

The following story “**They Came From Kviteseid**” is a collection of stories, letters and news articles about Houkom and Kirkebø families from Kviteseid, Norway. Of particular interest to me is the story about Ole Bjørnsen Houkom, my great-great-great-great grandfather. Originally these were all written in Norwegian and Dordi Round of California spent considerable time translating them into English. I first learned of Dordi’s books “They Came From Kviteseid - Part I” and “They Came From Kviteseid - Part II” (referred to as TCFK - Part I and II) in 2001 while reading the delightful book “Here Come the Norwegians” written by Carol Schwinkendorf Hansen (also an Ole Bjørnsen descendant).

I emailed to Carol and asked her how I could get a copy of TCFK - Part I and II. Carol wrote back and gave me Dordi Round’s mailing address. I wrote to Dordi explaining who I was, a descendant of Ole Bjørnsen) and asked if she had any copies of her books. She did not and at the age of 80 did not find it easy to arrange to have her own book copied however she offered to contact Helen Forbes (another Ole Bjørnsen descendant by his third wife Torgjerd - Helen is a good friend to Dordi) and see if Helen could do that for me. A few months later, I was extremely pleased to receive my very own copy of TCFK - Part I and II.

Dordi is an interesting person. She has no Norwegian blood but she calls Norway her “Shangri-la”. She emigrated to the USA in 1951 from England. She visited Norway in 1948, 1961, 1969, 1972, 1974 and 1996. She taught herself Norwegian and has made a life-long hobby of translating letters and documents into English. Her name is actually Beatrice Dorothy Round but a 90-year old Norwegian friend gave her the name Dordi and she likes it best so uses it for her translations.

Part I is over 50 pages including Notes from the Translator, Poem: On - and By Kviteseid Lake, Maps (Southern Norway and the Kviteseid District), Genealogical Charts, Old Records from Langelim, Ole Bjørnsen, Biographical description, 90 Year Family Festival at Coon Prairie, Letters from Friends, 1870, Olaf Svennungsen Houkom, by John A. Houkom, Pastor Olaf S. Houkom’s Letters, and Letters from Friends and Family, 1871 - 1891.

Part II is about 130 pages and includes Notes from the Translator, Fragment by Anders S. Houkom, Letters to and from the Houkom Family 1856 - After 1900, Olaf Sveinungsen’s Personal Documents, Aslak Sveinungsen’s Teaching Certificate Aslak’s Report to the School Board, 1888, Newspapers from 1824-1833, Aslak Houkom’s Notes about the Family, Aslak Houkom’s Notes about the name Houkom and News Item by Olaf S. Houkom.

I have not re-typed all of the books. I was particularly interested in the story about Ole Bjørnsen and so it is included in it’s entirety. The Table of Contents are included for both books. Beyond that I selected various pieces to include. The descendant chart is not the one from the book TCFK - Part I but rather is one from my files. It includes more information than the one in the book.

I am very grateful to Dordi for sharing her books with me, to Helen for copying them for me and to Carol for her wonderful literary works and putting me in touch with Dordi.

**THEY CAME FROM KVITSEID**

**Part I**

**a partial history**

**of the**

**HOUKOM and KJØRKJEBØ**

**Families**

**Collected from Old Records, Letters, News Items and printed  
Biography.**

# **THEY CAME FROM KVITSEID**

## Table of Contents

Notes from the Translator

Poem: On - and By Kviteseid Lake

Maps (Southern Norway and the Kviteseid District)

Genealogical Charts

Old Records from Langelim

Ole Bjørnsen, Biographical description

90 Year Family Festival at Coon Prairie

Letters from Friends, 1870

Olaf Svenningsen Houkom, by John A. Houkom

Pastor Olaf S. Houkom's Letters

Letters from Friends and Family, 1871 - 1891

## Notes from the Translator (Dordi Round)

I hope the descendants and relatives of the HOUKOM and KJØRKJEBØ (Kirkebo) families will enjoy reading this translation as much as I have enjoyed working on it. It had given me many weeks of delight, and I am almost sorry that I have finished the work.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with Norwegian language and customs I will include a few items of general information which may make some of the references easier to understand.

I must also point out that, unlike Olaf S. Houkom, who was well educated, the writers of some of the letters had apparently had very little schooling. The Telemark dialect is not found in the standard Norwegian - English dictionaries, so even in the well-written biography of Ole Bjørnsen, I had many word-puzzles to untangle; but some of the writers of the letters used their own methods of spelling, and NO punctuation! I have sprinkled commas, semi-colons, and periods here and there, for easier reading, but I have tried to preserve their style of writing, because it obviously reflects their conversation; and almost every phrase begins with “so”.

I have done the best I can with unfamiliar dialect words, which even my first generation Norwegian-American friends did not know; but I am still stumped by one, so I have not tried to translate it. In one letter Egelev Midtsund asks her brother to send her a pair of “kaler”. I guessed many things from wool cards to galoshes, but did not feel justified in using any of them. Can any of you help?

A brief historical note may be worth adding: for over 400 years Norway and Denmark shared a king, with the government in Copenhagen, and Norway treated like a poor relation. During the 1700's the Norwegians began to feel national pride and a desire for independence. Denmark sided with Napoleon during his wars, and was defeated along with him. The British forced Denmark to cede Norway to Sweden; but the Norwegians wanted independence, and adopted a Constitution, in 1814, which the Swedes agreed to recognize. Your ancestor, Ole Bjørnsen, (first to use the name Houkom) was a member of the 1815 Storting (Great Parliament) and helped to make vital decisions for the future of Norway.

However, he and the other rural representatives were constantly out-voted by city members on matters of rural welfare, and it was for this reason that many wealthy farm families, such as the Houkoms and Kirkeboe, emigrated. Not all the emigrants came with “nothing but the clothes on their backs”.

Now about names: the old custom was for a child to be known by three names: the baptismal name, the father's baptismal name plus son (sen, son) or dotter, and the name of the birthplace or family home; or of a home adopted in later life. In this way, Olav son of Bjørn from Hestehaga (the Horse Farm) was Ole Bjørnsen Hestehaga as a small child, but he lost the last name when his widowed mother remarried to a different farm. When he purchased the farm Houkom as an adult, he became Ole Bjørnsen Houkom - or Haukom as it was formerly spelled. Ole himself used both spellings.

It was also a custom to use all the family names for children, so seven brothers and sisters might produce five or six boys called Olav, plus a group named Aslak, and a few girls named Gunhild, etc. Ole Bjørnsen himself had two living sons named Aslak, one by his second, one by his third wife, who were sisters, and both wanted a son named after their brother, Aslak Kjærkjebø. The older one was known as Aslak Gotuholt, because his father gave him the farm with that name, and his youngest brother was Aslak Houkom. Perhaps these notes will help you to keep your ancestral relatives sorted out.

Have fun, and thank you for sharing your history with me.

DORDI ROUND

## Old Records from Langelim

from Langelim in Aamotsdal Parish, Seljord District

Kviteseid, August 15, 1930

Aslak Visterdal

About the middle of the 1700's Gunhild Lavrantsdotter was married to Ole (Bakken ?) And had two children with him:

1. Ole Olsen. He was owner of Bakken and died childless there about 1825.
2. Gunhild Olesdotter was born about 1757. She was probably married to Høydal or Jønnardalen in Langelim, but was still unmarried in 1789.

Gunhild Lavrantsdotter became a widow and re-married, to Ole Niculsson Sudgarden, who died in August 1788; they had two children:

1. Niculs Olson, who became the owner of Sudgarden when his father's estate was settled April 2, 1789. His mother still lived and was granted a pension from the estate. It was therefore only the right to use of the estate that was settled then. Niculs Olson was married to Haege Olesdotter and had two children: Ole Niculsson Sudgarden and Gunhild Niculsdotter. Gunhild remained unmarried, but Ole Niculsson has descendants in Langelim.
2. Bjørn Olson Hestehaga. Bjørn Olson (Sudgarden) Hestehaga was not very tall, although he otherwise seemed to be big and stalwart. He was fairly stout, thickset and unusually strong. But he was good-tempered and did not like to use his strength against others. However, the story is told that once at a party he encountered the bully from Numedal. The Numedolan wanted everything his own way at this party and danced solo all over the floor, boasting and flaunting himself. Then Bjørn couldn't restrain himself, but expressed himself: "You are just a head of froth, and you always will be a head of froth". Of course the big man from Numedal couldn't tolerate that; he flew at Bjørn's immediately, and there was a fight. The Numedolan was bigger, but Bjørn was more lithe and agile. It took a long time, but the end was that the big man from Numedal was just froth for the Telemarker. But it had been a hard struggle: the second day Bjørn's neck was so swollen that he couldn't turn his head; he had to turn his whole body.

Bjørn was married to Bergit Tovsdotter Store-Kallaak from Morgedal. They managed the place Hestehaga in Øyfjell and settled down there.

Bjørn didn't live long. He was at the settlement of his father's estate in 1789, but died not long after. He left two children;

1. Ole Bjørnsen, Haukom in Kviteseid.
2. Gunhild Bjørnsdotter, born 1785, died April 17, 1852, married to Johannes Guthormson Skare, Morgedal.

Excerpts from

# Ole Bjørnsen

**Biographical description**

by

**Rikard Berg**

**Selected and translated by Dordi Round**

Ole Bjørnsen was born at Hestehaga in Øfjell, (at that time in the parish of Laardal), on Christmas Day 1783. His family were newcomers from other districts. His father, Bjørn Olavsson, had come from Sudgarden in Selgjord, and his mother, Bergit Tovsdotter was from Kaldaak in Brunkeberg.

Kaldaak was one of the best farms in Morgedal, and at that time the family was wealthy, so the Kaldaak girls were reckoned among the finest marriage-prospects in the area. Birgit Kaldaak, like many young girls, wanted to know which of the suitors she would marry, so she followed an old custom. She dressed the old log chair in her church clothes, put a light on the seat, and lay down in the shadow of the chair. On the table she had put three bowls, one with brandy, one with beer, and one with water. Whoever did this on Christmas Eve would dream of her suitors. Birgit dreamed that at first a clever, handsome young man came in, wearing a long coat and knee-britches, with wide, fancy sock-bands, she could still envision them after she awoke. He drank from the beer-bowl, and tied his sock-bands around her neck before leaving. It was Bjørn Hestehaga. When a long time afterwards, she visited Hestehaga, and Bjørn took her up in the loft-room, she distinctly recognized the fancy sock-bands which were hanging by his church clothes, and in that way she knew him as the young man from her dream.

Also she dreamed that a young man came in and drank from the water bowl. It was Torgjus Hosleberg. Drinking from the water bowl predicted death, especially by drowning, and Torgjus later drowned in Nisservatne, (Nisser Lake).

She dreamed, too, that a non-commissioned officer came in and spread a blue blanket over her. That predicted that she would have a bad time with him; others would say that he would spread the funeral cloth over her. But the third man was Anders Torge, who became her third husband.

Birgit's life followed her dream. She was married three times, and to the men she had dreamed about. Bjørn Hestehaga courted her, and she liked him so well that they were soon engaged. Old Tov thought she could have chosen a better man than the one from Øfjell, and made fun of her because he was a mountain man. "No you'll have to put on a mountaineer's coat, Birgit", he said. "I can see Old Bear (Bjørn) in Honnaas Pass". People claim that it's possible to recognize a man coming through Honnaas Pass, above Bjaaland in Morgedal, while watching from Kaldaak; but one would need to be long-sighted.

Birgit was true to her Øfjell man, and moved to Hestehaga in 1776 or 1777. Bjørn and Birgit had a daughter, who soon died, and then a son, strong and vigorous; but he met sudden death. One day, when his father was working in the mill-house, the child toddled after him and fell into the mill-race. They found him in a back-water of the river. Bjørn grieved deeply over his son, especially as he felt it was partly his fault. He lay in the farm yard for days, sobbing, and could do no work.

Their third child was called Olav, and he was baptized when only one day old. In those days mountain people feared that trolls would steal babies and exchange them for their own, so it was necessary to Christen a child as soon as possible. The day after Christmas Bjørn wrapped the baby well and skied to

church with the child in his arms. Luckily it wasn't far to church, otherwise it might have been harmful. Two years later, 1785, Bjørn and Bergit had their last child, a little girl whom they named Gunnhild. She grew up and married Johans Guttormson Skarde in Morgedal.

Bjørn Hestehaga lived only one year after the birth of Gunnhild. He had been a hard worker, and wore himself out before his time. (Note: This account would put the death of Bjørn Hestehaga in 1786, but Aslak Vistedal states that he was at the settlement of his father's estate in 1789, but died not long after. He also states that Bjørn 'managed' Hestehaga, but the fact that Ole had money from his birthright to the farm indicates that his father owned it.) He built a loft which still stands at Hestehaga. He kept his farm in excellent condition. In those days it was bigger than it is now. Parts of it have been sold.

Birgit was married the second time to Torgjus Hosleberg in Ordal, (Brunkeberg), and had two sons with him, Bjørn and Tov. Bjørn came to Sandvik in Sundbygd and was the father of Torgjus Sandvik, the smith. He was a strong and faithful worker, and sometimes worked for his brother, Olav, threshing and woodcutting. Tov Torgjusson lived for a time at Skovik, about where Haugen in Kviteseid is now, and later moved to Brekke.

After the death of Torgjus Hosleberg Birgit was married the third time, to non-commissioned officer Anders Torge in Brunkeberg. She died on November 17, 1841, over 84 years of age. Anders lived a while after.

Because his mother moved down to Brunkeberg after her first husband's death, Ole (Olav) Bjørnsen grew up there. He was clever and hardworking, so he was among the first in confirmation class. He was 17 years old when confirmed by Pastor Windfeld. The pastor considered him so clever that he gave him the best testimonial to Bishop Hansen in Kristiansand, who at that time took in boys and educated them to be teachers. Olav inherited 200 riksdaler (640 kroner) from his father, and also had some money from his birthright to Hestehaga, so he could afford to go to Kristiansand in 1802.

It was hard work for country boys to sit from 8:00 am to 9:00 pm daily, for 8 weeks; but the boys all seemed to enjoy it. Ole Bjørnsen was certainly not the worst of the students. There he laid the groundwork for his clear and firm penmanship, and for the definitive and graceful style, and excellent choice of words which characterize everything he wrote.

For the rest of his life Olav (Ole) sought learning at every opportunity, read all kinds of books, and learned other languages; but he always wished he had had more schooling as a boy. Once he said of one of his sons, "I'll pay for Bjørn to be educated as a pastor". His wife was scornful, but Ole continued, "If I could have had schooling when I was growing up, I'd be a pastor now."

In 1802 he became a teacher in Kviteseid, and taught for 17 or 18 years. In 1807 the people of Brunkeberg sent a request to the bishop asking that Ole be appointed parish clerk, and in 1808 he was named to the office. It was not child's play to be clerk for such a large area as Kviteseid was then. The clerk had to sing in six churches, and accompany the pastor no matter what the weather or state of the roads. In 1810 Nissedal was separated from the parish, so after that there were only four churches to serve.

