural district back in Norway, and instigated the same institutions when arriving in the New World.

Leaving a Legacy

What kind of legacy has the immigrants from Singsås left in the US? Did they leave anything for their ancestors to help them identify themselves as Americans of Norwegian descent, often labeled as Norwegian-Americans? Immigrants from Singsås to the US settled almost exclusively in the Midwest, and the vast majority started working as farmers after their arrival in the New World. This was a continuance of the life led by their ancestors in Norway, and can be seen as the immigrants way of continuing a life they knew and passing on a long tradition of farming the land to their descendants. This also indicates that many features of the experience of immigrants from Singsås well suit models of Norwegian migrants, which portray them as being involved in rural-to-rural migration. The migrants from Singsås studied here fit perfectly into these models. They left a relatively small (as regards to population), rural district to make a journey across the Atlantic Ocean to create a new life for themselves and their families in America. After their arrival in the US the immigrants settled mainly in rural, agricultural areas, and then concentrated their settlement in Hendricks, Minnesota, through processes of remigration inside the Upper Midwest.

People from Singsås were involved in transplanting the major institutions of their communities, as shown earlier with the Hendricks settlement in Minnesota. This transplantation involved both bringing an old-fashioned Norwegian farming culture and Norwegian cultural and ethical values, but also institutions which the immigrants themselves had experienced in Norway such as a Post Office, a congregation and their own district school. By doing this the immigrants left a legacy of Norwegian values and a heritage for their descendants to bring into to their lives as second- and third-generation Americans.

Even though the immigrants in Hendricks started their own congregation and brought a Lutheran Minister to their settlement, there is no evidence that these people were very pietistic people. In *The Immigrants' Trek* the immigrants are several times referred to as devoted Christians, but this is the only "proof" of an overly religious sentiment among these immigrants. Judging with contemporary eyes, the author concludes that these immigrants

seem to have been very eager to establish a community and institutions from their home community in Norway. One of the most important institutions in nineteenth-century Norway was the church, but the significance of the church was just as much social as it was religious. The same point seems to have applied to the settlements in America that involved people from Singsås. The church was an important institution to establish to confirm themselves as Lutherans, but equally important to create the institution they knew from Norway. An example of the congregation in Hendricks being important for its social value as well as for its religious value is that during the same week as the congregation was founded in October 1874 Hans Pedersen Digre and Kari Pedersdatter Troøien got married there.

Conclusion

Immigrants from Singsås arrived in America filled with hopes and dreams of a better life. The majority wanted to find a piece of land they could claim as their own. Their search for this brought them to the Upper Midwest, where they commonly settled in established Norwegian settlements. Through remigration and stepping-stone patterns immigrants from Singsås spread throughout northern Iowa, the south and western Minnesota and into the Dakotas, and many must have fulfilled their dreams of acquiring and create a new future for themselves and their kin. Early accounts of these immigrants have probably contributed to a somewhat idealized image of them. The immigrants were rather common people who traveled to an unknown continent in search of a new life, and in doing so had to endure some hardships and tough moments.

The remigration and stepping-stone patterns the Singsåsbygg used when they settled in the United States put them in a tradition of other Norwegian immigrants settling with similar patterns, as shown by Gjerde¹⁴² and Mauk.¹⁴³ Even though Singsås and Balestrand are districts that are far away from each other in Norway, immigrants moved among similar patterns. They possibly brought with them a similar culture to the United States. When settling in the New World they brought family values that made them stick together and help each other, and at the same time help and assist the people arriving later. This shows that they brought with

¹⁴² Gjerde, Jon *From Peasants to Farmers*, page 131-132

¹⁴³ Mauk, David C “*Scandinavians*”, page 468

them traditional values from rural parts of Norway, such as helping and assisting your friends and relatives to get by and have a good life.

5 Summary and General Conclusion

The factors that made people leave varied greatly, and many scholars have tried to find common factors that made people leave. Their explanations have varied from pointing to direct economic causes to more diverse explanations of religious persecution and adventurous spirits. A common ground is that most scholars identify and point to the fact that each emigrant had individual and personal reasons for leaving.

