

From Tromsø to Lake Lillian in 155 Years



In 20 minutes by Gary Gauer
July 19, 2019

Introduction to my talk at the Anders Andersen Reunion

- My name is Gary Gauer. I lived here in Lake Lillian until graduation in 1957 from Bird Island high school
- This 20-minute presentation is about connections to places and times. Mostly about Tromsø Norway and Lake Lillian Minnesota over 155 years. That allows less than 8 years per minute. Some detail will be left out.
- My great great grandfather Larsved Olaf Mattson was one of the first Swedes to come here in 1869 from Lake Moje near Gagnef in the area of Dalarna. His daughter Anna Olson married my great grandfather John Erickson from the same area.
- Most of my relatives were farmers except for my dad Otto who worked as a salesman for the Ford dealership. We lived here in town and I am the oldest of 5 boys. We were farm kids on weekends and during the summers when we helped relatives or nearby farmers.

My Website is **gauer001.net**

Lake Lillian History with Stories and Photos of a small rural town in Kandiyohi County Minnesota

Revised March 11 2019

This site began in 2002 to advertise for my Gauer Family Reunion and has evolved over time to include pioneer articles of interest to others with roots in Lake Lillian. Recent focus has evolved to include articles of My Mothers family with roots in Tromsø Norway and Dalarna Sweden.

Most of the early settlers near Lake Lillian were from Norway and Sweden. The first Norwegians from Tromsø, Norway arrived in 1864. Swedish settlers came from Gagnef, Dalarna, Sweden starting in 1869.

Material is added to this site from time to time. The site contains at least 81 stories or albums to explore.

Check for recent additions on the whats new / notes log. Watch for more pioneer stories soon.

- History of Lake Lillian area with over 80 articles



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web

- More recent postings to my site have focused on some of the pioneer settlers from near Tromso in Norway and Gagnef in Sweden.
- Some of the articles are mine. Many are posted as authored by others with Lake Lillian roots. Contributors include Inger Giaever of Tromsø and LaVonne Bomsta Hookom, Arlan Johnson, and Susan Granlund. More family story contributions are welcome and can be uploaded as time permits.
- The site started in 2002 when I began to use it for my Gauer Family Reunion and post family stories and photos from relatives.
- I wanted to learn more about the life of my Swiss and German grandparents Mat and Lena Gauer who died in East Lake Lillian 16 years before I was born. Some information of East Lake Lillian residents was found in the old newspapers from the nearby towns Atwater, Bird Island and Willmar.
- Many hours went into that effort at the Minnesota History Society Library in St Paul which has microfilm rolls of all the newspapers in Minnesota.
- **Volunteer country correspondents** submitted the neighborhood news on a sporadic basis. I selected items mostly about relatives and families that I knew and entered them into a place on my site called Old Local News.
- The following caught my eye: September 8 1916 ARP / East West LL
- A few of the nearest neighbors helped Mrs A H Vick celebrate her birthday last Thursday and it is needless to say that the old women enjoyed themselves immensely over their coffee and Lefse.

Tromsø Connections

- I attended the 2014 Anders Andersen reunion in Tromsø.
- My wife, Grace, and I found the Ludvik Sebulonsen house along the Balsfjord at Indre Andersdal (south of Tromsø) where my grandmother Halfrida lived as a young girl.
- Halfrida left Andersdal in 1900 at the age of 13.
- Frida married August Erickson in 1904, a Swede born here in Lake Lillian in 1877. She died in 1960 without the opportunity to re-visit her homeland.



I must confess that I am not a descendant of Anders Anderson. I do however have an affinity for this reunion group because 2 of Frida's sisters were married to Hanson brothers whose father was Hans Andersen, 14th child of Anders Anderson

Tromsø



2014
Reunion
Hotel

About Tromsø

- Tromsø is in northern Norway, near the polar sea, above the Arctic Circle and warmed by the Gulf Stream. The city of Tromsø covers an Island in the midst of fjords and mountains. It has a population over 60000 and has been called the Paris of the North and Gateway to the Arctic because it is the service center and largest shopping, shipping and tourist port in Northern Norway. The sea provides fish. North Energy and others are involved with oil and gas drilling platforms in the Barents Sea. It has museums, a university and an airport. It does not have a railroad. It has the Hurtigruten ship line that stops twice every day to bring goods and tourists.
- The land along the fjords varies from very steep mountains to areas with narrow fields along foothills where a road can exist. Picture a string of small subsistence farms that stretched along the shore with a house, some sheds and a small barn to house a few livestock. Often in the early days, the family income was augmented by jobs for the men on the sea as a fisherman or a sailor. And the wives and children tended the gardens and the livestock.
- See my website for more narration and photos of the Tromsø area in 2014.

