

Excerpt from "ENDRE CHRISTENSON, AND OTHERS" by Nehemias Tjernagel:

Endre was born in the year 1834 at Tjernagel, district of Sveen, Norway. He lived with his parents till he reached the age of confirmation, when he was placed in the home of his uncle, Haldor Tjernagel. As he was rather awkward and bashful he disliked the change for fear of being called upon to appear in the role of reader at the religious gatherings often held there. Having at this time a chance to earn a whole dollar by joining a fishing excursion, he snapped at the opportunity and left his uncle.

Through with this venture, he collected the dollar, donned his best clothes, packed his kit, and surreptitiously left the paternal home of the fishing hamlet, Haugesund, seventeen miles distant. Arrived there he sought the village store which he found filled to overflowing with fisherman and fellows about town, many of whom were coarse and vulgar. The establishment was unkempt and uninviting. He at once grew homesick and, hastily departing, walked into the darkness of night with a lump in his throat and nowhere to go.

As he approached a light near the wharf he found himself peering through the window of a sailor's house. He knocked with some trepidation, was admitted, and found himself in the home of a relative of the noted evangelist, Hans Nielson Hauge. He was made welcome for the night, and the next morning was berthed aboard the host's and brother's fishing smack loaded with herring for Stavanger.

Endre was persuaded by a large, muscular youth who was working his passage to lend him his dollar, but when he chanced to come upon him tying his bundle to skip ashore, it occurred to our friend that had seen the last of his money, forsoot, he recovered it there and then. Upon demanding it he was blithely told that he need not worry as he would soon receive it. Endre wanted it on the spot. "Nix," said the other, whereupon Endre grabbed him by the neck, flung him to the floor and sat upon him. At this juncture the Captain appeared. Our hero grew unspeakably alarmed, fearing that his action might lead to arrest. Hearing the reason for the altercation, the Captain sided with Endre, and the rascal received his deserts and Endre his silver.

Wishing to become a sailor, he sought the office of the Sea Commissioner to obtain the papers required for such a vocation. Unused to office etiquette he did not knock, but unannounced entered by mistake an apartment occupied by a couple of spinsters who set up a lusty screaming at the sight of the rather ungainly looking

visitor who had so unexpectedly dropped in on them. He was ejected from the room without ceremony and heard the door-lock click behind him, whereupon, looking furtively about, he became aware of a pair of keen eyes regarding him fixedly through a slit in the next door. He blurted out his errand, the door swung open, and he was invited to remove his hat and enter. He was granted his seat forthwith and he emerged from the office feeling that he was of some importance in the world.

After a few weeks' experience in sailing, which he found to be minus poetry and decidedly prosaic, he abandoned the ship and returned home to finish his work in the confirmation class. Sad to say, many a lesson went unlearned; and not a few in the large classes those days succeeded in outwitting the overworked minister and slipped through to confirmation mostly on appearances. Fortunately a considerable number took the work seriously and it became a blessed influence in their subsequent lives.

After confirmation, considering himself quite as grown up as anybody, he determined to cast his fortunes with the sea once more. He looked for a position commensurate with his new-found dignity, but finally accepted the only post available, that of cook and dishwasher, the meanest job on board. He experienced the time-honored onus which attaches to this office and became the butt of jokes, spite and ill humor which an unwritten law decreed he must bear uncomplainingly. Once on a trip to Gothenburg, while the ship was careening madly in a storm, he was flung in a heap while carrying some victuals and received a broadside of blows from the Captain as his portion. He was nagged and browbeaten, cursed and cuffed as a daily diversion by mischievous shipmates. Such was the life of the novice at sea in those days.

Our friend relates that while the ship tarried at Gothenburg plenty of thieves infested the wharves, and during his shift he kept in agony of apprehension lest they outwit him and make away with the property he had been set to guard. Pretty women with beautiful silken head-dresses would hover near with saucy lips and seductive smiles and beg him to take their dainty 'kerchiefs in exchange for hemp rope-ends, which they unraveled and so led at a good profit to ship-builders.

Through with his novitiate, Endre gained employment aboard the sloop Nesha sailing from Bommel Island off the eastern (Nehemias likely meant to say "western") coast of Norway near Tjernagel. What he relates of his connection with this vessel is of special interest owing to two characters introduced here and

designated as the strong men of western Norway, Rejanes of Stavanger and Store Per (Big Pete) of Tjernagel.