People from Singsås left for America in huge numbers, and throughout the period of this study emigration was relatively intense, even though there were annual variations. Individual reasons differed for people from Singsås as they did for the rest of Norway, but there were patterns. Norwegian scholars, like Nils Olav Østrem, argue that economy was not the only important factor that made people leave. *“The individuals who left were never among the poorest in the poor country (Norway).”*¹⁴⁴ The people who were at the bottom of the social hierarchy, it is claimed by some, did not have the economic or personal resources to make the leap from Norway to America. Arguments against economy often point to high ticket prices and the fact that people who left had to have distinguished personal traits and resources that made them leave.

The data from Singsås reveals that the people highest in the social and economic hierarchy stayed. They stayed to take over farms or continue living in their home country in Norway. These persons had relatively secure economic futures, commonly they were to take over a farm or they were the sons and daughters of well-to-do farmers with a family in their back who could support them both socially and financially. On the other hand, there is nothing that proves that the poorest necessarily had to stay and that they were prevented from leaving. Evidence rather supports the opposite. Especially from the mid 1870s, there seems to be nothing preventing almost anyone from acquiring a ticket and travel across the Atlantic to the New World. People sold everything they owned and scraped together money for tickets for themselves and their family, or they left on pre-paid tickets. Naturally, they must have had the urge and the desire of leaving and starting a new life somewhere else, but information supports that many of the persons who were at the bottom of the economic and social ladder

¹⁴⁴ Østrem, Nils Olav ”Myten om Amerika” in Daatland, Dan Dyrli & Aarek, Hans Eirik *Migrasjon som kultur – Artikkelsamling* (Rogaland, 2003), page 46

acquired tickets and left their native Norway to start over in America. Emigrants from Singsås included cotters, cotter's children, servants, tenants (someone who rented a room on a farm, and worked for food and board, called *innerst or inderst*) and at least one family evicted from their home.

Changes in agriculture in the last half of the nineteenth century affected Singsås in a deep and profound way, and when leaving Singsås during this period, the emigrants normally chose America over the closest city, which was Trondheim. The option of migrating to Trondheim was commonly ignored or rejected by the ones migrating from Singsås. This seems strange, because even before the railway between Singsås and Trondheim was opened in 1877, Trondheim was not more than hours away, and migrating or going to the city to get a job was possible. However, the fact that this option was dismissed could be due to a lack of faith in themselves and their ability to perform new and unfamiliar tasks or jobs. They opted to travel to America instead, and most of the ones that did chose to travel to the rural Upper Midwest. This seems to be driven by a desire to farm land and/or continue in agrarian occupations such as farming or timberwork. Driven by their want for land and their desire to get a farm where they could make a life for themselves and their family, they embarked on a long journey to America. These emigrants left Norway during a period when intense romantic nationalism swept the country, and writers such as Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson idealized life on the Norwegian countryside. Affected by these romanticized views of life on the countryside farming the land, emigrants from Singsås opted for America over other choices, such as Trondheim.

Family migration can also have been induced by the desire to continue a life in a rural area. Especially the nuclear family had been important on farms, and in the self-sufficient farming culture that had existed in Norway for centuries. All this evidence suggests that the emigrants who left Singsås did this to preserve their way of life. They traveled with their friends and family and chose America over the city, so that they could continue the life they and their ancestors had lived for ages. Maybe they were adventurous, open-minded people, but evidence point to the fact that they made the leap across the Atlantic to resist the forces of change that were catching up with them in Norway.

When evaluating the effect of and the consequences of the migration from Norway to America one must never underestimate the factor of improved transportations and the broadened perspective of the world people got during the nineteenth century. Even though the

American continent had been discovered several centuries earlier, the nineteenth century, with its improved ships and railways and rapidly expanding postal system, brought this continent closer and more accessible to Europeans than it had ever been before. Not only could people travel to America in a relatively short time, but they could communicate with the ones who they left behind too. For the emigrants from Singsås the construction of the railway and the finishing of this in 1877 probably was one the most important factors for the high rate of emigration from Singsås to America in the late 1870s and 1880s. This made it easier to leave, and it undoubtedly contributed to the widespread emigration Singsås experienced during this era.

Driven by a motivation to improve the lives of themselves and their family, people from Singsås went across the Atlantic Ocean to the American Upper Midwest between 1850 and 1905. Many of them did just that, and their ancestors are now spread across the entire continent, continuing the legacy of their Norwegian ancestors.

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