Balsfjord is just south of Tromsø

1856 Kirke

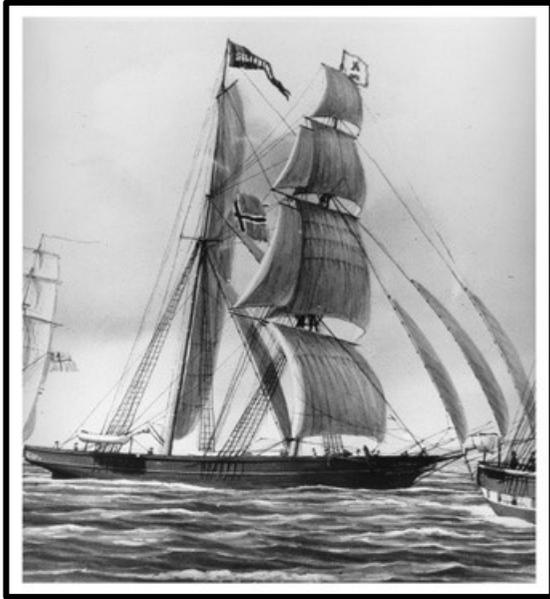


Tromsø emigrants along the Balsfjord left a settled area with a new church at Tennes

About Balsfjord

- A larger farming community called Balsfjord is between the Malangen fjord and the Balsfjord where the open and rolling land is more suited for dairy farms. The Tine dairy factory at Storsteinnes is one of the largest producers of the Norwegian brown cheese (*brunost*). They also make their own brand of cheese, called Balsfjord, from goat's [milk](#).
- Boats were used as regular transportation to Tromsø and along the fjords. Now there are ferries, bridges and tunnels that allow some people to live out along the Fjords and drive Fords to jobs or services in the Island city of Tromsø.

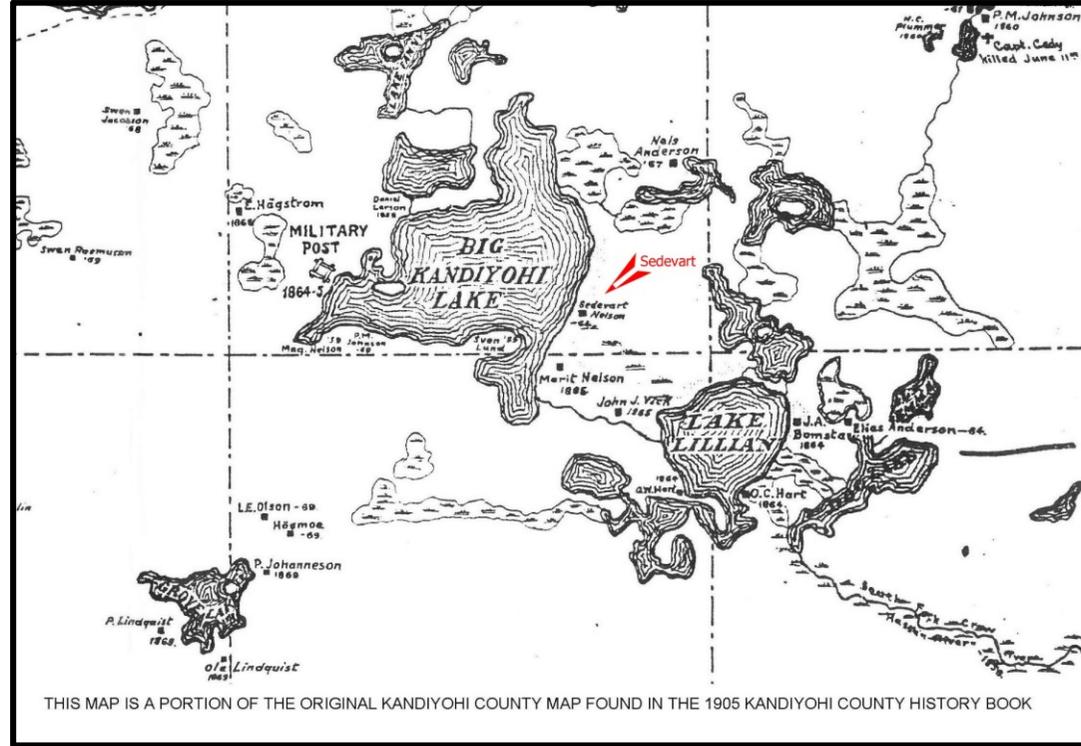
Sleipner sailed from Norway to Chicago in 1862 (and the following 3 years)



a group of emigrants from Tromsø were led by Reverend J A J Bomstad to seek and settle on open homestead land. They sailed to Chicago and got as far as a settled area near the Minnesota River at St Peter, Minnesota They were held up there in August 1862 because of the Indian uprising and had to wait until it was safer to move on to the frontier in 1864.