We find Endre at the age of seventeen, year 1851 (actually 1852), quitting the sea as a sailor and embarking as an immigrant on a sail-ship bound for the United States. he came in the company of his half-brother, Jokum Christenson and Peder Larson, (Store Per), both newly married. There were about fifty others in the party from the same district, Sveen, whose destination was this country. The ocean voyage lasted seven weeks. Arriving in New York moneyless, Endre considered taking service on a boat bound for South America, but was induced by Per and his wife (the latter was Endre's half-sister and the former his cousin) to accept fare-money from them and come west in their company.

A small steamer brought them from their ship in New York to Albany. From this place they were taken by canal-boat to Buffalo and hence by steamboat to Green Bay, Wisconsin. A river steamer carried them a distance up the Winnebago river in the direction of Waupaca. But their passage was more or less impeded by logs spanning the river. Finding, finally, that further progress was impossible, the steamer was turned downstream and the passengers had no choice but to unload their belongings on the river-bank and make themselves at home as best they might in the strange surroundings. With the exception of Jokum, who knew a few words of English, all were unfamiliar with the language of the country. Not far from the river they discovered a hut on a hill-top where lived a Frenchman and his two squaws, but he knew no more English than they, and no Norwegian at all; hence there was little or nothing to be learned from him. Three of the party Jokum, Mr. Nygaard and Mr. Leite, were appointed as scouts to hunt for civilization and obtain help. Peder Christenson, Endre's half-brother, and Michael Lie, whose wife was Endre's cousin, and come to these parts considerably in advance of the others and were supposed to be located somewhere in this section. The new immigrants hoped to get their aid to transport their families and belongings to a more promising place. Store Per was left in charge of the camp.

Forsaken thus in the wildwoods, the little colony suffered both apprehension and loneliness, to which was added alarm when a large band of Indians arriving in canoes after dark landed and surrounded them. The braves drew nigh quietly and watchfully, seemingly torn between timidity and curiosity concerning these strange pale-faces who had invaded their haunts. Our friends were greatly dismayed, but agreed they must not show fear. Per remained calm, even smiled in friendly fashion as the Indians ventured near them. They were in full war regalia, and it is not to be wondered at if some of the more timid became uneasy at their approach.

Per bethought himself of his violin, drew it forth and played a few simple melodies. The war-like host regarded the instrument with grave scrutiny, upon which the women importuned the player to hide it from sight as the warriors might think it a cursed thing with which to invoke evil upon them. But nothing happened except that the Indians set to work to make fires, fetched the carcass of a deer and roasted its meat impaled on the ends of stout sticks. The delicious odor from the roasted venison was most tempting, but none dared ask for a helping. The uncommunicative visitors finally left as quickly as they had come, but reappeared the next night. They continued their silence, but their attitude bespoke a keen alertness; nothing that transpired escaped their attention. The tense, tiring situation caused the women and children to huddle together on their travelers' chests with wearied hopelessness. Per, however, continued serene as before, and drew more tune-magic from his stringed talisman, which breathed of brotherly love and bespoke peace to his company and the strange assemblage about them. Evidently the Redskins were reached by its message, for soon afterward the band departed in their canoes as noiselessly as they had come; and the forest zephyrs breathed a psalm of deliverance and thanksgiving which found devoted echo in the hearts of our little flock.

With nothing to eat save some stale codfish and a few dry crusts of bread, the days seemed long before the scouting party returned. When after three days they appeared each with an ox-team, Michael Lie accompanying them with his own team, there was a happy reunion and no delay in setting off for Waupaca, their immediate destination. Here the three ox teams were returned to their owners and the little band was left to make the best of it in an abandoned shack, presumably a lumberman's shanty. A sack of flour was obtained and dumplings of simple ingredients hurriedly made to still the pangs of hunger. But the food proved soggy and hard to digest, making the partakers uncomfortable as they were not accustomed to the highly refined flour in use here. Several fell sick, among them Per, who suffered greatly. Indeed, they were thoroughly famished for want of suitable food. Nor could they stomach the rank bacon that they had with difficulty obtained. That they survived in spite of a lack of the simplest provisions seems strange to us who have ever been blessed with plenty.

According to what Endre remembered there were in the party, besides himself, Filipus Knutson Leo and Kjersti his wife, Johannes Lie and family, Jacob Nygaard and family, Per and his wife, Miss Gondla Slettedne, Carl, a Swede, Jokum Christenson, wife and infant, Steffo Leite, two brothers by the name of Rymgmyr, and their companion, a carpenter.