He was an excellent clerk, with a deep and powerful voice, which could be heard throughout the congregation. "He bellows like a bull", said his enemies. "A handsome young man, with a delightful voice", said Clause Pavels. "...resonant as a church bell", said the famous writer, Henrik Wergeland, about him. He couldn't tolerate competition. Once the young Crøger ladies, who were music teachers at the Kosa School, began singing the psalm ahead of him in Brunkeberg Church. Ole glanced over to them

where they sat in the choir loft, and then he began the psalm, with such power as had never before been heard in Brunkeberg. It was a cold winter day, and his breath turned to a frosty cloud as he sang. The congregation followed his singing, and the Crøger ladies had to give in. If people wanted a singer, they sent for “Olav the clerk”. For the Reformation Ceremony in Kviteseid, October 31, 1817, they had a concert in the church, and Olav was the leader; and when Prince Oscar visited Chamberlain Løvenskiold at Fossum, Ole Bjørnsen was sent for to lead the singing, and everyone was pleased with him.

He was an excellent teacher, and he kept strict discipline in school. Sometimes he had to teach confirmation classes, too, if the pastor was elsewhere. He arranged it so that he was paid 12 shillings by every candidate for confirmation. Finally a fuss was made, and some refused to pay. They said he had no right to it. “I know I have no right to it” he said “but I’ve fired them up so well, I thought I might as well get it, as long as I’m clerk.” But that was the end of that arrangement.

It is uncertain where Ole Bjørnsen lived the first year he was schoolmaster. In 1811 Pastor Jens Zetlitz moved to Kviteseid, and Ole Bjørnsen moved into one of the buildings at the Parsonage there. The building was known as “Rulla” because there was a big stone roller by it. In the years when Ole was a Stortingsman (like a Senator, or Member of Parliament), attending the Storting in Christiania, he and Zetlitz exchanged many letters, and often the pastor wrote that he was “going down to Egelev”, that is, going down to visit Ole’s wife, Egelev, in Rulla.

According to Ole’s son, Aslak Gotuholt, Ole moved to Haukom on June 14, 1817. He had bought a half-share in Haukom in 1813, when Chamberlain Aall bought the other half-share; but by 1822 Ole owned all of it. In 1842 he bought Gotuholt, where his son went to live. But Ole lived the rest of his life at Haukom, except for his duties in Christiania.

Like his mother, Ole Bjørnsen was married three times. He was a big noble-looking man, over six feet tall, light haired and blue eyed, fair complexioned. He was very sociable, and it was no wonder the girls liked him. But he was not fat, rather of slender build.

Ole Bjørnsen had a “first love”. She was Anne, who later married Knut Flekstveit in Laardal; and she was crazy about Ole. One Sunday she was Godmother at a Christening, and gave mixed-up answers to all the pastor’s questions. Afterwards when people asked her what happened, she replied” Yes, what are you surprised about? I happened to see the clerk, and I forgot everything.” But Anne was changeable, and her family were against Ole.

Bjørnsen was still young when he courted Anne, because on June 23 1806, he married Tone Torleivsdotter Hemmestveit in Brunkeberg. She died the following spring, and their baby died soon afterwards. It was a short but very happy marriage. On March 25, 1811 he married Egelev Aslaksdotter Kyrkjebøen in Kviteseid, and with her he lived perhaps his happiest days. His letters are full of beautiful compliments for her. She died June 2, 1823.

In his home everything went like clockwork. For Christmas the woodshed had to be full, and at his house all was ready for Christmas Eve. According to Jon Orlid, Christmas began every year the moment the master stepped into the bathtub. After him, all the other could get cleaned up, and when everyone had bathed, they sat down at the table, the Christmas psalm was sung, and all the old table manners were kept. One evening during Christmas the whole household would gather for a dance, Aslak would get out his fiddle, and the family and the servants danced. The master himself enjoyed looking on. Especially was Sveinung, a son of the third wife, praised for his beautiful dancing, and then young Olav thought he ought to ask his father if he wasn’t first-rate, too. “Just as fine to watch as that is, I can do it myself” said little Olav. “Oh yes, you’re very clever, too” said his father, smiling. It was altogether a fine household, and

Ole Bjørnsen's servants stayed long with him.

To understand the spiritual development of Ole Bjørnsen one must consider his friendship with the poet-pastor, Jens Zetlitz.

Even while Zetlitz still lived in Vikedal he and Bjørnsen were acquainted through letters. In 1811 Zetlitz was named pastor for Kviteseid, and he immediately wrote to various people in the area for information. One of them was the parish clerk, and so they became acquainted. By early Mar, 1811, Zetlitz was addressing him as Dearest Friend, and complimenting him on his beautiful penmanship and excellent style.

Soon after Zetlitz moved into the parsonage the clerk moved into the Rulla house on the parsonage property. In 1812 the pastor dedicated his second collection of poems to Bjørnsen, and included in it six of Bjørnsen's own poems. Zetlitz was very happy to have a companion who could appreciate and criticize his work, discuss all subjects with him, and advise him on some matters. The first time Bjørnsen was absent from Kviteseid, to attend Storting, Zetlitz really missed him. "I have forced myself to work harder, in order to better bear the boredom caused by lack of your company."

It would not have been a true friendship if they had not told each other the truth when necessary. They had much to teach each other. Zetlitz was negligent and careless, Bjørnsen was clever and absolutely orderly. There are many stories about the pastor's carelessness in church services; he often came late to communion; he frequently sat drinking most of Saturday night, so he had to sleep off his intoxication on Sunday morning, and the clerk had to shake him and pull him out of bed. The pastor objected to this, and one day he took his revenge. They were to hold communion in Vraadal; the clerk usually stood on the runners of the sled behind the pastor when he drove to church. This Sunday the pastor was up very early, the horse was harnessed to the sled, and with the whip in his hand he peeped in to Rulla. The clerk was still in bed. "What's the matter with the clerk?" he asked. "The pastor is leaving" and as Bjørnsen jumped out of bed and struggled into his clothes, the pastor jumped into his sled and drove away. That day the clerk had to use "the apostle's horse" over Vraadal Moor.

It was well known that Zetlitz was a heavy drinker; on the other hand Bjørnsen was moderate in all ways, and often talked to the pastor about his drinking. One Saturday night they visited Ole Blom at Nese, and the pastor drank too much. The next day they were due at Flaabygd for the service. "It looks bad, if the pastor comes to church drunk" said the clerk. "Better a drunk pastor than half a clerk" said the pastor. Although Bjørnsen was not a heavy drinker, he maintained his friendship with Zetlitz, and often bought or transported brandy for him, and the pastor thanked him in rhymed verse.

It is also certain that Bjørnsen was often angry and unhappy about his friend's behavior, and suffered for his faults. After a sincere New Year's wish for him in 1814 he added:

Although I cannot hide  
the quiet sorrow, the pain  
which to my tender side  
and heart came back again,  
when weakness took control  
and my Friend into error slipped  
and laughed like a lost soul;  
my tears of pity dripped.

Although Ole Bjørnsen was temperate, he was not "holier than thou". In the matter of drink, as in all things, he followed the custom of the country, but no further than he could retain his self-control; and

yet far enough that his companions could accept him as one of their own. He often refers to parties in his letters, and Ole Blom reported in his diary for 1826, “The 14<sup>th</sup> November I went with Ole Bjørnsen to Hvidesøe, where we drank punch and played cards til 2 o’clock at night, and I won 4 ½ speciedaler”. We who live in a later era, with different opinions, can not understand how the pastor, the parish clerk, and the assistant clerk could sit in the parsonage, drinking and playing cards for money; but in those days people were not surprised by it. (Translator’s note: the last sentence is an expression of the author, Rikard Berg. The book gives no indication of what “era” he lived in.) The amazing thing is that the one who was closest to Zetlitz kept himself from over-indulgence, and Ole Bjørnsen should be honored for his moderation, which showed what a steadfast man he was. He always went along; he drank, he played cards, sometimes for money, and he enjoyed parties among his good friends. He missed them when for some reason he could not join them. When his political duties prevented him accepting a party invitation from Gudmund Fjaagesund, he wrote a poem expressing his regrets.

In a letter to Ole Blom in 1821 he wrote: “We had some guests over Pentecost, and had a lot of fun. I’d been lucky enough to get some beer, which heated their heads. My neighbor, Halvor, became so crazy that he not only overwhelmed me with curses, but he was determined to knock me down. I couldn’t get away until I had thrown him on the floor a couple of times; but then he became quite peaceful, and the day after he came to me and begged me very humbly for forgiveness, which he received on condition that next time he would behave himself, and he promised faithfully. Whether he keeps his word, time will tell.” Bjørnsen was so far from being angry over this, that he tells it with laughter in his eyes; and because he was moderate, he kept his self-control, and could laugh at another man’s craziness.

He was not against brandy. He voted for the brandy law in 1816, and he set up a brandy distillery at Haukom. He thought it would bring in a good profit. However, it seems that he became much more temperate as he grew older. In 1841 he was one of the founders of a Temperance Society. The year after he wrote to his son, Aslak Gotuholt, that it was very good if people could remain sober at parties, and in a letter to P. Mandt later in 1842 he wrote, “Would to God that drunkenness might diminish more and more.” It seems that he had deep personal reasons for saying this; because it coupled it with the news that his son had been too early laid in his grave.

Zetlitz was naturally the “Sun” who gave light to all around him; the most popular, the best poet, the best educated, the cleverest, a fount of wit, the merriest, and with a firm ability to weld together all the best talents of the area. He got all of them writing poetry, even the ones who were sure they couldn’t.

The one who received most benefit from Zetlitz was of course Bjørnsen. For six or seven years they were together almost daily, and whenever they had any spare time, they discussed all possible subjects. Bjørnsen learned most from the association; but friendship with Bjørnsen was, for Zetlitz, “a necessity like light and air; and if anything broke the friendship, he would be completely devastated, he said. Bjørnsen set him up as a pattern, and in his many poems to Zetlitz he praises his poetic spirit and friendship:

How rare and seldom is the joy  
to find a friend like you,  
whose heart and spirit more and more  
completely charm my mood.  
This Friendship’s strong eternal band  
not even Death can sever;  
however grim and cold its hand.  
Our Friendship is for ever.

When Zetlitz died in 1821 it was a great loss for many, and most for the leaders of the district, because

they were best able to appreciate him. Both Ole Blom and Tormod Knutsen wrote poems in his memory, but it is perhaps Ole Bjørnsen who best expressed the sorry, and felt it the most deeply:

Thoughtful and deep in sorry I stand  
and see with tear-filled eyes  
the grave where Zetlitz lies,  
where his dust becomes part of the land.

Over the heavy loss Friendship sighs,  
He who brought happiness everywhere  
when his comrades gathered to share  
in the grave's cold embrace now lies.

The man with the spirit of light,  
with the open, generous heart,  
who only good thoughts could impart,  
has sunk into Death's dark night.

The Post whose echoing lay  
rang joyfully over the land  
from Norway's hills to the strand  
now lies in the silent clay.

The Speaker, religion's tongue,  
who the Truths of Jesus spoke,  
sharing Love with all the folk,  
is no longer his people among.

(Translator's note: There are eight more verses, but in the interest of brevity I have omitted them.)

As early as 1822, the publisher C. N. Schwach had written to Ole Bjørnsen asking him to arrange for a complete collection of the poems of Zetlitz, and asked that Bjørnsen send him all printed and unprinted poems in existence. Before he died, Zetlitz had begged Ole to take care of all his literary works, and he did so most faithfully. Schwach also asked him to gather material for a biography, and suggested that Bjørnsen himself would be the best person to write it; but Ole protested that he had neither the time nor the ability, and sent all the material to Schwach, who expressed gratitude for his association with Bjørnsen, and wrote the biography himself, Bjørnsen praised him greatly for it.

Ole Bjørnsen had to take care, not only of Zetlitz' literary affairs, but also of his economic matters, and here his friendship was really put to the test. He had a great deal of trouble with the task, and helped the widow and the son, Søren Zetlitz, as much as he could. There was insufficient value in the estate to cover the debts, so he applied for a year's grace for the widow, but it wasn't granted. He managed to gather in about 400 speciedaler owed to the pastor, but there should have been 550. Zetlitz had been very casual about his affairs while in Kviteseid, and had never demanded the payments that should have been made to him. There was very little for the widow, and less for Søren Zetlitz, who was a student in Kristiania, and continually wrote to Bjørnsen for money. Fru Zetlitz showed no gratitude for all Ole's help. In fact, she accused him of plagiarizing Zetlitz' poetry.

Zetlitz had great benefit from his association of Bjørnsen, who was an excellent farmer, and in politics followed the desires of his constituents. Bjørnsen was not ashamed of his "farmer" status. When in the Storting, in 1815, he still wore his homespun, homemade clothes. He thought it ridiculous for a farmer to

dress up in a tall hat and tail-coat. Many people admired him for his attitude. He wrote home that Bishop Sørensen treated him like a brother, and that he had several times been invited to visit the Crown Prince and other dignitaries, who complimented him for wearing the “national” clothes. They were interested in his accounts of the customs in Telemark, and persuaded him to do the Halling dance. However, the year after, 1816, he wrote home that he had been forced to buy new clothes, because his homespun ones had become worn out and shabby.

Bjørnsen retained his local customs for good reasons. He had a strong sense of what was appropriate for the individual; and he was also bothered by the attitude of some city dwellers towards the rural population. This had been especially bad in Kviteseid, where many honest, hardworking farmers had been badly treated and cheated by townspeople with whom they had traded. He expressed deep gratitude to publisher C. N. Schwach, for his genuine appreciation of the talents of rural writers. Bjørnsen was jealous of his own and his countrymen’s honor. His knowledge of their own worth made him proud to keep the rural traditions.

He showed this, too, in the poems he wrote in the Telemark dialect, such as “The Telemark Farmer’s Feelings Concerning Sweden’s Demands on Norway”. Which he suggested should be sung to the tune of one of the ancient “Dream Songs”. This is the first known literary mention of the Draumkvedet;” (1813). Obviously he was well acquainted with the ancient poems, and knew their worth, but it was many years before better known Norwegian literary figures realized their importance.

Other Telemark farmer-poets also wrote about the political struggle with Sweden, and one of the best-known poems, printed in a newspaper with the poet named as “A Son of Old Norway”, has been attributed to Bjørnsen. The author of this biography disagrees, but quotes it as an indication of the growing awareness of the worth of the farmer of Norway, of which Bjørnsen was so strong a supporter.

Zetlitz taught Bjørnsen to use poetry, or rhyming verse, for many different occasions: an invitation, an acceptance or excused refusal of an invitation, a request for payment due, a celebration - all should be expressed in rhyme; but Bjørnsen was too serious to be coaxed into writing comic verse.

To appreciate another kind of poem we can read two verses which Bjørnsen wrote at the death of his friend’s sister:

#### At Gunhild Fjaagesund’s Grave

Take Back now, Earth, the dust you gave,  
We faintly glimpse between Death and Grave  
Hope’s smile of gentleness,  
that Jesus’ voice, with solemn sound  
shall echo all the Earth around,  
and from the Grave’s dark rest  
the Dead shall rise new-blessed.

Then shall we meet again,  
when Family and Friend  
their tears shall wipe away;  
within God’s heavenly light  
our lives eternally bright,  
in Jesus name we pray  
God grant that Holy Day

Gunhild was the sister of Ole Blom and wife of Gullmund Fjaagesund; she was well-known as an especially excellent wife, and her hospitality had been lavished on Bjørnsen and Zetlitz. Both friends were able to express their appreciation on this sad occasion, Zetlitz with a good funeral oration, and Bjørnsen with these verses, which he sang at the grave side.