Lake Lillian was the area of

- the townships of (West) Lake Lillian, East Lake Lillian and parts of Fahlun and Lake Elizabeth



Hardship on the frontier in Lake Lillian

- Elias was 10th child of Anders Anderson and was a friend of J A J Bomstad
- Elias and Beata Anderson with seven children settled in East LL section 5 in 1864
- Next slide is based on an article published in 1939 detailing a fire in the fall of 1864 and construction of temporary shelter in a haystack while a log cabin was being built
- Hardship and exposure was too much for Beata, who became ill and never recovered. She died from malnutrition and pneumonia in 1865. She was the first pioneer woman to die in this community
- Elias died at age 49 from pneumonia in 1873 after a 3-day blizzard and a struggle to care for the oxen

Saturday, June 17, 1939

The Old Timers . . . by EBEN E. LAWSON



From : Willmar daily tribune

Home on the Lake Lillian Prairie

- Elias Andersen (or Anderson) rented a farm in Nicollet County after his 1863 arrival, but in the summer of 1864, he selected land in Section 5 of East Lake Lillian Township, Kandiyohi County. He put up some hay on his new property, returned to Nicollet County to thresh grain on the rented farm, and then brought his family to East Lake Lillian to temporarily reside in a 10 x 12 foot abandoned shack. One fall morning the shack caught fire and burned to the ground, leaving the family on the wild prairie with only the clothing and bedding they managed to save from the fire.
- Elias and his older sons laid some rails across two haystacks and made a roof of hay or dry grass. They somehow closed the ends and made a 'house' which the family used until late fall or early winter when a log house was completed. The cook stove was still functional, so meals were cooked outside. A sack of flour had been rescued from the burned cabin and was used for making bread that had a unique scorched taste. Daughter, Adriana told about hunting in the early fall snow for knives and spoons that lay in the ashes of the burned shack. The temperature dropped to -20° F on December 8 and was quickly followed by 10 inches of snow.

Create a Community

- Norwegians settled mostly north and east of our Lake Lillian starting in 1864
- The railroad came through to Atwater and Willmar in 1869 and The Swedes began to settle on more open land mostly west and south of Lake Lillian
- Farmers were assessed time and or money to build roads mostly along the square mile grid. The farmers planted trees around their prairie homesteads for windbreaks with the aid of the government Timber act.
- Schools came first. One room schools were scattered in the country as needed
- The second railroad came to Bird Island in 1878
- Churches were established initially by meeting in homes and schools
- The first Church buildings happened in 1886 (22 years after the first settlers from Tromsø)

“Butter” Towns came and went.

Thorpe was 2 miles east of county 8 on state highway #7
and just south of Hans Pete Hanson’s place

From 1896 to 1923



butter towns

- The largest butter town nearby was "old" **Thorpe**.
- Creameries were being established by 1893. They were often the catalyst for a small general store, a blacksmith, a feed store or the like to cluster around.
- The first nearby “butter town” was at the southwest shore of Lake Lillian on the hill just north of the Andrew Anderson place. The creamery burned in 1900 and led to the loss of the remaining businesses at that site.
- After that another creamery cluster started SW of LL on the west side of section 24. It lasted until the Lake Lillian village came to be in 1923.

the LAKE LILLIAN
TOWNSITE was
Born when the
LUCE LINE
RAILROAD came
In 1923

- This photo of the depot station was sometime in the 1930s
- The last train came through in 1967



Rapid Growth

- The railroad came to LL 59 years after our first Norwegian settlers came to the area
- The depot location is where the fire department building is now.
- The new village of LL grew rapidly for the first 40 years as a business center for the surrounding farm townships. There were jobs and opportunities for individuals and families in town

Hans C Petterson had a blacksmith shop in Thorpe.