From Waupaca they were brought a little further on their way by Michael Lie, but as he was unable to transport such a considerable party for any distance, they were obliged to halt indefinitely. As they had no shelter they secured some fence-rails which they set up in such a fashion that a covering of hay could be placed on top and around them; and into this makeshift abode as many crowded themselves as the space allowed. An Aakla (blanket) hung across an opening in the wall served as a door. Jokum and Per set up a lean-to of rails on one side of the structure, roofed it over with quilts, and spread some hay on the ground for beds. Endre and his young companions remained in the open and caught naps at odd hours. When it rained they walked briskly to and fro in the wet to keep their joints from stiffening.

They tarried here for some time till Michael Lie decided to break the monotony by loading up some shingles which he planned to deliver at the Koshkonong settlement. As the others couldn't bear to be left behind, they shouldered what personal effects Michael couldn't haul and trailed along after him. Fortunately or unfortunately for Endre, he had abandoned his sea-chest in New York and later his "skrin" (small wooden hand trunk) when landing from the river-boat, so he had but a mere handful to carry. Per, on the contrary, bore a mammoth burden, and as the distance was some 130 miles it was no pleasure jaunt he entered upon. Besides he went barefoot to save shoe-leather. They rested at night on their aakla in favored spots of grass. They found difficulty in obtaining sufficient food, but luckily milk was generally to be had for the asking from scattered settlers, here and there, whose hearts went out to them in their need. Only a few showed them the cold shoulder. One woman threw the milk asked for on the ground when she heard they couldn't afford to pay her price. At another place they found a family of professed Christians, who, upon surrendering some of their surplus milk, charged them double price for it.

After a week of travel in this fashion they arrived, footsore and weary at Koshkonong. Here they found many settlers of their own nationality, this being one of the oldest Norwegian settlements in America. The pretty hills and dells of this section reminded them of the mountains and valleys in the old country, and with cheer and kindness shown them on every hand they soon felt themselves at home.

After resting at Koshkonong Jokum and Endre set out afoot for Milwaukee, eighty miles distant. They had as guide a man who was taking a load of wheat to market, and they followed him a considerable part of the distance. In one place they halted and worked a whole day for a good meal. Though they filled themselves to capacity it was not long before they were as hungry as ever. Temptation to stay

their appetites at another's expense came in the form of an apple orchard, but they had scarcely swallowed the first glorious mouthful of the delicious fruit before some watch-dogs appeared on the scene and took a bite out of them. They saved most of their skin but continued empty of stomach till they finally reached their destination. They secured a lodging-place, but it proved uninviting enough, for in the morning they found two dead from cholera in the room where they had slept. Luckily they escaped this dread disease, which was then raging in the city. Jokum accepted service at once on a lake vessel as first mate. Eventually he became a ship-owner himself and one of the influential citizens of Milwaukee. Endre took hire on the same boat as a common sailor, plied the lakes on various craft later, then drifted to Chicago, and from there finally made his way to the Fox River settlement in Illinois.

In the year 1858 Endre left Illinois for Iowa in the company of his mother, his two sisters, Helen, later Mrs. Haaver Thorson, and Bertha, later Mrs. Knute Nelson, Erick and Knute Eglund, and a Mr. Oino. They used oxen as their motive power and the trip lasted three weeks. Lars Henryson, Paul Thompson, Tjernan Charlson (Halsnes), Christen Skarhaug and Mons Grove, all with their families, came at the same time. Endre's party preferred to travel separately and kept themselves a few miles ahead of the others during the whole journey. It rained much during their period of travel and they had difficulty in fording swollen streams and in crossing poorly built bridges.

As they reached the Indian reservation near Tama, Iowa, they were joined by three grocery-haulers who had four oxen with two bulls in lead on each wagon. In the evening Endre, the grocery men and others, crossed the river to explore the Indian domicile there. As they entered the timber they were met by some ferocious Indian dogs that sent them all scurrying with the exception of the oldest grocery-peddler, who braved the canines and soon whistled for the timid ones to return. Upon again assembling they met face to face with some Indian braves who showed friendship by escorting them into the deep timber where they were holding a dance and pow-wow. The visitors were invited to seat themselves on straw mats and witness the performance, but they had no sooner accepted the invitation when one of the dancers snatched away Endre's hat and he saw himself going bare headed the rest of the journey. His companions laughed; and he too joined when the circling dancers dexterously gathered up the hats of the rest of the party. They made a feint as if to conceal them, but suddenly returned them as deftly and unexpectedly as they had been snatched away.