Although many critics have down-graded his poetry, Bjørnsen's verses always have well-rounded form and musical language. They have a lyric freshness and often paint colorful word-pictures. He loved the beauties of Nature. His collected poems were never published. His son, Aslak Haukom, intended to publish them, but never did. Some were printed in a book of Zetlitz' poems, and others in various papers. On the death of Zetlitz, Bjørnsen sent to Ole Blom, who was Stortingsman at that time, a poem he had written about Zetlitz, and requested Blom to destroy it if no paper would print it. However, it was printed in "Nationalbladet". Various others were printed individually, but most of them were in his own written notebook, which Aslak Haukom Gotuholt eventually must have owned, as he sent copies to many of M. B. Landstad. Now the notebook is apparently lost.

Ole Bjørnsen was less a poet than a practical man. He enjoyed poetry, loved to read, had a large library, and gathered much knowledge. He was an excellent farmer. He cleared all of Haugen (the hillside) and plowed much new land at Haukom. He tried many new methods of farming. In a letter to Peter Mandt, dated February 6, 1844, he wrote; "Although during several years I have incurred great expense in this work, it is obvious now that in the future it will give compensation, and I can therefore judge that on the whole it is much more profitable, and at any rate more secure, to gamble on digging in the earth than in the mountains, although mining should not be given up, if there is a good chance of making it pay." He had previously written about the "mining craze" which was infecting so many. He loved farming, and rejoiced to see the growth after plowing.

His son, Aslak Haukom, wrote: "I remember an autumn, probably 1845, he was visited by two older men. They left the house and went over to the Big Field, which was cut, and the grain was stacked around the poles. They looked at the grain, and he reached into the stack and held out on his hand layers of barley ears, while he talked with the men. He was so interested in agriculture, and by then he had plowed up most of the land at Haukom, so it couldn't be recognized as the place it had been when he took it over.

In agriculture as in everything else he was orderly; everything in its right place and done at the right time; nothing wasted, nothing lavished uselessly. Old Marte Sundt was the cook for all the parties in Sundbygd, and she said there wasn't a house in the whole district that was so well-kept and well organized, in every way. "You have everything I need in the same place where you usually have it," she said to the Haukom-wife. It was the same always. "I could go and fetch everything, big and small, just as easily as if I had been in the house and cared for it myself a long time," and Marte.

Bjørnsen usually sat in his office the whole day, and had so much writing to do that he sometimes had to ask his son, Aslak, to help him. But then he would need some fresh air, and he'd go out to see his workers. Hallvord Solberg told that he was breaking round in an enclosure at Haukom, and the farmer came out to see how it was going. He stuck his stick deep into the dirt, and he happened to strike a stone. Then Hallvord had to come and dig out the stone, even though the plowing was finished. "That stick of his was worse than anything", said Hallvord.

He was very clever with cattle and horses. Once he had bought a beautiful horse and used it on an errand to Brunkeberg. When he came to Gotuholt on the way home, he offered his son even trade in a badly-behaved horse Aslak had. The new horse was bad, he said; it had shown its bad character up by the Church. Aslak saw that it was a good horse, and told his father to try it a little longer. "No, he's bad, and I won't keep him. If he won't have him, someone else will," said Olav. So they swapped immediately.

He was the boy who had learned what he needed, and he taught his children the same. Once a man from Selgjord was out rowing with Sveinung, Ole's son. "Do you remember the time we went with your father up on the hill? When we came to the east of Sollistoulen in the narrow valley where the path divides, we stopped, and your father pointed upwards and said, that there the path divides, and up on the mountain stands a devil; and so he said to you, 'So that you won't forget where the path divides, I'm going to take you by the nose.' You weren't very big at that time, Sveinong", said the Selgjording.

One needs only read his letters home, from the time he sat in the Storting, to see what care he had for everything; Are the fields and pastures growing well? Is the barn ready at Houkom? Has Christopher Ness got the reaper from Schouvig? Has my timber been driven to the sawmill, and has Saamund Lindestad cut it? He was always asking. Had she had any slaughtering done? Had she bought any pigs? Aamund Tollehommen or Torleiv Vealøy must bring home the wood. Gunnar Utsund must bring home timber for the dairy; and if Hallvord Haukom has not brought home the rest of the barn timber it had better come fast. Kjetil Tormodson must dig a ditch to the site of the house. If te wife needs shoes for Christmas, she must get the skin Aslak Staalane has tanned, and get Jon to make them. He thought of everything, and it all had to go as smoothly as when he was at home; and whether it was his own or the district who owned something, everything had to be well done. Bjørnsen became manager of the district storehouse after Høgje Geirvoll, and when dirty grain was brought in as the required contribution, he cleaned it. "I've been a thresher, so I know how to clean the grain", he said.

Sometimes he could be so worried about small losses that it was both pitiful and laughable. He wrote to Egelev, "I can't refrain from reporting something awful, and I foresee that it will both you much: the best pair of new stockings, which Turi Bekhus knitted, have been stolen. I wore them the day we ate with the Prince, and in the evening I hung them on a string over the door to my room, where there are always clothes hanging, which belong to people in the house - yes - but the next day they were gone. Sometimes I have sworn and sometimes wept over these beautiful and expensive stockings, which I'll never get the like of."

Some people thought he was stingy, and accused him of demanding too much toll. The daughter of the bailiff said that whenever there was an estate settling meeting at his office, he always got something good out of it. Others will think the same about his economy when he was a Stortingsman. He complained that to live well in the city one had to ladle out the money. He therefore brought forward a plan that they should not be limited to the purveyors who were hired to feed the representatives, but that each should be free to eat where he liked. He also wrote home advising his wife not to accept any payments on debts till he came home, as the money had been devalued, so he would have to re-figure the debts in order to receive the full value that was owed to him. Some people would call this greed; but seen practically, it is quite natural for a man who liked everything orderly. There were so many demands on him to settle estates, and he was in his time the most ought-after official in Kviteseid. He was guardian for many; he was manager of the district storehouse; for a time he was mayor; and he held many other offices which carried bit responsibilities; and he was the private advisor for people over the whole of Kviteseid and Nissedal; everyone came to him to have a document written or a demand for payment worded; he was treasurer for auctions and estates; he collected accounts and other dues for pastors who had moved away, etc. Most of the dues he had to collect were official, not personal. Most important is that no-one can say his demands were other than rightful.

Some people criticized him for demanding payment on old debts, but the debts were due. He showed that he could be generous on many occasions. There were hard years and needy times while he was storehouse manager. One spring the people had absolutely no seed grain, and the storehouse was empty; so he promised that all who needed could come to him at home and get either a sack of barley or a basket of potatoes; and there came the whole flock! His bins were soon almost empty, so his wife began to fuss

that there wouldn't be enough for the house. Then her husband was angry. "If the bins are empty I know a way to get what is needed", he said.

Kristine Possmyr told that after she became a widow, she still lived for a while at Langelid, with her brothers. Langelid is a farm far into the hills from Haukom. Times were hard for her. She was alone with three children to provide for, so she had to ask for help. She was alone with three children to provide for, so she had to ask for help from the district, and at one time had been issued a half barrel of barley which she had to collect at Spjøtsodd. She came with the half barrel in a sack on her back, and sent word in to Ole Bjørnsen, asking whether she could leave half the load at Haukom. She couldn't carry it all at once up into the hills. When he came to measure out the grain he was angry. "It's a plague!" he said. "How can they be crazy enough to give this stuff for people's food? It isn't fit for animals." He took the sack and emptied it into the waste grain bin. Then he measured her a quarter of the finest grain, and told her to come back again for another quarter of the same kind. Before she left he insisted that she go into the house for a meal. Such was Bjørnsen, a wise and good man who saw what was needed; but strict and harsh when it concerned laziness and slovenliness; and stern in his demands for the right.

Ole Bjørnsen was strict and accurate, with himself and others. He was a good mathematician, but occasionally he made a mistake, and he was honest enough to admit it. A man told that once, after the Service, he approached Ole on his way out of Brunkeberg Church, and asked for the loan of a dollar. Sometime afterwards the clerk met him and asked for repayment of the dollar. "I didn't get a dollar from you", said the man. "But I have it in my notebook", said Ole. "Yes", said the man. "I asked you if I could borrow a dollar, in a Brunkeberg Church, and you took a book out of your pocket and wrote in it. What you wrote, I don't know, but I didn't get a dollar, and so I didn't ask you again". Bjørnsen stared hard at him, crossed out something in his notebook, and said nothing more.

He hated waste, and did not like formal visits with important people, because they wasted time. It was the same with food and drink; nothing must be wasted. Eiliv Staulen had fun with him one day. Ole poured him a glass of beer, and after drinking it, Eiliv left. Then Olav realized that it was not beer he had poured, but brandy. "Oh that rascal", he said. "He drank up the whole glass. Run after him, Aslak and bring him back". But it was too late to retrieve the brandy.

Sometimes in his drive to get things done, he didn't stop to think. Hallvord Bergland was at Haukom working in the smithy, and made a branding iron. (Translator's Note: The word used here is 'brandjarn'. It may be 'fire iron', a rake or poker for the fireplace, instead of branding iron. I can't be sure, and none of my sources of reference are any help.) Knowing that Ole was fussy about the design and size, he took the red-hot iron in the tongs and carried it to Ole for inspection. Ole reached out his hand for it as soon as he saw it, and dropped it immediately on the floor. His hand was badly burned, and Hallvord was thoroughly rebuked for not saying that the iron was hot. "You saw that I was carrying it in the tongs, so you should have known it was hot", said Hallvord, and trudged muttering back to the smithy.

Bjørnsen was not only authoritative, he was progressive, and it wasn't surprising that a man with his capacity for work, knowledge, and ability, eventually held all the offices in the district. As well as schoolmaster and parish clerk, he was for a time treasurer, community auditor, from 1812 second mediator, and from 1820 first mediator. He was deputy bailiff in Nissedal for ten years, but because the bailiff had been suspended, Ole carried the whole burden, which included a murder case. He was postmaster from 1835, at which time a new mail service was being organized through Telemark, so there was a great deal of work involved. He had to make many trips along the postal routes. Postage payment gave him a lot of trouble, as Norway had still not begun to use stamps. Debts on unpaid mail delivery could be huge. "I have had to summon Sveinung Weium for almost two years' postage and newspaper

subscription,” he wrote in an 1840 letter Peter Mandt, “and he has a pair of neighbors that are no better”.

On top of all this he was a member of the Parish Council, and in the same letter he reported, “On the Council I always have the honor of being chosen for whatever needs the most work; because the chairman, whom we re-elected to the position at his own wish, carries on in the same old way and is usually unfit for the job”. This refers to Ole Blom, who was chairman then.

Ole Bjørnsen and Ole Blom were the most influential farmers of the district, and both were Stortingsmen, in turn. There is no doubt that they were rivals, over district offices and in politics. They were different in mood, Bjørnsen strict, authoritative, and exact, Blom friendly, mild, and casual. These characteristics made for many difficulties between them; but when Blom beat him in election to an office, Bjørnsen wrote him a congratulatory poem. In spite of their rivalry, they were always good friends, even though their opinion differed. When Blom wanted to invest the grain-storehouse money in a savings bank for Kviteseid, Bjørnsen was against the idea. Bjørnsen was moderate, Blom the opposite. In 1844 Bjørnsen wrote to Peter Mandt, “Here we’ve had a quiet and peaceful Christmas, no big carousals, and no drunkenness has ruled, which is good. I have only been out one evening to Gadeholt (Gotuholt) and one to my neighbor, Svenung Houchus (Sveinung Haukom), and in both these small parties pure sobriety ruled. Our mutual friend, the King of Ness (Ole Blom) has however been the usual Christmas Pig, which condition began several days before Christmas with the wassail bowl and continued till after New Year. Now he is well again but his wife still hasn’t completely recovered.

Ole Blom spread rumors of mis-doings when Bjørnsen beat him in an election in 1832, but on the whole they treated each other honorably and were always good friends. Bjørnsen was often a guest at Nese (Ness), and he was guardian of the affairs of Blom’s mother. They were often together at parties, but each had fun in his own way; Blom got a hangover, Bjørnsen stayed sober. They both enjoyed playing cards, and sometimes they sat till the morning hours playing cards at Haukom, Ness, the vicarage, or at the home of Secretary of State Aall, or other dignitaries. They wrote many poems to each other, commemorating shared joys, or congratulating on political victories or birthdays. Bjørnsen was elected Stortingsman in 1815, 1836 and 1839; Blom in 1821 and 1824.

Their companionship was important for both of them; both were among the most enlightened farmers, and their political discussions, written and oral, matured them to a wider view; but Bjørnsen was the better farmer of the two, and certainly the hardest worker.

The long Storting, 1815-1816, had many very important matters to settle. Ole Bjørnsen was one of the foremost workers, was consulted often, and was on eleven committees. He didn’t waste time; up at 5:00 am, drank a cup of tea or coffee, smoked his pipe, ate breakfast, took care of whatever was waiting; 8:30 - 3:00 he sat in the Ting; then home for food, coffee and a smoke. Next he wrote an account of the day’s business, and made a copy for the Secretary of State - which had to go out with every post. There might be time to read a good book.

He decided it was too expensive at the first house he stayed in during the Ting, so he moved with Teis Lundegaard to stay with Captain Brede in Skipargata. It was cheaper, and Lundegaard and Bjørnsen were two who knew how to work together. They were both democrats when it concerned the welfare of farmers. Bjørnsen introduced several motions, with clear, well-thought oratory, concerning mercantile privileges that worked hardship on farmers, the purchase of farm land by city groups who did not intend to use it, the farmers’ right to control watercourses for transport, timber sales, sale of farm produce, and brandy distilling.

He was also strongly in favor of fairer draft laws. The sons of town citizens, officials, craftsmen and

commissioners were excused from national defense duty, so most of those called on were sons of farmers and cottagers. The struggle over this was very severe. Ole Bjørnsen read a well-written speech, showing that universal draft was the most just for the individual, and the safest and cheapest for the country; but the farmers were outnumbered and outvoted by the city representatives.

A similar fate awaited the tax question. As it stood, the rural areas were responsible for 4/5, the cities for 1/5. All except one of the rural representatives wanted the city portion to be 1/4, but again they were outvoted. But both times the farmers were troublesome. Claus Pavels wrote in his diary, "The farmers made a big fuss in the Committees, and some of them had to be shown out of the sixth committee. Church-singer Bjørnsen is impertinent and conceited, a true blackguard"; and he accused Bjørnsen of trying to dominate the businessmen.

After his first term as Stortingsman, Bjørnsen remained at home for 20 years, but he followed all political developments closely, vied with Ole Blom in 1821, and later was often deputy. He probably influenced Blom in various questions while Blom was Stortingsman. The two chief questions were lowering of taxes and increase in grain duty. "There should be no increase in the grain toll. It would be damaging to the whole country, except for Hedemark and a few Eastern districts. Fight then Best Friend, against this proposal", he wrote in April, 1821, and continued with many more arguments against it. He spoke from experience.

A series of bad crop-years had reduced people to poverty. Devaluation of money, woods tax, vegetable-field tax were heavy burdens. In the mountains of Telemark it was so bad that a petition was organized, and Bjørnsen was asked to be spokesman. He wrote a plea to the Ting, saying that "a decrease in the taxes must come about, as the people have no way to pay last year's remaining expenses, to say nothing of the coming year's". The petition had many signatures but it was too late.