August 3, 1923 ARP / ELL

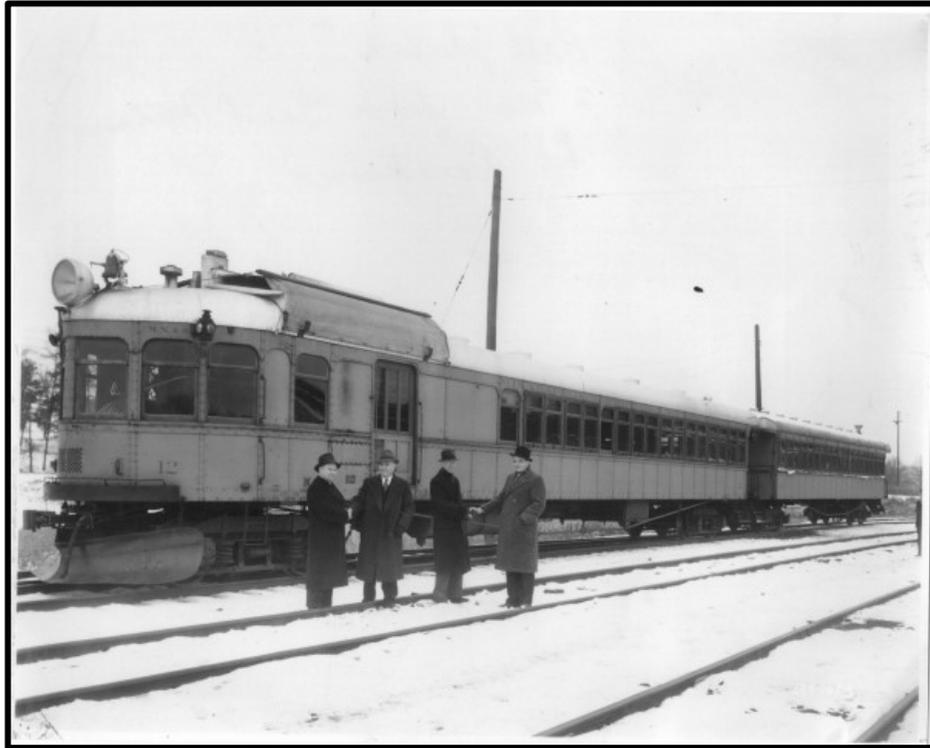
H. C. Petterson, the Thorpe black smith,
had his house moved last week to the
new town of Lake Lillian.

Hans Petterson Family

- Hans was important to LL History. His mother Hanna was the first born of Hans Anderson. Hans started as a blacksmith and became an electrician.
- Hans and Olga Petterson had 8 children. The family members found job opportunities and 6 of them settled in the expanding town of LL.
- Art operated a tank truck for farm delivery of oil and fuel. Clarence became the blacksmith. Kenneth was a mechanic. Hazel married Carl Erickson and they operated a restaurant, Vany married Stansie Swenson who graded the township gravel roads with his Caterpillar grader. Harvey continued the electrical and plumbing contracting business. His son Lowell Petterson, grandson of Hans, operates the business after Harvey died.
- Hans wired the Leo Gauer farm house on section 15 East LL in December of 1936 just in time to light the Christmas tree for 3 of my older cousins to enjoy

The Luce Line

- The first Passenger train cars had gasoline engine powered generators for its electric traction motors.
- Passenger service was discontinued in 1947.
- Freight trains used Steam locomotives through the 1940's and diesel electric units after that.



Railroad

- Box cars were used in those days to bring lumber and smaller shipments by Railway Express.
- Grain was shipped in box cars from the country elevators using "Grain doors" made of boards to span the sliding side door openings. Gondola cars brought coal for heating.
- The railroad had a section crew for track repair and had a depot with an active railway express service in the 40's. Steam locomotives were used and there was a wooden water tower along the south side of the tracks near where the elevator is now.

Lake Lillian at its peak in the 1950's

Looking North



Main street full

- The main street was full of businesses without the gaps that you see today. Erickson's Store burned in 1971. The Ford Garage burned in 2017.
- The town of 300 people served as the main store for at least 700 more from the surrounding area. Town businesses in the '50s included 2 dealerships offering cars, trucks, tractor, and implements. The farmers had creamery, elevator, feed, fertilizer and produce businesses. Others along the main street were The Lake Lillian Crier newspaper, The First State Bank, a post office, a barbershop, a blacksmith, 3 gas service stations, a car body shop, a lumber yard, 2 hardware stores, 2 cafes and a tavern. A butcher shop had some groceries and 2 general stores had groceries, shoes and overalls. The town had a lighted baseball diamond and a double A baseball team and a movie theater with movable seats to allow roller-skating. Other services included a plumbing and electrical contractor and bulk truck operators for gas delivery and livestock hauling

Looking south



The Elevator was built in 1952

Near the peak

- A municipal water tower and system was installed in 1950. Before that every house in town still had an outhouse along the alley.