While watching the Indians in their dancing contortions the head grocer suddenly divested himself of his hampering garb, jumped into the swaying circle, and joined in the gaieties. This gave great glee to the entertainers, the squaws especially. He took one on each arm, whirled them around, hoisted himself to their shoulders and performed many other antics for their entertainment. Suddenly a stentorian voice broke through the night, whereupon silence fell; and quietly as a whisper the vast throng faded mist-like into the forest, leaving our party bewildered and alone. The call of the chief ended the merriment for the night.

After buying a farm five and a half miles northeast of Story City, Endre went back to Illinois, ostensibly for the purpose of annexing a wife, and, sure enough, he found a most estimable help-meet in the person of Julia Nelson Solbjor. They were married in 1860 and made their home permanently on the place he had chosen in Iowa, remaining there till their death, Julia passing away in 1912 and Endre ten years later in his 88th year. They were church people and died in the realization of God's mercies and in the hope of a better life to come. Endre was survived by three of his children; eight had preceded him in death.

With an abundance of material blessings, thanks to their thrift and economy, Endre and Julia had been enabled to establish a comfortable home where hospitality abounded. Mother Julia was widely known for her excellent home-making qualities and for her kind concern for all who came and went at her house. Especially did the many hired hands they had throughout the years testify to this. We would make particular mention of the large weddings celebrated at this hospitable homestead; the several daughters were given their final send-off therefrom in elegant style. The whole countryside came upon invitation and enjoyed a grand holiday; the bride was in ecstasy and the bridegroom in clover. There was enough of the best to eat, and to spare, and the visiting and feasting continued all day and into the wee small hours of the night. Such was the old fashioned wedding. The bridal couple did not slip away from their friends immediately after the ceremony--invariably performed in church--, but shed their luster on the assemblage to the very end. There was no hurried departure on a wedding-trip, hence no waste of rice, nor of old shoes, which latter were either taken to the shoe-surgeon to be patched or saved for fuel. Almost invariably the happy couple settled down promptly in a nest of their own and began at once to plan, work and save for days to come. Often on the marriage night the newly-weds were serenaded by a charivari crowd made up of acquaintances who had not been included at the nuptial feast. Their advent was heralded by a prodigious racket and a demand for smokes and for toothsome left-over morsels, the more the better. They were out for a lark and as a rule were tractable, though noisy.

Endre was good at word-pictures and could relate graphically his many and varied experiences. Often have we listened with keenest interest to his narratives, but they have mostly, to our regret, escaped from memory. We will, however, in closing, submit an added sketch from his life touching the Indian uprisings in connection with the Spirit Lake Massacre.

On a Sunday afternoon in the long ago, as our friend was reading a religious discourse before his assembled household, his aged mother suddenly interrupted him with the explanation: "Look at all the cattle!" But her vision was at fault and instead of cattle three files of Redskins advancing in regulation Indian fashion were approaching, the center file heading straight for the house. A few braves mounted on ponies rode back and forth between the lines to communicate orders. Our friends grew alarmed and, hoping to escape the oncoming hordes, hurriedly left in the direction of Store Per's place to the south, Endre grabbing one child and his wife's brother, a soldier, the other. Mr. Keefe, who occupied the place later owned by Rasmus Eie, met them on the way and bade them be of good cheer as he did not think the warriors would molest them while on the march. They kept filing by at intervals till sundown, when we may presume they made camp. The narrator said it was an unforgettable sight as he viewed the multi-colored pageant of the prairie winding in and out among the hills as far as the eye could reach. He judged there were thousands of the paint-bedaubed, feather-bedecked braves in the vast company. A few belated youthful stragglers brought up the rear and were crying. It seemed strange to Mr. Keefe that an Indian warrior should so forget himself as to shed tears, and so sought to learn the reason. But no word was vouchsafed him. Evidently the rigors of the warpath had been too much for them and they were downcast because they were likely to miss the anticipated fray.

A friend of Endre was one of the unfortunate victims of the Spirit Lake tragedy. The family had been warned of the impending danger, but had tarried on in their home, disliking to leave. The consequences were that when the warring hordes came upon them there was bloodshed, the husband was killed near their dwelling, while the wife was seized and stripped and forced to witness the slaughter of her baby. She expected to meet a similar fate, but fortunately found an opportunity to hide in the tall grass and thus escaped.

End (Transcribed July 2007 by Phil Rhodes with minor editing.)