In the 1836 Ting he sat with another Telemarking, bailiff Peter Mandt. He was a member of the Council, then. His work that session was less dramatic and more practical. The brandy law that he had supported in 1815, he tried this time and in 1842 to repeal. The law had been on the books long enough to show what damage it had done. In 1842 he helped to put through many laws to help the country people, including one concerning assessments which he had worked for since 1833. He was respected by many great people for this, and honored for his stand on the Jewish question. Here he went against the opinion of his party and expressed his own deeply humanitarian feelings, for which the great poet, and organizer of the Jewish question, Henrik Wergeland praised him. Wergeland also wrote glowingly about Bjørnsen in his book, "The Jewish Question". (Note: According to the Constitution, Jews were not allowed admission into Norway. In 1839 Wergeland sent a proposal to the Storting to repeal this but it was defeated in 1842. It was finally passed in 1851, six years after his death (on July 12, 1845). A statue to Wergeland was raised by Norwegian immigrants in Fargo, North Dakota.)

In 1844 Bjørnsen was defeated, and Lavrantz Holtane of Kviteseid was elected. He did so many shady deals and dishonest things that he was sent up for "hard labour". Holtane's wife, Ingeborg, begged Bjørnsen to write an appeal to free her husband, but he refused. So Ingeborg talked to Bjørnsen's wife, Torgjerd, and she persuaded him. They collected many signatures, and Lavrantz was freed before completing his sentence. "You are very kind", he said to Torgjerd; but he was always hateful towards Olav, and could never forget his humiliation. The last time Bjørnsen was a candidate, Lavrantz traveled the district, ostensibly supporting Bjørnsen, but persuading the distant voters to use "absent ballots" which he would deliver; but instead, he burned them, so Bjørnsen was defeated, but by a very narrow margin.

Ole Bjørnsen was broken in health already, before he lost the election. If he had been re-elected, his

working days would have been short. In 1835 he had written, "I have not been well this summer, having a stoppage in my liver or something, and my stomach is not in the best condition; but I have been better recently, so I hope with God's help it will improve." He was unsteady and not very well through the next years, but kept up all his work. Then in the winter of 1845 he became sick enough to stay in bed. He had been quite sick in April. Then, on the second day of Christmas, the last time he sang in Brunkeberg Church, people received a warning: while still burning brightly, one of the lights broke in the middle and fell to the floor, but the stub in the candlestick still burned just as well. The people took it as an omen, and their parish clerk never came into the Church again.

His son, Aslak Haukom, wrote, "I remember a little from his sickness. I don't think he was in bed more than two or three months. Doctor Bakke visited him often, and I remember that Doctor Krabbe from Seljord was sent for, too, and we children were ordered to gather ripe juniper berries, for tea; but it was too late."

Ole Blom wrote in his diary, "The 16<sup>th</sup> (of April) I went to Udsund, where I learned that Church Singer Bjørnsen had died that morning, after long sickness and a short time bedridden. He was 61.5 years old. An important death."

Aslak Haukom told more: "I remember the funeral. Small spruce trees were set up from the house, across the yard, and part way down the road. Snow had fallen in the night, and I thought it was fun to go from tree to tree on the bare spots. Some of the guests ate in the livingroom and some in the parlor, and afterwards gathered in the bedroom - the big room - where the coffin stood. I stood behind Mother and my older sister. Mother was white-faced, but couldn't weep. My sister sobbed. I stared at all of them, wondering, but when the coffin was carried out I understood that now he was leaving us for ever, and I cried as only a child can cry. Two women stood behind me, and one said - I remember it well - 'He's weeping, poor little boy, but he doesn't know what he is weeping about'. I was at that time 7.5 years old. (Note: This Aslak Haukom must be one of the younger children of Ole's third marriage, a child of Torgjerd. Aslak Gotuholt, Ole's second son with Torgjerd's sister, Egelev, his second wife, was already a grown man at the time of his father's funeral, farming at the place Gotuholt, and old enough to have traded horses with his father some years before.

The day of the funeral, April 29, all the most important people of the district were gathered in Haukom. Ole Blom wrote, "The corpse was brought into the Church, where the Provost gave a find talk, and Pastor Landstad gave a rhymed obituary, in which he didn't show any skill at reading his own production, which was mediocre."

Ole Bjørnsen was missed by everyone, and his posthumous fame was the best. Bailiff Quisling of Fyrisdal wrote, "Two weeks ago a truly notable farmer left us. He was the Church Singer in Hvidesøe, Ole Bjørnsen. From being a poor cottager's son the man has worked his way up to be a well-to-do landowner and has acquired besides, much knowledge. He has been a representative in several Stortings and has distinguished himself there. People will realize that his defeat in the last election has hastened his death; of that I have no doubt. In all his public life the man has distinguished himself with exceptional diligence and order, as well as with desirable efficiency in whatever he undertook and was trusted to carry out, and often enough of this made him a target for the arrows of jealousy."

Tormod Knudsen, who became the Stortingsman when Bjørnsen was defeated, wrote, "With Church-Singer Bjørnsen's death, his widow lost an excellent husband, the children a devoted father and tutor. It seems as if I cannot realize that Bjørnsen is dead. We have stood in many movements and have privately been steady friends, but oftenest public rivals. Peace to his dust and honor to his memory."

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After the Biography, eight poems of Ole Bjørnsen are printed in the book, including the one referred to in this story “Telebondernes Følelser — (The Telemark Farmers’ Feelings) ---” and the following:

Vaarsang (Spring Song)

Sommersang (Summer Song)

Høstsang (Autumn Song)

Vintersang (Winter Song)

Vort Kjaere fødeland til aere (To the honor of our dear birth-land)

Ved bredden bord med støb i haender (At the spread table with cup in hand)

Til Zetlitz (To Zetlitz)

## **News Item from “Reform”, Eau Claire, Wisconsin - June 22, 1933 90 Year Family Festival at Coon Prairie**

On Sunday, June 11, the Oberson-Kjørkjebø Family gathered in the beautiful Ingman Thorsgaard home in Coon Prairie for the 90 year festival, since it is not 90 years since the first of the family, Høie Oberson Kjørkjebø came to Dane County. The day dawned with sparkling weather and one and all seemed to be in festive spirits. The women brought well-filled food baskets and dinner was served under the great shady trees. The gathering was called to order and Pastor Holum led them in prayer. Next “Blest Be the tie that binds” was sung. Then the following historical account was read, which was written by Obert Rundahl of Coon Valley, and also a poem by Mrs. Hilda Berg, which she read herself.

I was asked by several of my relatives whether I would write a few words about the Kjørkjebø Family for this occasion. As I had only a short time to work on it, it will be both brief and deficient.

I must begin with old Ouver Kjørkjebø, who was born in Kviteseid Parish, Upper Telemark, in 1791. He was married to Karen Knutsdotter. She was a sister of Stortingsman Houkom. (Note: All the other papers in this collection indicate that Stortingsman Houkom had only one sister, Gunhild, who married Johannes Guttormson. Her father was Bjørn, not Knut. However, Stortingsman Ole Bjørnson Houkom had three wives, two of whom were Kjørkjebø girls, sisters, so Ouver Kjørkjebø was brother-in-law to Stortingsman through his sisters, not through his wife.) They had the following children: Svennung, Høie, Oslak, Thron, Ouver, Ingeborg, Jon and Saave. In 1851 he emigrated with his family and settled in Coon Prairie the same year, where he got a farm in the town of Jefferson. His grandson still owns it. He was a good woodcarver, furniture maker, and painter, and in Norway he had had various positions of trust in his town. His wife was often helpful in cases of sickness and was interested in gardening and flowers. Ouver Kjørkjebø died 9<sup>th</sup> May, 1862 and was laid to rest in Coon Prairie Churchyard.

Svennung, his eldest son, very early got himself a good farm on Coon Prairie. As he brought money with him from Norway he was a well-to-do man. He was married twice. The first time to Thone Houkom. They had two children, Ole and Ouver. The second time with Ronnei Guttormsdotter. They had the following children; Karen, Ole, Gustav, Alfred, Tillie, Julius and Theodore. He is also buried in Coon Prairie Churchyard.

Høie, the second son, was the first of the family to emigrate to America. He came to Koshkonong in 1843 when he was not quite 16 years old. He was a member of the first emigrant-party that left Upper Telemark. When he came to Koshkonong he worked for a Yankee farmer, where he soon learned the English language. In the following years he had many exciting experiences, as he passed several winters in the woods of Northern Wisconsin, and had several trips to the South. In the year 1849 he came to La Crosse, which then consisted of just a few houses. He traveled further to Coon Prairie, where he took himself some land. There were not more than 5 or 6 settlers in Coon Prairie and one in Coon Valley. He was married to Ingeborg Quale who was the daughter of one of the first settlers on Liberty Prairie, Dane Co. She was related to the famous flyer, Carl Ben Eielson.) Høie had the following children; Karen Juve, Engeborg Rundahl, Ole, Ouver, Ellen Sebion, Malla Nelson and Emma Thorsgaard. He had the first farm in the town of Coon and was a very wealthy man. He was nearly 94 when he died and was buried in Coon Prairie Churchyard.

Aslak had a good farm in the town of Jefferson and was married the first time with a girl from Skarrerud. They had three children, Olaus, Engeborg and Karen. The second time he was married to Tone Skolos. They had two children, Gustav and Ben. He is also buried in Coon Prairie Churchyard.

Jon bought a fine farm in the town of Coon. He was not married. He died on New Year's Eve 1916 and

is buried in Bangs Churchyard.

Engeborg died as a young girl.

Thron and Ouver were twins. Thron was married to Tone Juva. They had the following children; Tom, Ole, Sam, Alfred, Karen, Bentine, Torvald, Arthur, Alma, Alma and Hartvig. He moved in the 60's to the town of Hamburg on the farm which his son Tom still has. He is buried in Lower Coon Valley Churchyard.

Ouver bought the neighboring farm to Thron and his son Oscar still lives on it. He was married to Mathea Hammersberg. They had the following children; Mrs. Carl Gullord, Caroline, Andreas, Ole Isidore, Mathilde, and Oscar. He is also buried in Lower Coon Valley Churchyard.

Saave was married to Torbjørn Thompson. They bought a farm in Lower Coon Valley and were neighbors of Thron and Ouver. Their daughter Mrs. Gunhild Hagen, now owns their old home. They had the following children; Mrs. Gunhild Hagen, Hannah, Clara, Tillie, Ida, Karen, Oscar and Theodore. She is also buried in Lower Coon Valley Churchyard. Yes, now has Ouver Kjørkjebø's Family become a great clan, which has fine homes in towns and on the land from the Mississippi River to Viroqua. Many have also moved away and live in other places.

The Kjørkjebø name is a very old name which goes back with some certainty to the year 1398. They were called in those days Kirkeboen and were probably of German descent. Ouver Kjørkjebø's old farm in Norway is now changed to an important country town. It lies very beautifully along Bandak Lake. (Note: My large-scale map of Telemark shows Kyrkjebø to be on a smaller lake, Sundkilen. Only small villages are marked on the shores of Lake Bandak. It has electric light and paved streets with many shops and beautiful homes. In old Grandfather's time it had a central situation with Church and school and grocery store. The only ones of the clan, whom I know of, still in Norway, are two sons of my Grandfather's siblings. The one is Rector of Skein High School and the other is also a teacher there. A brother's grandson of Ole Rundahl is also a teacher there. The Kjørkjebø family is also related to former Congressman Halvor Stenerson and his brothers.

I must finally say, that the Lord has been good to us in all these 90 years.

#### 90 year Jubilee

It is a great day for the Kjørkjebø Clan  
Today we gather from west and east  
Some are only distantly related  
But all wish to share in the feast

It is long since the first of the Family  
Left home and crossed the sea's waves  
They wanted to travel towards the west  
All now rest, hidden in their graves

Høie was the first to leave his home  
Just a youngster not yet sixteen  
He was with the first flock of migrants  
Who traveled from Telemark that spring

He came with the others to Koshkonong  
Where for several years he stayed  
But then he wandered to Coon Prairie  
Where a better living was made

Later followed his five brothers  
And also both his sisters, so dear  
Their Father and Mother added their strength  
So that all were together here

Høie and Svennung, Aslak and Jon  
Made lovely Coon Prairie their home  
But the twin brothers, Ouver and Tron  
And sister Saave made Chaseburg their home

Engeborg died as a lovely young girl  
In her later teenage years  
She was sadly missed by the Family  
Who shed for her many tears

But courage was strong, and life's force great  
Their mood was pure white as snow  
Music and song encouraged them  
And fun was not lacking, we know

They brought God's word with them and never forgot  
When they came to a foreign land  
To keep it always hidden deep  
In the heart of each woman and man

For many long years, ninety now,  
The Family has been living here  
God shall be honored, above all else  
Who allows us to celebrate this year

So we bid you all heartily welcome  
To the lovely Thorsgaard home  
May we have good times together  
To remember when further we roam

Mrs. Hilda Berg

After this Pastor H. O. Bach of Coon Valley gave a talk, and the gathering sang "Among slopes and hills near the ocean." Next came a talk by Pastor J. A. Houkom, of Blanchardville, Wisconsin, who is one of the Clan. The group sang "Now we will bid each other Farewell." Pastor J. O. Holum said a few more words, and the program ended by repeating The Lord's Prayer in unison.

Henry Randahl was elected chairman of the Arrangement Committee, which was composed of Oscar Gullord, Coon Valley, Albert Skolos and Ernest Thorsgaard of Westby. The Program Committee was Mrs. Philip Bouffler and Paul Overson from Chaseburg and Annie Gilbertson from La Cross. A Portrait

of the Gathering was taken by L. H. Davidson of Coon Valley. There were 124 guests. Several from Taylor, Wisconsin and Deerfield, Wisconsin were also there. Then Supper was served.

It was a day which will long be remembered. All speakers spoke well of the Telemarkingers. It was the fourth reunion to be held. The first was held in Pettibone Park, La Crosse. The second at the home of Ole and Oover Oberson, Westby and the third at the home of Obert Rundahl, Coon Valley.

These letters are in the book TCFK - Part I .....

Letters from friends in America to Svennung Olsen Houkom 1870

- Ole Halvorson Klevstul January 15, 1870
- G. Gundersen May 21, 1870
- Olav Svennungsen Houkom May 21, 1879
- John A. Houkom

Letters from Pastor Olaf S. Houkom 1870 to his parents, brother and sister

To Friend Svenung Olesen Houkom from Gunlek Gundersen

To Sister-in-law Aslau Halvorsdotter Lande from Gregor Kittilsen 1871

To Brother from Bergit Olsdotter 1880

To Brother Egelev O. Midtsund 1881

To Uncle and Aunt from Dorthe Bergseth 1891

Hampton, January 15, 1870

Dear Friend Svennung Olsen

I will here with some few words and lines write to you to let you know that we are all healthy and live well, and I wish that these few words and lines will find you with the same good pleasure. So I must tell you that I have been very satisfied ever since I came here. But it is not good to advise anyone either for or against coming, for here are many who do not thrive well at first, but the longer they are here the better they like it; for here it is much more advantageous than in Norway in all respects. I have had a dollar and a quarter a day in summer; during the cutting I had two dollars a day for binding the wheat. We were four to bind after the machine and they cut from ten to fourteen acres every day; and the machine is driven with 2 or 4 horses and they thresh from 3 to 400 bushels a day. And here is good money to breed animals; here a man can cut as much hay as he will without paying, but land is a fairly high price from 5 to 8 dollars per acre and worked land from 10 to 15 per acre. And by next summer the railroad will be finished to Hampton 10 miles from here, and it will go 2 English miles from here as I see. The wheat crop in America is about the same as with the lumber business in Norway. Now the wheat is low priced; it has been a half dollar per bushel here for wheat, therefore here is hard money times. Potatoes are a half dollar per bushel; a quarter kilo butter 15 shillings; a quarter kilo port 8 shillings. A pair of horses from 3 to 400 dollars; a pair of oxen about 100 dollars; a cow from 20 to 30 dollars; a new wagon costs 100 dollars, a plow 30 dollars, a reaper or machine for cutting the wheat costs from 175 to 200 dollars; so a man can cut hay with the same. A threshing machine from 7 to 800 dollars; a horse rake, to rake hay with, from 10 to 65 dollars for different kinds of them.