Was near the peak of its development and service to the agricultural community

- It has been declining for the last 56 years as the surrounding farms have grown larger. The remaining people on the land are fewer and travel to larger communities for goods and services.

Oxen on Parade 1964 at 100 years

John L. Hanson 1898-2001 and Bill Peterson



100 years

- Photo shows John L Hanson, 1898- 2001. His brother, James, 1896-1982 built the yoke and wagon and trained the oxen.
- First Lutheran was remodeled in 1960 as shown
- Raining

Ford Garage

- Oct 1962
- Otto Gauer
at left
- Bill Johnson
at far right
- The
business
closed in
1987



Tractors

1954 Ford with overhead valve engine and more power after the famous Ford 8N



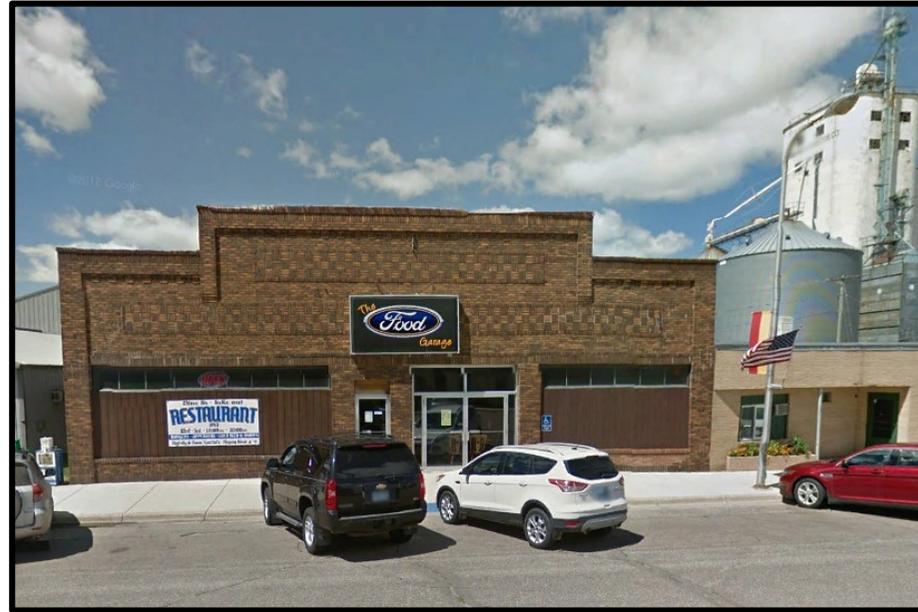
1953 John Deere G last of the letter series



Progress

- So, this agricultural community has seen the progress from working the land with Oxen and walking plows. Next came horses powered by hay and oats to pull wagons, sulky plows and other implements with seats.
- Eventually steam engines and gas or fuel powered tractors were used to power threshing machines. Row crop tractors came in the 30's. The last Draft horses went away after WWII when tractor production resumed.
- John Deere introduced its new generation models with 4- and 6-cylinder engines in 1960 as farmers needed more power than 2-cylinder designs could produce.

Food Garage 2010 to 2017



Destroyed by fire Sept 11 2017

Change

- The small diversified family farms of my youth had livestock, Fences for pastures, and used crop rotation to grow oats, alfalfa, corn and soy beans.
- Today most remaining agri-business farms are 9 times larger and specialized.
- Many with larger cash crop lands have no fences, barns or silos. Some operations have huge barns to confine large numbers of turkeys or other livestock.
- Farming methods have changed with chemical weed control, tailored application of fertilizers, and with Hybrid seed for narrow rows.
- Corn pickers were replaced by combines with corn heads. Large tractors with air-conditioned cabs are guided and auto steered by GPS.

Lake Lillian Today

The fire department has a nice building that sits on the site of the old depot.

A community building is used for meetings and reunions by reservation.

The community has a library, publishes a monthly newsletter supports a Fun Days Celebration every year in August.



Today

- The United Lutheran Church remains active after 4 rural churches and 2 others in town have closed.
- Elementary school children are now bussed to the old high school building in Bird Island and the High school kids to Olivia
- The town survives today with a smaller population in town and fewer businesses, including a convenience store, a bar, the bank, insurance, trucking etc.
- We have seen the changes and We wonder what the future will be
- Lake Lillian has people that care about and support this community.

Review and Wrap

So now we have reviewed Lake Lillian, Minnesota over 155 years in about 20 minutes and left out a lot of detail.

See more detail starting with the pioneer settlers on the website.

gauer001.net