I will send herewith a receipt to Halvor Thorsen Kipstul on the deed to the farm Mevastul which he has asked me for. As I heard in Thor's letter, so I must ask Halvor Kipstul if he has paid Jens Mevastul the 4 marks and 4 shillings which were due on the declaration which he bought for him; he has asked me here and I did not know other than that he had received it.

So I must tell you that Gunlek Dalen traveled to Minnesota last spring to Gunder and so they want 400 miles further northwest. He has taken land there on a homestead of 160 acres; it cost him 15 dollars, but it is new land. So it is poor earnings and hard to make a living at first; he got himself a house up in the autumn but he hasn't broken anything yet, and he says it has good water and hay harvest and exceptionally rich land and plenty of trees.

So I must tell you that Thov and Gonild have a daughter who is now 7 weeks old. And Jens was married to a girl from Hedemarken in February 1869, and they have also a daughter 10 weeks old. So I must tell you that the Skuggeberg girls came here 6 weeks before Christmas. Anne is with a farmer 9 miles north of here and Kari is at the hotel in Hampton 10 miles south of here. Anne gets one and a half and Kari two dollars per week. And they are quite satisfied. I have no more news this time except that you must be most heartily greeted from us all.

Ole Halvorson Klevstul

So I must ask if you will write to me as soon as you get this letter in hand and let us know if there is anyone coming here to America in the spring. And let us hear news from our old birth-land; it gladdens us greatly.

My address is Ole Halvorson, Hampton, P.O., Franklin Co., Iowa, North America

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That I the undersigned herewith engage myself to give Svennung Olsen Houkom power of attorney to write under the deed to the farm Mevastul in my behalf. This is confirmed by me in the presence of two

witnesses.

Ole Halvorson  
Signed by himself

To Witness  
Thov Gulliksen Dalen  
Kittil Svennungsen Lisland

Pomme de tere 21 May 1870

Good friend Svennung Oleson and Son-in-law Høje Aslaksen

I must write to you both at one time. Your honored and welcome letter, posted in Videsøe the 2 March, I received the 14 April and read through it with great happiness and joy, when I heard that you are all healthy and live well. Which we must and should thank God for; and the same I can say in return that we are well, both I and my wife, till this date and live well; and now I shall tell you how I have got my land; 26 June 1869 I took a statement for 1 year - a statement doesn't last more than one year - which I gave 3 ½ dollars for, and 26 June 1870 I shall take a homestead. So I must pay 15 ½ dollars. So I can sit there for 5 years as well as taxes; so I get a deed or conveyance. So I must pay tax and then I am full owner; and I have 1 quarter land and 1 quarter contains 100.60 acres (Note: 100.60 acres - I think he was not sure how to write 160, the usual size of one quarter) and I have put up a cabin; it is 8 alen long and 7 alen broad; (Note: Alen - the Norwegian alen equals 24.7 inches) and so I have bought myself a stove or cook-oven and two windows and so I have roofed it with birchbark and sod just as the Norwegian way; and the timber consists of oak. Big, about 8 or 10 inches top; and so there is here partly basswood or linden in Norwegian and elm and something called ironwood; and 6 or 8 miles north in Ottertel (Ottetail) is tamarack; it is like Norwegian spruce. Big and long it can be 30 or 40 alen, and so straight as a light (beam) but my land is nothing but small trees and hazel bushes. I can cut the bushes; we have here a knife about 18 inches long, but we must dig the big tree roots. I don't have prairie, but I think it is better to take woods because a prairie without woods, then one must either buy wood, or so must a man steal them and I have no liking for that; and it was not good for me to travel a long way from Gunder. I have nothing to drive with but Gunder has 4 driving oxen so I get help. How strong they are.

I must explain to you a little more about the building method here; we cut oak timbers 5 or 6 inches thick and so we cover with shakes. The ground timbers we do not take off the bark on the ground, and so the roof, the most, those who can afford to buy chips but here they are called shingles; and so we fill in the wall spaces; in Norway we called them wall lights, but here they call them (kjnkur) chinker. So we have sand and lime and pack full the wall spaces, and so we whitewash with lime. So it is the best house any man could own - so there is not such a warm house in Norway - but here are plenty who build of frame and boards and plaster, but they are not so warm, but better looking. Now I will explain to you about the land's condition. Here the land is on the average flat so we can see 10 or 12 English miles; but so there are small valleys and rolling land, and woods here and there, and sloughs and big lakes - vatn in Norwegian - in between big fishing places, and around here now at this time the fish go up the river - the beck - so a man can take as much as he will have; and completely perfect good soil is here. Last autumn they got 30 bushels of wheat per acre and potatoes and root vegetables grow completely overwhelmingly. You ask me if it will be beneficial for you to come over here to America, and I shall do the best I can. I will not advise you either for or against because nobody who comes likes it the first year; they think everything is contrary at the beginning, but when they have been here 1 year. But I have not talked to any who would rather be in Norway again. If I got a similar farm in the same way, I think that the taxes and expenses are so big, that when a man has paid his taxes and expenses and workers' pay so I believe I would scarcely have the half again. So they sit and complain for themselves and it is great misery, but that is not the case here. Here the taxes and expenses are reduced as the State debt is paid in and it goes quickly. So I believe as far as I understand it that you would do well, just as well as others and especially well for your children. Your son Ole who is so well educated could soon learn the language and get a good position, for now you know how a man can get himself land. So it is not expensive, and if you come, so I will not advise you to buy some old farm, because the soil is worn out long ago; and so you must get yourself in debt, and it is not so easy to pay off for wood is cheap. Wood costs now 60 or 70 and up to 80 cents a bushel; and 100 pounds of flour or sifted wheatmeal costs 2 ½ dollars, and here are 100 cents in a dollar. Butter is now 15 cents a pound, pork 10 cents a pound. Coffee is 3 ½ pounds for 1

dollar. Tobacco is 1 dollar a pound. Clothes are dear and linen is 18 or 20 or 22 cents a yard and 1 yard is 1 ½ alen Norwegian. Clothes for women are not so dear.

As you could have some money left over when you come, so I believe that you would do fairly well, but I will not tell you to come or not, but from what I have written I shall vouch that it is true. We must work here just as we had to in Norway, but then here we have something to work for; and if you think of coming don't delay, for the longer you wait the further west you must go to get land; for here people come in thousands, and here in Otter Tail County is still enough land to get, but people must go further just as they come here. And I hear from your letter much news since I came away, and it was a great joy to hear, and if you think of coming next Spring so write to me. So I shall give you some information about the journey, and so I must beg you if you could help Høie and Thorbjør with some money. So they could come to me. It is so expensive to send money orders, so much goes away; and now I must end my simple writing for this time, with a heartfelt and loving greeting to you altogether.

Live well in God is the wish from the heart.

Gunlek Gundersen Dalen

My address is Mr. G. Gundersen, Pomedetere P.O., Stivens County Minnesota, Nort Amerik

(Written along the edge) If you would like to share in the postage cost so tell me what it costs. Dear friend will you read this letter for Høie Langeli. Greet Miken and Ole from me.

Pomedetere 21 May 1870

Dear Daughter and Son-in-law Høie Aslaksen

Your welcome writing of 27 February I received 14 April, and read it through with great joy and happiness, and I hear must news since I left, and I hear from your letter that your Mother is dead and your Father is not in very good health either, and you ask about your old Father, whether to bring him with you. That I will not allow myself to tell you, either to or not, but this much I can say, that it is very difficult for old people. So you must do as you will; and you ask me whether I can find a way to some money to help you with, that I cannot answer you at present because I have been so busy paying what I owed to Gunder, and getting myself a house; and the pay here is not very big, because here it is too newly settled, people have nothing to hire with; but if I could do so I would be heartily willing to do it; but you must finally try to come over next spring, you shall have land from me at first. So you can plant enough to live on, as much as you want, all that you will have for nothing; unless you will go to Iowa, there where Thor is; there the pay for work is very high, but so there is no land available and no wood. So you would do better to come to me; and now I must finish for this time I have such little time. I must go to the Post Office, but when you get this letter you must write to me again. So I will write back. So you must in God's name be most lovingly greeted from us both. Greet your Father from me and little Aslak and Gunlek and all your children. I would God would allow me to have Aslak and Gunlek here with me; adieu live well all well in God. Greet all my old friends for me.

Gunlek Gundersen Dalen

(Written on the edge) Write soon and tell of one thing and another - by next year I hope you visit me but you must write to me as soon as you can, for it is a great happiness for me when I receive a letter from Norway, we sit here alone — Greet Jolstad from me and Ole and Andrea Nystul, Halvor and Cresti and Ole Gravoli.

## **Olaf Svennungsen Houkom**

Olaf Svennungsen Houkom was born May 31, 1850 at Kviteseid, Telemark, Norway of parents Svennung Olsen Houkom and wife Marie 1864-1866. Emigrated to America 1870. Worked for relatives at Coon Prairie, Vernon County, Trempealeau Valley, Trempealeau County, Wisconsin and Highland Prairie, Fillmore County, Minnesota 1870 - 1874. Attended La Crosse Business College, La Crosse, Wisconsin 1874 - 1876, Augsburg College 1876 - 1880.

Visited Norway and heard lectures at Kristiania University 1880-1881. Studied Theology at Augsburg Seminary 1881 - 1884. Ordained 1884. Mission Pastor west of Devil's Lake, North Dakota, 1884 - 1885. Minister for Ness and Middle Grove Congregation, Mekinock, Grand Forks County, North Dakota 1885 - 1902, Trinity Congregation, Northwood, North Dakota 1885 - 1891; Hoel and St. Petri Congregation, Northwood, North Dakota 1885 - 1887; Ebenezer Congregation, Northwood, North Dakota 1904.

Farmed at Mekinock, North Dakota 1888 - 1912; Fargo, North Dakota 1912 - 1920. Married to Anna Marie Glerum 1888 (died 1891) and Anne J. Dahlum 1893. Died November 5, 1920.

His brothers and sisters who are named in the following letters came to America as follows:

Hans and Tarjer 1879

Anders 1881

and finally his parents, together with brother and sisters Aslak, Anne and Thone in summer 1887.

His parents lived with him at Mekinock, North Dakota 1887 - 1894 when they took land for themselves in Roseau County, Minnesota, where they died, his mother in 1896 and his father in 1910.

## Pastor Olaf S. Houkom's Letters from America

(At present) "Rjukan" 5<sup>th</sup> June 1870

Dear Father,

I will briefly inform you, dear parents and relatives, that we arrived at Quebec the 3<sup>rd</sup>, and in the morning of the 6<sup>th</sup> shall be sent further on a steamship to Milwaukee. Because of headwinds the journey has been fairly slow; but God be praised we are all in good health who arrived here. Two died, namely Kristen Verpe and Kari's two children. There have been several attacks of seasickness; I have not been. Skien and Laurdal have still not come. From Tarje Eistaaen I must ask you to greet his parents at home, because he will not write until he is further along; he is fairly well and in good spirits. As I shall write you more fully when I reach Coon Prairie, so must I end this short letter and greet you dear parents and family and relatives, from Egelev, her children and acquaintances here on board. I must now break off with the heartiest farewell and thanks to you all and be assured that I am always your devoted son.

Olaf S. Houkom

Coon Prairie, 24 July 1870

Dear Father:

Since God so mercifully has been present with his fatherly help, and guided us on our long and tedious journey, it is not too much if I take my pen and inform you, dear parents and family, so that you also can partake in my happiness and gratitude to Him, our Life's all-good guide.

As it is already six weeks since we left Rjukan, I hope that the little imperfect letter I wrote there has arrived. I'll now write something more detailed about the journey. As you know we sailed out of Skien harbor 12<sup>th</sup> April, which day I shall not easily forget, as I parted from you dear Father, and the rest of my friends and acquaintances who stood and watched. That afternoon we were in Langsund, where we stayed becalmed till Good Friday the 15<sup>th</sup>, the morning when we sailed out of the harbor. We tacked for two or three days, I'm not sure, before we lost sign of the Fatherland. Now already the weakest began to suffer the intolerable seasickness, with its pains under the breast and hastening their sacrifices to the insatiable sea god; but God be praised, with me and my company it was quite scarce for the whole journey.

When we came out on the North Sea a storm arose so we raced with great speed past Scotland, and immediately we were on the great free ocean where we lay and tumbled against a head wind and sometimes storm, so we couldn't reckon on a good wind for more than one or two days a week across the whole Atlantic. But so we finally came to the long-awaited Newfoundland Banks, where fishing boats lay thick around us. Now everyone's thought began to lighten, and some days we saw land on one side or the other. So we came to the great St. Lawrence Bay, where we lost sight of land again. So the Pilot came on board and we entered The River, as they call it, then we had enough to look at, and what a beautiful sight! White-painted houses, as close as in a town on each side down to the beach, and one beautiful Church after another, and the green fields and meadows with the picturesque woods in the background.

We all stood on the decks and almost stared our eyes out. Below decks and on deck there was washing and getting ready for the arrival at quarantine, which no passenger ship could pass. We got there in the evening, and lay over til morning. Then the doctor came on board to examine us, and see if we were healthy and sound; otherwise we would have had to go to the hospital. But thank God Rjukan had its people in good shape, so no one was left behind. Then we were sailworthy again, and in the evening we anchored in Quebec Harbor. It was then the Friday before Pentecost. Now our long sea voyage was done. It was undeniably a bad journey, for those who have many small children to care for when they are sick. However, they seem less vulnerable to seasickness than adults. For my part it was an enjoyable trip, because alternately there was always dancing and all kinds of fun imaginable. I shall refer to the journey again.

The second morning of Pentecost we had to be up early, for everyone had to be on deck, packed and ready for the journey through the land. In the afternoon here came a little steamship which transferred us and our belongings to a big steamship, which went to Montreal. So our luggage was driven, but we had to walk about half an English mile to a smaller steamboat which went through a long canal past many towns and places, until we came to Hamilton, where we left the ship in a hurry and got in a train. From there it went to Detroit, where we were taken across a river, to another train. Here our luggage was taken out of the wagon for Customs inspection, but it was no great matter. He just lifted the lid and looked in the chest. From Detroit we went to Grand Haven, where we again got on a steamship, on which we crossed the Great Lake Michigan to Milwaukee. We met an acquaintance there, namely Thorbjørn Gregerson and his son Hans; they live a few miles from town. Now we went by train again to La Crosse where we arrived Monday afternoon just 8 days since we left Quebec. We stayed overnight in an emigrant lodging home, build of boards, in the town. All morning we walked around, expecting Paul to come for us; but unfortunately, nobody came. So we took the first chance that offered; I met a man from Laurdal named Christoffer Sending and we drove with him about 20 English miles and then had to walk about three miles to John Kirkebø's, where we hoped to stay overnight, but he wasn't home, so we walked to the nearest neighbor, a man from Gudbrandsdal named Svend Berge, where we were treated as if we were their own relatives. In the morning his wife went part way with us, and showed us the way to Høie Kirkebø, where Paul was working.

We arrived there in the afternoon, and Paul came to meet us when he saw us coming; he was not a little indignant that we had had to walk. He had not hoped to see me and Mikkel, but he was very happy that we could be together again. Obviously he had not received the letter I wrote in Quebec. It came several days after our arrival. He took us in the house; and you can believe it wasn't long before Høie had harnessed the horses, and off we went, I and Paul and he, to the town for our chests, which we had left behind. Now we came to an agreement with Høie; he has a big farm and lives well. He is married to the daughter of Olaf Kvaale, and has six children. I soon began to do a little work, I was digging with Paul, cutting up trees and bushes by the roots; but the news of our arrival spread, so we had to visit everybody, and that took many days. The crops seemed fairly poor in several places, because there had been an unusual drought over the whole of Wisconsin and several places. We celebrated the 4<sup>th</sup> of July with Tron, who lives about 12 English miles from the others. Paul took his violin and played, and old Karen was with us and danced the Springdans. I stayed there 14 days for the hay cutting.

When I came back up on the Prairie, I hired out for the month to Aslak for 25 dollars. The haying is now finished, and the Reaper, that is a cutting machine, is heard clattering on almost every farm. From Andreas Naes I got a letter 8 days after my arrival; he says he has written to you and said what he thinks is best for me; he writes to me it is best if I stay with my relatives in Wisconsin, in case you come in the Spring, he says, you can travel with him on the Western journey. You have certainly waited a long time for this letter, dear Parents, but better late than never. I cannot sufficiently thank God, who up to now has granted me life and health, and if only He will be with me and offer me His assistance, so that I can be of

service and happiness to you, dear Parents, who have always showered me with good and wished me well, have thanks for every loving admonition, and may I never forget them. I finish with a friendly greeting from all relatives, though most from your devoted son.

Olaf S. Houkom

Greet all relatives and acquaintances, especially Uncle Anders from me.

O. S. Houkom

Highlands Prairie, January 9<sup>th</sup> 1871

Dear Precious Parents!

As it is now such a long time since I wrote home, and I have received no reply, I presume that one of the letters has gone astray. I certainly received, on August 16<sup>th</sup>, your dear letter of July 8, and about three weeks later I wrote a letter to you, for which I have awaited an answer nearly three months; but none has come. I can now no longer put off writing, as I can imagine your longing to hear from me, who am so far away from you. I can not sufficiently thank our heavenly Father, who so fatherly has stood by me and preserved my health since I forsook home and Fatherland. In case the letter I wrote in summer has not arrived I must recount. As soon as I got here I had a letter from Anders Naes, from which I saw that it was no use for me to go to the West; so I settled down in Wisconsin, which I afterwards regretted because of the low wages there. The first I ACTUALLY WORKED FOR WAS Tron, with whom I cut hay for 14 days. I had then a dollar a day. Afterwards I hired out for a month in the harvest to Aslak Kirkebøen and had 25 dollars, which was the highest wages then given. Then I was threshing with Paul for a few days; he has just bought a share in a threshing machine with Tron and Ouver, which I thought an ill-considered risk - it wasn't enough with 160 dollars for the machine, but there was also a pair of horses that he must have, and they cost 200 dollars; on top of that winter fodder he must buy for them. He earned barely enough to pay for the machine. As it was a day here and a day there, I thought there was very little profit following the machine. I and Mikkel Seland got the idea of going to Minnesota to work on the railroad, and traveled by train to Rushford and there met Gjermund Aasland, who told me that Andreas and Gunnuld Naes were at Highland Prairie, where they came for the harvest. We had only 6 or 7 English miles to travel to them, and decided therefore to meet them. We went now to Hans Naes where Andreas was. They were very surprised when I told them what the wages were in Wisconsin. Andreas and Gunnuld had 50 dollars each for a month, otherwise the usual daily pay was from 2 ½ to 3 dollars, which is twice that at Coon Prairie. I now joined the threshing again for a time, and have worked for Hans since, and I now intend to go to an English School. My Uncle Aslak suggested I should take a school, which I could have had, but then I would have had to give up my own schooling, so that would have been to my detriment, instead of any advantage.

Now I must change the subject, and describe the course of the year here. I must certainly say, it is a hard time for the farmer, as he got less wheat, and the price has not been over 88 cents for the very best wheat in the town, which is sold for both under and over 50 cents. Those who have money to lend have taken over now, when they can get 12 to 18 per cent interest.

You asked in your letter if I would write details about my journey and how I find the land to be. As regards the trip, I described it as well as I could remember, in the letter I wrote in the summer. As can be expected, thoughts of the sea have something terrifying about them for many; but for my part I think it was just a joy-ride, as for the whole trip I was well and sound. There were many seasick the first days, but it wasn't long before they were up on deck dancing and playing, so you would think the deck would collapse under them. There were some who were seasick again as soon as it became stormy. It didn't seem to affect the children much. It was worse for those with small babies, who had to sit still in their bunks all the time. On the whole we had a fine but long journey. On the steamboat through the land it was worse, because we had to lie crossways on the deck, and when we changed from one boat to the other they drove us head over heels to get our things over on the other. As regards the land, I've still had very little experience. The land is, as far as I have seen, promising for all trades. Here a man can easily choose whatever handwork or trade he wants. If he will learn a craft, it is not as in Norway, that he must learn for several years and perhaps pay for it, but here he gets his monthly pay while he is learning. If he wants to be a farmer here lie great stretches of land waiting cultivation, and the black soil gives full

recompense for your work. But it is certain, time must be used and money saved, you can put away a pretty shilling in a year. It is easy to earn money here, but there are also many temptations to waste it. I was at Church on Christmas Day, and never since I left home have I felt myself more at home than that day. Many were gathered together, but there are many here also who would just as soon leave the Church alone, rather than offer any money towards the Pastor's pay, or the maintenance of the Church; but they cannot do without brandy. As I have heard nothing from you, I don't suppose you are coming over in the Spring; if that is the case, so write as fast as possible. I must finish my simple writing to all relatives and friends both big and small. Hans and family send most friendly greetings to you and the rest of the relatives. Yes, dear Parents and Family the most sincere greetings from your always devoted.

O. S. Houkom

Naes, 30<sup>th</sup> March 1871

Dear Father,

Your very precious but equally long awaited letter, I received the 24<sup>th</sup> of this month, and how dear is it not for me, your so long absent son, to hear from you, dear Parents and family, as well as relatives and friends in my home, that you all are healthy and living well, just as it is also a happiness for me to be able to give you the same news again, that I am well, which is neither in mine nor mortal power to preserve, but my Heavenly Father, whose blessings are due appropriate gratitude.

I say, long awaited letter, and you must not wonder, as a greeting in a letter from Tarald Sundet to Mikkel Norgaarden is all I have heard from you since I got a letter from you last summer. I see from your letter, that also you have long awaited a letter from me, and the mutual waiting, caused by the crossing of our letters, is the cause of the long silence which has taken place between us. And the greetings in Uncle's letter to Egelev I know nothing about, as I haven't had a letter from them, since I last parted from them in Autumn until just a few days ago, when Paul sent to request the money, which was lent by his Mother for my journey over. I gave him this answer: "It was my Father, and not I, who borrowed the money; because if the money had been borrowed in such a way that I had to repay it, I must certainly have been there when the loan was arranged, or at least informed by my Father of the conditions of time in which it should be paid." In his letter neither a Norwegian letter nor a greeting from there was mentioned.

I thank you so much for your letter and the loving admonitions therein, of which every word goes to my heart; for I see how deeply lies on your heart, dear Father, my welfare, both Spiritual and temporal. Yes, memories of your goodness to me dear Parents, will not be dimmed by obstacles or success, but will ever live in my heart until Life's last moment. When I could no longer hold out in the uncertainty that I hovered in, while I waited for the letter, I wrote a letter to you immediately after Christmas, which I hope you have received. As I can't remember whether I told you about my trip to Minnesota, I will now make you better informed. I have worked a month for Aslak Kirkebøe, and been some days with the threshing machine, but when reaping was over the day's wage had decreased, so Mikken Seland I agreed to travel. Far west in Minnesota work could be had on the railroad, with good pay; but when we reached La Crosse, where we walked from Coon Prairie, we were warned against the hard railroad work, and that we were likely to be cheated because we didn't know the language. We decided then to travel to Highlands Prairie; therefore got a ticket across the Mississippi and by train to Rushford, which is 30 English miles from La Crosse, which cost \$1.65, and then we had still 7 English miles which we were lucky enough to drive. For the rest, I wrote so much in the above-mentioned letter, which I won't repeat here. In Winter, when I had time, I took a trip and visited several acquaintances, namely: Thorjus Braekke, Thorgrim and Aslak Rolefstad and Hans Roholt; they're all well and live well. Alak Midbøe is, as you know, married,

he lives with Thorgrim. Thorjus has land in Wisconsin, near Svennung Houkom and Stener Amundsen, where he will move in Spring; Anders Braekke is also there. I have also talked to Gunder and Thor Lønnegraf, on whom I had a claim from Mr. Jorgensen in Skien, but there was nothing to get from them, so I sent it back, and I hope it has arrived. Thor will soon be married, I heard, and Gunder leads a bad life, as his behavior to his wife is less than praiseworthy. In winter she left him once, and he swore he would find those who fooled her into doing such a thing; but as he was afraid to stay at home alone, he had to promise to be good, and get her to come back, for as long as that will be.

It is happy news to hear that there in Norway it has been a good year which was greatly needed, as the fearful war everywhere has its influence, not the least in Norway. Here in America people are hoping for the best now that the war is ended. The price of wheat has since that time risen greatly, it is now up to \$1.15 a bushel. You ask me dear Father if I am willing and able to repay Aunt Egelev the money you borrowed from her for my journey, and what shall prevent it, dear Father, if the Lord who up to now has been with me and granted me life and health. Therefore it is my decision to pay back the money, so I must ask you to give me exact information of the size of the sum and the repayment conditions, if it shall be repaid with interest, and if so, how much; but I cannot pay it until Autumn, as nobody pays anything before they have threshed. As it is a serious matter, I can not here give you any advice concerning your journey to America, as I am still too new in the land and too little acquainted with its advantages and disadvantages, but I shall bit by bit give you a better account of things.

Now be most lovingly greeted, dear Parents and Family, greet Uncle Anders, Uncle Aslak, my friend Olf Naes, yes I can not name everybody; but I bid you greet all relatives - old Grandma must not be forgotten, and acquaintances, from your always devoted son.

O. S. Houkom

N.B. Hans greets you faithfully. Greet Mikkell Klevstul from me that I still don't have a portrait. You must on my behalf congratulate him now that he will step out into the world on both legs, as people say.

Highland Prairie, November 26, 1871

Dear Father,

I have now postponed long enough the time to answer your dear writings of 22 September, which I received the 26<sup>th</sup> of last month, and I can scarcely describe the excited feelings with which I opened the great and contents-rich letter, where I found you all in good condition after the journey over. One portrait at a time I didn't have patience to spend time over, but pulled them all out, and looked at one after the other, so that I could greet you all. Thereafter I gazed at and would have a conversation with each one, but in the end I deceived myself, when no reply could be received; but lovely it was anyway, to study such successful portraits of you, who so often in hard times and good times have been next to the all-good Creator and preserver of all things and guide, the subject of my thoughts, and it must depend on God whether we again in this world can gladden ourselves in seeing again each other in a different way from this. Not therefore, dear parents and family, I certainly have a feeling that we shall meet again, whether it is on this side or the other side of the ocean. I thank God, that I who up to now have had health, and with it happiness in whatever I have taken up, so I could reach the goal of my wishes which are that I with a certain acknowledgment could show you a return for all the good you have shown me; when you with good upbringing have so much as it stands in human power, afforded my well-being both spiritual and temporal. Just as you also have given me a good and basic childhood education from which I later in life

can reap gain and happiness. Always I am preceded by you with good examples, and equally good advice was always given to me. God give me always strength and will, that I hereafter may live, and thus lead a moral life and Christian conduct, so that you, my dear parents, may have honor, benefit and happiness thereof.

It is a joy to hear such good news from the Fatherland as in these two years have come therefrom; that you are blessed with such rich harvests, which were highly needed after so many hard years, so that the many impoverished could raise themselves a little again. If people in Norway have had good years, so have here in America the last harvests been unfavorable. Wheat prices have been low until now in Autumn they finally came up a little, as it has been one dollar per bushel; but so the wheat harvest, it has been very poor this year, which is caused by the long-lasting drought throughout the summer, for there came not to say a raindrop the whole summer and whole autumn. This long-lasting drought has had many injurious results, namely; prairie fires, and forest fires, which rampaged horribly in many places. Prairie fires have brought ruin in hundreds of miles width, and many towns have gone as the spoil of fire, both here in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Woods and saw mills to the value of many hundred thousands are burned up in Wisconsin and Michigan. The westerly counties of Minnesota have partly been plagued by grasshopper swarms which utterly destroyed the growth where they settled. Hailstorms also struck down the crops in the north and west counties; so here in the churches have been offerings for the needy.

In Autumn I visited our old neighbor Svennung Houkom; he lives in Tremplau Valley in Wisconsin, about two day's journey from here. He has a fine large farm of 100 acres, and 10 acres of woods. He lives and is well, and the boys run the farm — for a half share in the crops, and so they work elsewhere for the rest of the time. I shall greet you from Svennung and Thone, and the girls bade me send greetings to Anne so diligently. The son-in-law Stener is just the nearest neighbor to them and lives perfectly well. The relationship between him and his parents-in-law has now turned the other side out, as they visit each other and sit at the coffee table and chat quite amicably. Svennung finally had to take Stener to the woodshed until he became the owner of his own farm and house. I don't believe Svennung has anything to say about Stener concerning his fortune. Saamund Bjaaland is also settled there in the neighborhood; all at his place are healthy and live well. I must greet you from them. From Torjus and Anders Braekke I shall greet you; also from Halvor Høleson and Ole Holtevigen. From Gunnhild Kringlemyr shall I also greet you; she is now married. All of them are settled in Tremplau Valley. Yes, I must now finally thank you most lovingly for the portraits you sent, which found me sound and well, which I also have been the whole summer. I earned in summer and autumn about 80 dollars. Now I am a school teacher and shall have 12 dollars a month, which is unheard-of cheap; but I would rather earn something than nothing. From Hans and family I send friendly greetings, but Mari has been rather poorly, as she for the whole summer has been badly plagued with gout, and swelled up first in one joint and then in another, both in arms and legs. They send their most loving thanks for the portraits you sent; because Mari can not go anywhere they cannot show thanks by sending you their portraits in return. Send greetings to Flaabygd from them. From Anders I shall greet you most diligently and tell you many thanks for the portraits. Both he and Jorgen are healthy and in good shape. I should write down his address in case you would write to him. The portraits for Mother's brother Gunder I have not sent yet, as I don't have his address, but I think I can get it from Anders.

I send now enclosed herewith some portraits, and you must select the one you like best. It is not exactly the size you asked for, but it's fairly successful so I believe it will be well accepted. God grant that it may find you all well and contented. One I must ask you to send to my dear Mother's brother Anders Houkom with many loving greetings. Also one to Father's brother Aslak, and greet him most heartily from me. Tell them both I have thought of writing to them, and one day I will get serious about it. Concerning your portraits again. To Mikkel Klevstul must you send the fourth, as I have given him a promise of it. Greet him most diligently, and as I suspect that he is now a man you must request him that

he send his wife's portrait. Send as many portraits as you can get, as I have a big album to fill.

I must now break off my simple writing with loving greetings to all relatives and acquaintances, and you are both first and last greeted dear dear parents and family from me who always include you all in a dear memory.

Finally I sign myself with respect your ever devoted son,

O. S. Houkom

P.S. The unanswered questions in your next to the last letter I can not remember. Let me know next time you write. In case anyone we know comes to America next year, I would like to have three pairs of mittens, two women's and one for a man.

Dear Brother,

I thank you very much for your little letter, from which I see that you have had good health, which is the best of all earthly gifts, since we with trembling hands and voices took leave of each other. Yes, many times, dear Brother, are you and my home's memories present for my soul. Where the peaks and hillsides are crowned with lovely trees, where everything is so delightful, where the pretty Spring-singers with the most lovely tones tuned their sons of praise, and where I as a child passed the happiest days of my life. Here I find nothing like it; here I see only the level prairies with small strips of trees between and on the prairie edges big oak woods. Most of the houses are small, but some are very pretty. There is plenty of fun here, such as music and dancing, but often also foolery, so it isn't as good and enjoyable as at home, and everything seems somewhat strange.

I see from your letter that your position in life has been changed, as you - by being confirmed have come a step further forward in the World. You probably think you have come into freedom now, but your gentle childhood with its gladness disappears more and more and the adult age arrives with many kinds of temptations to trouble your baptismal vows, so you must be alert and pray the Almighty for strength and aid to resist. Greet my brothers and sisters: Anne, Tarjer, Tone, Anders, Aslak, and little Anne Andrea, greet all my comrades, and you yourself are greeting most lovingly by your ever affectionate brother.

O. S. Houkom

P.S. Tell my Father to hurry and send me a portrait of you altogether.

La Crescent, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1872

Dear Father,

Your, as always welcome and encouraging Writing I received March 21<sup>st</sup> this year. I can scarcely express with words with what feelings I received your letter, for there is no-one who knows, how precious I consider every message from the place, where I passed Life's most joyful and blessed days, together with dear Parents and family, yes, relatives and friends, to know whose state of health lies so greatly in my heart. I can therefore not sufficiently acknowledge and thank God, our Father and preserver and guide of all things, who allows me with messages and information to find you in health, as the most important, and for Life's other needs, in satisfactory position: since good times and harvests have benefitted you. Next I have the happiness to tell you, that I am well, and find myself in good circumstances. It is now a long time, dear Father, since I received your letter, so already you have waited long for a letter back from me; but I have postponed it until now, and can scarcely say why. However, one thing is that I have nothing interesting here to tell you, but I must get started with what I have. I must begin by answering what you have asked me, whether I already with my departure had decided to take a trip home again and visit relatives and friends. Then I will answer that it really was so; for it was clear to me, that you, dear Parents, would not follow after as quickly, as you thought at that time. To forsake you, and not have in mind to see you again in Life, was for me too hard to think of. I thought then with God's help, to set foot on my Fatherland again within 5 or 6 years and I think the same now. Time runs fast, two years are already lapsed since I set foot on America's land.

I must now go on to tell what I have undertaken since I last wrote to you. As I wrote last time, I contracted to hold Norwegian School for two months last winter; but I taught not more than one, for after Christmas an English School came to the same district, so I wanted to use the time to go to it and so all the winter passed. We had cold and rainy weather. On Summer's Day we had a snowstorm with between

1 ½ and 2 feet of snow. Wheat sowing was delayed for many until May began. In the Spring work I worked a month for a neighbor of Hans Naes, a man from Tudal, for which I earned 13 dollars. Most of my work was with plow and harrow and seeder-machine, which I drove with two big brown horses - in work no-one drives a single horse, but always a pair, as with a word called Tim (written Team).

The 5<sup>th</sup> June I left Highlands Prairie and came down to a little town by Mississippi, which is called La Crescent, in Minnesota. It lies opposite La Crosse in Wisconsin. Here men are working on a railroad, which goes along the Mississippi. It is here I shall work for a time, so I am almost like the road-gypsies in Norway; but here is better price for a road gypsy, here, than in Norway, as a man has 2 dollars a day and feeds himself. For food and lodging a man pays four dollars a week. It was hard work at first, till I got used to it, stand unceasingly and spade or shovel or hack without a rest. We go out to work at 7 o'clock in the morning and stay till 12 o'clock and out again at 1 o'clock and stay there till we rest at 6 o'clock in the evening. I shall be here till the last half of July, when I believe that the Harvest begins, so I shall go up to Highlands Prairie or North Prairie which lies north of the first. For the harvest days a man gets 2 or 3 dollars a day and food. Here on the railroad work I have for fellow-workers Norwegians, Swedes, Germans, Irish, and Americans. Here is a mixed life, you can believe, when people are in everyone twitters with his beak as if one should hear a flock of different birds all chattering at once and among them parrots, to which I liken them, which rattle in all languages without really knowing any of them. Some of the conversations can also be very entertaining such as accounts of manners and customs among the different people. But if one listened to all the raw and inhuman, one could believe he was among heathens. Such talk one doesn't usually hear among regular Americans. In this way they are more like the higher educated class in our Fatherland; but power-lust and contempt for the smaller is not found among them.

I must now go on and tell you some news, but it won't be much. Prospects for a good year are very promising. The wheat fields are very thick and fruitful. Andreas Naes has come back from California. He bade me greet you warmly, as well as Anders, Mother's brother, and if you meet anyone from Flaabygd then greet them from him. Jørgen would have liked to come with him; but he couldn't leave just then as he has a farm, which he wants to sell the produce from, and take a trip to Norway; but I have not heard from him since. You must tell Hans Norgaarden that I was recently at his son's wedding. He was married to the youngest daughter of Ole Rekanaes of Flaabygd. She was only 18 years old.

I didn't finish the letter at the place where I began it; for I suddenly thought, that it would be fun for a while to be a mower, instead of the tiresome railroad work. For this purpose I went over to Coon Prairie to Svennung Ouversen with whom I shall be during the mowing; but as I said before I shall go to Minnesota for the harvest. Here at Coon Prairie I found everything as in the old days, except that Aslak Kirkeboe died during last winter.

From Svennung and family I must greet you most warmly. He says, that he time after time has thought of writing to you, but has never come to accomplish it. Svennung has now succeeded so he progresses in prosperity and fortune every year. The other brothers lack much, for they do not have it on the swing as does Svennung, but they are healthy and live well. Old Karen is also quite lively and well, except occasionally, as she is plagued with rheumatism. I have met Egelev once hurriedly; she has always been well since we saw each other. I send greetings from her and the children. Paul is further north in Wisconsin, where he works as carpenter and joiner, and Dorthe is here with Svennung and works. Egelev said, that now she is expecting any day a letter from Uncle Aslak (Father's brother), concerning the money, which is due to her. Of the money she should have from me, I have paid some and the rest she shall have, if not before, so certainly in Autumn, so I shall send a receipt next time I write. She has now been paid by Mikkel Seland. From Highlands Prairie I must greet you from Hans Naes and family, who were well when I left them, except that Mari is badly plagued with a malignant tumor in the legs.

Likewise I must greet you warmly from Aslak Hasvik, who has a farm not far from Hans. Hans Gundersen Lia, whom I have talked with a few times bids me greet you and Uncle Anders (Mother's brother) very affectionately. He is in good circumstances. You must give Uncle Aslak (Father's brother) many thanks for the portraits he sent. Greet him and all other relatives and friends most warmly from me, who always has them in fond remembrance. Finally, dear Parents and family, be lovingly greeted from me and live well; that is the wish of your ever affectionate son.

O. S. Houkom

You must forgive me this time because I have no portrait to send you, but I will try to do better next time. I must greet Anne from Dorthe and she will greet Dorthe Midsund and say she can soon expect a letter from her.

Leon P. O. Monroe co. Wis  
U. States of North America 19 July 1873

Dear Father,

Your very welcome letter of 26 January this year I received about the middle of March thereafter. It is a great joy to me to hear that you at home are well and healthy which we must thank our good and almighty Creator for. That my Mother is sometimes sick pains me to hear, and I also see in your letter that sister Tarjer has still been plagued with anemia (Literally - green sickness - chlorosis). In such a case it is best to renounce all in patience into God's hand as He is the one who both will and can help. Concerning Tarjer I hope that she has overcome her sickness, but with Mother it is unfortunately the case that it reminds us again and again how necessary it is that she keeps herself as much as possible from exertions which she also can now well do since my sisters grow and thrive and so I do not doubt that they like good children don't hold themselves back, but with gladness and gratitude do everything in their power to ease Father's and Mother's burdens.

Concerning me it is just as great a joy to be able to inform you dear Parents and family that I am still healthy and find myself well, for which I owe the all-good Father praise and thanks.

I am at present with the Germans who live in a valley near La Crosse which is called Chipmunk Cooley, (pronounce it Kijipmond Kuli). I came here last September and was here the whole winter and will be here also through the summer. I and Mikkel Seland are together and our work is to chop bushes and small trees up by the root, which is called Grubbing, for which we have 7 ½ to 9 dollars per acre and I believe we shall come to earn 1 dollar a day each. I went to English school again in the winter so I can now somewhat read and speak English. I was alone here among the Germans, when Mikkel was at Highlands Prairie in Minnesota, where he froze his ears so badly that he was sick from it all winter. I am happy among these Germans; they are very good people. Instead of where I have been before where I only heard cursing and swearing, foolery and all discomfort, I see here nothing but fear of God, order and uprightness around me. Such places are much to be preferred even though they are among strange nationalities I think; but such will one not hear among Norwegians who very slyly can describe for their poor newly arrived countrymen how over exertion in work and also swindling exists among other nationalities, and the mistake with newcomers is that they are too trusting of their own people; also too shy to submit to the small inconvenience which follows from going to an American for work without being able to talk to him for the first few weeks.

Just as there is here a change of ink, so there is also a change for me concerning since I began this letter. Yes, I began this letter late, but that is now however a long time ago, as I actually began it in May, if it wasn't in April, as there was a pair of days when I couldn't do anything because I had a swollen hand. I did the beginning then, but laid it away and put off the writing, because I was busy reading the paper, "Scandinavia and America" for which I subscribed with the current year's beginning, yes, also this change I talked about. Actually I left the Germans at the end of May and was on the way to a town named Sparta here in Wisconsin, so I met a Yankee (pronounced Jaenki and is a name for the descendants of the first immigrants in North America), to whom I hired myself for 5 months for the pay of 22 dollars per month. I began my work the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June. I now live in a house, such as one could not believe existed, which in Norwegian expression is called farm house, but rich man's farm, and however its owner is an American farmer or 'Bonde'.

With joy I hear that there are very good times over there in Old Norway now, which are also highly needed, so that the poor farmer and worker can begin to improve himself a little. These good times are probably I believe a strong antidote against America-fever; but after my intuition, as I don't believe the

good times in Norway will continue very long, so they would do best now, those who have anything to dispose of, to strike while the iron is hot, as one says, if they have any thought of at any time going to America, for here are also good times for one who has to begin from the beginning. However not for the reason that I believe here will be a quick change in the run of time; but when they have thought and think of going to America so I don't think there's any use putting it off - I have now the joy of delivering to you the receipt from Aunt Egelev. I paid her off at New Year, and the whole sum came to 67 dollars and 12 cents in American paper money.

Of news I have not much as I haven't been among acquaintances since before Christmas; but they are all, as far as I know, in health and well-to-do. Andreas Naes is now married as you probably have heard, with the daughter of Aslak Pegeberg and Lisibet Bergstaa. I heard that some fool from Flaabygd said "It would be find to get children out of them" as she is just as big as he is. Asker Tveten is married to Thorsten Gunnison Veungen, who was a widower - Thorgrim Kleppe is married to the daughter of Tarjei Odden.

I must close for this time with all loving and friendly greetings to you dear Parents and family, and greet all relatives and friends for me. Live well: this wishes your ever affectionate Son.

Ole S. Houkom

P.S. If you write so that it comes before the end of October so my address is as I have written it at the beginning of the letter. Hans, you must write to me with much news, preferably before I move, so perhaps you will get a portrait of me in the Autumn.

La Crosse November 6, 1874

Dear Father,

It is now a long time since I received your, as always welcome, letter of 1<sup>st</sup> February this year which I read through with the same tense feeling and interest, as I have for every new piece of information from the Fatherland. With the same letter one also to Svennung Kirkebø, which I also immediately thereafter sent on. I would much rather have delivered it myself, but it happened that it began to thaw, when I had the letters, and everyone knows that the country roads in America are not good to travel then; because of the fine dirt together with clay and partly fine sand, which all become like dough when it becomes wet through. Yes as I said both letters were very interesting because of so much news, and mostly because the last like all earlier letters was permeated with the same Father-love which I have had such uncountable proofs of. I see from your letter than Home has been visited somewhat by sickness, but which however with God's help will disappear again. However, how I would be thankful to God for the first information that you dear Father were perfectly cured of your attack of infirmity.

However you must understand that a bachelor's life is restless and volatile, when you realize that I was no longer than a month at the place, from which I wrote the letter to Mother's brother, after I had written it. The fact is, I moved at New Year back to the same Germans, where I had worked before. I went to school there for several weeks, and then worked for them the whole of last summer, and earned about 160 dollars.

I have now about 14 days since finished with farm work and determined I will try something else, namely, to take up commerce or business life, since I think I have had the education necessary for it. To this purpose I have now moved to the town of La Crosse, where I go to a better school than that found out in the country. For tuition I have paid 5 dollars for 13 weeks and for food and lodging I must pay 3 ½ dollars per week. When I have attended this school so long that I think I can easily enter a better one I shall go into the so-called "Business College", in Norwegian Forretnings Skole, here in the town where one learns book keeping and shop keeping. For that teaching about 55 or 60 dollars is charged; but then one can go on his whole life, travel and come again as he himself pleases. The few dollars I have saved will now go; but however I hope, if I may be as healthy as up to now, that I shall soon have them again; because book-keeping has high pay in this country, from 50 to 100 dollars a month. Many have more than that.

I see from your letter that Hans has gone to Kristiansand to Under Officer School, which was a good decision seeing that he can get a good education, and the pay isn't so little either.

You spoke of the possibility that he would write to me from his new location, but I have received nothing; he probably wrote to my former place and so I haven't received it. I would very much like a letter from him with a description of Kristiansand and the School, as well as life and activity there, and so I shall give him a fairly good description of La Crosse.

There is a Norwegian Lutheran Church here in the town which is under the Norwegian Synod's management where there is mass in the morning and school in the afternoon on Sundays and I like to help with the teaching in the school. For the rest there are many churches of different kinds of sects and a Nunnery. I cannot now give a description of La Crosse and its inhabitants; I will postpone that until the weather is colder and it is more pleasant to sit indoors. There are now not many lines left on the paper, poor and empty as it is of news. The only and best news I have to give you is, that I am healthy and well. From relatives and friends I have heard nothing in a long while, but the last I heard from them they were well. I must now finish my simple writing with a friendly greeting to all relatives and friends and

acquaintances at Home.

Yes Father and Mother and Brothers and Sisters, whom I for all time have in loving memory be at the end greeted most lovingly from your ever affectionate son.

Olaf S. Houkom

I send now a portrait which is of another and better edition.

La Crosse, Wis. 11<sup>th</sup> April 1876

Dear Faithful Father,

Again have many days been added to the past time since I last heard from my dear parents and sisters and brothers, relatives and others, which it pleases me to have information on. I can not sufficiently thank you dear Father for your comforting letters which always breathe from a faithful heart filled with love, from where, I am assured, rise many humble prayers to the Highest's throne for a faraway son. Loving parents and brothers and sisters, let us continually and always in prayer embrace each other before God's throne, that we someday must gather there, if it should not be granted us here in life, which however I hope will happen, to all of us in mutual joy and benefit. Yes many days of grace has the dear God let go by in this time of our separation to give us time to think over our position, to improve and prepare us for the future. But how do I use the time? Is a question, which every Christian should ask himself with reference to the spiritual as well as to the bodily. Most will certainly find, that they have far too little watched and prayed, which is so completely necessary, so that the Lord won't come upon us like a thief in the night and take us away from this world in our sleeping sin. We should truly begin to take the subject seriously; take the good Bible down off the shelf and right diligently consider what our Savior will have us believe and do. These thoughts have more and more penetrated my heart, since I received an account of my grandmother's sudden death; and what else is the Lord's intention when He so suddenly takes on out of our midst, than that He will thereby waken us survivors to reflection. Here runs the dear Pontoppidan's word in my thoughts, that God uses "now suffering, now benefits, now others' examples and such more, which can lead us to meditation". Yes, the Lord enlightens me also with His Holy Spirit, that I can clearly see how little I achieve by myself, and that all I should know of salvation is the crucified Lord Jesus Christ, for our God takes no consideration of age, riches, much knowledge or any other thing, by which we if we live long enough, could do much to embellish the outer form, but rather that we take our soul into consideration, pray him to enrich it with His grace, and adorn ourselves with humility and gentleness, saying like my blessed cousin Anne Gadeholt, Amen, when the message comes that we shall wander away from here. It is now some time since I saw an account of my dear school comrade's, Hand Udbøn's, passing. That disciple of the Lord did not become an old worker in His vineyard here below; he is now released from all trouble and enjoys the eternal rest in the Vineyard-owner's own palace.

Since I now have plenty of time and do not have much news to write, I will take a short review of the places where I have lived, and then also at the same time consider the way in which the Lord has brought me through in these past years. As you know I came first to live three months time at Coon Prairie. There are many countrymen, of whom some are our relatives. Many years ago a congregation was organized which belongs to the Norwegian Lutheran Church over here which is called the Norwegian Synod, and has been served by its foremost pastors, so one would think that it is a congregation which blossomed with love for its Savior and His word, bearing the fruits of faith; but unfortunately it is not so; for one can from their life and way of living draw the sad view of Christian life, that when one has been baptized, confirmed, and goes to Church once in a while, so that suffices. Others drink, fight, curse and brawl so it can't be so dangerous for me; I see nobody else who reads and prays morning and evening on Sunday, so it probably isn't more necessary for me, yes, if I should behave myself thus, so they would call me a member of a Bible-reading sect, and I wouldn't bear that label for anything in the world. That is what can be heard oftenest and is typical of their daily life. So I came to Highlands Prairie and lived among relatives and acquaintances there for almost 2 years. Yes, then I came right from the ashes into the fire, as one says. There is a large congregation belonging to the Norwegian Synod, and with the Christian life it seems even worse than at Coon Prairie, and that must well have a probable cause in the beyond all reason prevailing drunkenness. There are also some families which belong to the so-called Augustana Synod, and right away one sees that these lead a life of another power. On the contrary in the neighborhood where I lived such great godlessness prevailed as I believe can be found anywhere among

people raised in a Christian land. I can't understand how I was able to live there so long; but it was certainly my simplicity and honesty, even if I must praise myself as being in possession of these virtues, which bound me, or perhaps more truly said, that they knew well to take advantage of binding me. After a couple of months company with Mother Starck and her three sons, Franz, Wilhelm and Ignatz - I mean here the German family - I found it so pleasant with them, that I took the blessings - rich decision to stay with them over the winter and moved there in spite of all persuasions from Highlands Prairie, with all my things and all that I had gained during the time I was there, about 30 dollars and good experience. Experience is expensive here in this land. From now on it began to be more and more clear in my eyes. I looked back on the past as a fumbling in the dark on the edge of a terrible precipice, from whose abyss only God's protecting hand could have saved me. To be fallen in the depths I believe can rightly be said about those who sneer at a Christian life, scorn to hear God's word or to meditate, and make use of neither prayer nor communion. We can never keep ourselves too far away from such, and not pray enough to the Lord to protect every young one who comes into their vicinity. - - With the Germans, in whose house godliness, peace, love and uprightness were seriously striven after, I lived now and then for two years. It was in this time that the six months fell that I lived with the Yankee in Leon, where I had thought to stay longer to acquire more fluency in English and had already begun to go to school there, in spite of understanding that the man was a free thinker and there was no sign of family prayers; but I thought it would be all right. In the end I had however to yield to my heart's quiet longing, which always yearned for the peaceful home, from which I seemed to hear the graceful songs and heart-felt prayers, which there I had learned to love and which I heard every morning before we began the day's work and every evening before we went to rest.

So I came back to dear Mother Starck, where I was greeted with a loving welcome. Yes, this old lady I believe with full right must be called a right good widow, for she continually exhorted her sons to godliness and treatment of their fellow-man according to God's word and as they would like others to treat them. Were there any obstacles to overcome she always took her way to the Lord, and she preferred to go up into the bed-loft and pour out her heart, and I often heard her praying while she worked, for example when she kneaded dough or churned. When we came home in the evening she always had a good word for us and asked also whether we were hungry. Seldom would we hear her speak or have bad thoughts about anyone. The people I lodged with the last winter were also pious. It must however be deplored that Methodists have several erroneous teachings; but certain it is, that a single scream or buzz over the teaching's purity and unity in talk and writing, without waking the people to conversion and life in Christ, serves just as much to drive people to a spiritual death. Such is the way the Norwegian Synod has it, and therefore there is much ungodliness among them. In Holden congregation where I was the previous summer they were not quite so unruly as in the Norwegian congregations with which I had been before; but I happened to hear that boys invited others to dance out on the Church slope after the Service, and card-playing was by no means a rarity on Sunday. In contrast the older Huset people were serious Christians and they had certainly also seen enough of life's frailties and learned to keep themselves to the only salvation which is in Jesus Christ. Also they treated me as their own son, and I loved them as my own parents. Halvor Huset is now so sickly, it is uncertain if we shall meet again in this world. Both Halvor and Aslaug Huset have been infirm for several years.

In the middle of October last year I came back to La Crosse and began my business studies again, and I was lucky enough to come to the house of Pastor Midtbøe. I have herewith received a basic strengthening in the Lutheran teaching and life as I previously have learned and thought it should be. I have made various journeys with him to his congregations and at every place I seem to have found corroboration for, that here is something else to do other than the world's desire to play. Midtbøe is of the Norwegian-Danish Conference. To get a more accurate account of Church conduct over here I advise you to write to Pastor Lars Oftedal in Stavanger for a description of his travels in America. It is very interesting to read and costs, I believe, 12 shillings. There is general sorrow here now in the Conference's congregations

because the founder and leader of the Conference, A. Weenaas, is going back to Old Norway to accept a call. He has now become tired of the fight he has had to experience against the Norwegian Synod's wrong teaching, as for example, that slavery is not a sin, that keeping holy the Day of Rest is only a ceremonial command, that it is sin for a layman to preach God's word, etc. Against all their direction Professor Weenaas has published a book called *Wisconsiniam*. The Norwegian Synod's pastors have now become more bitter against him than before. Pastor Muus of Holden, Goodhue Co., even calls him "a devil's zealous servant".

Yes, the letter is now already very long, but I hope it will be forgiven; for I want so much to make a try at describing the dangers which beset a young man, when he will step out into the world, and these dangers are found not only in America, but I know that they are just the same at home as in other places. Therefore I will impress on every young heart, that he keeps himself from such places, where there is dancing, drink and frivolous talk; because I have truly experienced myself, that there are the seeds of all kinds of excesses and continually an obstacle for true Godliness. It is something I have not forgotten and which has been a great help in my wanderings; and it is this admonition which was the last I heard from my Mother's lips before I left: Forget not God Olaf.

Augsberg Seminary  
Minneapolis, Minn. 8<sup>th</sup> February 1880

Dear Father,

Your very welcome letter of 21<sup>st</sup> August I received from Prof. Oftedal's hand as soon as I came back to the school in the Autumn. It is a great joy to me to receive your letter, dear Father, but now so long has passed with my negligence over writing that I must feel ashamed of myself every time I get a letter from you. I will now try if I can't get back in the right course again with my letter writing, so that indifference shall not take control of me.

I will first thank you for your letters and for the much well-meant advice, which I with the greatest joy seek to follow, as far as circumstances and my own conscience allow it. That I haven't quite followed all of your advice and adapted myself to your wishes I will certainly not make a secret of, but I hope, that you for the Lord's sake will not blame me for disobedience, when I do not know of any step I have taken light-minded since I forsook - the pig path - (by which I mean the company I had there for the most) - on Highlands Prairie. When I forsook that place I truly took in moral regard as important step, which was not taken because of Christian need, for any thought of my soul's salvation had still not touched me. Desire for teaching had certainly now and then stirred in me, but that came more from eagerness for knowledge than from conviction of my spiritual call. I made a try at keeping a school, - as you perhaps will remember I wrote about, - but it was no longer than a month and that was enough for me. I found places in "The Explanation", which came too close to my "ego", when I had to try to enforce on the children these truths in their full strength and significance. I gave up teaching; but I must go forward. I also thought about Decorah School for awhile; but how soon could I get the benefit of going there? Was the question. I was stopped by money, money had much to say. I worked hard, went to school a little, and acquired little by little the English language. I began to be superior to my friends in knowledge, and that flattered my pride. I thought I must go higher. I continually heard eulogies over Mons Anderson and C. Solberg, two Norwegian merchants in La Crosse, how they from nothing had traded themselves up to be owners of the greatest business houses west of Chicago. I saw the elegant gentlemen, store clerks, heard about their high pay and easy work; I burned with desire to try my luck and be a respected citizen after the world's standard. This was the basic motive for my entry into the Business School in La Crosse, which you can also understand from the letter I wrote at that time. Let me also add, that my thoughts of a journey hoe have been both postponed and destroyed by the same thoughts of vanity. I had earned not so little, but I would not come home, before I had accumulated a considerable sum, which I hoped to acquire when I got a good book-keepers job. "Man's heart plans his way, but the Lord confirms his course". In my good progress in the business school I saw reflected my future happiness; but all of a sudden, a voice sounded within me: take care of your soul! I knew the weight of the word: "For what doth it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" And how did my previous thoughts look in the light of God's word? The happiness and honor, which I had dreamed for myself became for me a frightening idol. I feared the way I had trodden; I saw, and others have dearly experienced, that it is slippery. Under this fight my former life stood forth in its nakedness; the one misery has followed the other all the way from childhood. I have much to beg your forgiveness for, dear Parents! But as I surely believe, that the sins of my youth have been forgiven by God, I hope also they are forgiven and forgotten by you; no doubts plague me for that reason, but that I haven't kept my promise to come home, so that we still can enjoy a blessed time together, rests heavily on me; but I will certainly come.

In the same light, as I saw my own life, I saw also the people, I had been among; oh what misery of sin and all that vulgarity, to which I have been witness! How could I other than offer my future for this my own people. It would certainly have been a much more peaceful life and a better outcome in the temporal, as well as a less responsible to have arranged a home on a farm. I remember well, that you

advised me to do that, when I left, and I have understood it from your later letters that you didn't approve my going into this school and thereby treading a new pathway in life. But should I then have acted against my best convictions? Oh, you wouldn't want, dear Father, me to have done that, when I recognize it fully and strongly as a call from the Lord, who certainly has preserved me thereto through the darkness of sin, waked in my heart the longing after the Savior and finally steered my feet to this place. I will not believe, dear Parents, that there is basically any aversion in either of you towards this turning, which has occurred in my life. But so that you, if you should be tempted to such an aversion, can more easily resist, I will name for you a pair of examples, which it is no shame to follow, even if the whole world laughed and scorned. It is well known to you, that god gave Abraham a son, that son to whom all the Lord's promises applied, that Abraham should have a great progeny in whom all the whole world would be blessed. One day the Lord said, that he should take this son and sacrifice him as a burnt offering. What would there be then for the hope of this old age? Did he refuse to give his son to the Lord? Certainly not! He was immediately ready to obey the Lord's direction and had already sacrificed his son in his heart, when he gripped the knife to cut the thread of life, which bound them together here in time. I will also remind you of Hanna, whom the Lord blessed with a son in her old age; while she rejoiced over her son she said "I prayed humbly for this boy, and the Lord gave me my desire, which I desired of him. And also I, I have willingly offered him to the Lord all the days of his life". Let us diligently pray that the Lord will teach us to love His ways and have desire for His law, day and night, to meditate thereon.

When I write so rarely, you can easily come to the conclusion, that my childhoods home has become of no consequence to me; but it is not so. Never have thoughts of home been more pleasing to me than now, and never have parents and brothers and sisters temporal and eternal welfare lain more on my heart. But there is so much, which I must think about, both what concerns my spiritual and temporal life, so that all else becomes just a matter of less importance for me. First of all, I have to make sure that I am not "careful and troubled about many things," so that I would lose the treasure. Next is the study and limited means, which also require a little thought, except that it has gone fairly well for me so far, and there are prospects that I shall get through even better hereafter. Here I remember your not so strange advice to borrow the needed money for my schooling. I thank you very much for the assistance, which you promised to render me. Although I have a little hesitation about borrowing money, I turned directly to Svennung Kirkebø; but because of the bad harvests he could not see his way to render me any help. I am now very glad also that it failed; for I am more independent to go forward, as I have so far done. Actually I got into debt for 30 dollars last winter, and it was mostly the result of my going so far away to hold school the previous summer. I was namely in Racine, Wisconsin, a town about 380 Eng. Miles from here; I had only a three months school, and no chance to earn anything on the side. The journey cost about 16 dollars, in spite of going by train at half price. When I came back here in the Autumn to the school I had 50 dollars left. The previous school year cost me about 100 dollars, including 22 dollars for clothes. How did you earn this 100 dollars? You are probably asking. I managed to get through by borrowing 30 dollars, as I mentioned before, and in addition I did a few small jobs in the school building for 25 dollars.

Last summer I did such good business, that I could pay 10 dollars back to the "fund for needy students", which is my creditor. Rightly enough, it was said that I did not need to pay back more than the 20, but I shall always consider it as a debt. Where I was last summer you have probably learned from Hans' letter; I earned altogether 115 dollars. This summer I shall go there again. I need scarcely tell you that in winter I have it especially pleasant, now that I have both Hans and Tarjer with me. I heard actually last Autumn, that Hans had a strong wish to go to school, but did not have the means for it. I wrote to Prof. Sverdrup, who is the administrator, whether he could find a little for Hans to do, so he could keep himself at school. He promised to help him through, so he could be without worry. Hans was glad, and came with me to school. He has paid half to Aslak Houkom and so he has paid for his food till New Year. Also he has a

little work with Prof. Oftedal and so he will get the rest that he needs, from the “fund for needy students  
“. Tarjer is here with two other girls and prepares food for the students. She is kept very busy, but is well  
and feels very happy. She longs for a letter. If no-one has written yet someone should soon write to her.  
We received Anders’ letter a couple of days ago. Be herewith heartily greeted Parents, brothers, sisters,  
relatives and acquaintances from all three of us and don’t forget us in your prayers. Live well in God.  
Your always affectionate son.

Olaf

Greet Fru Florentz from a Porsgrund family, Sjøberg. I worked in the harvest with the old one, who has a  
farm a little way from Willmar. Herman holds a County office in Willmar. Thorvald is a police officer in  
Minneapolis. Mathilde lives still in unmarried status.

Let me this time not forget to thank you for the three pairs of mittens, which I received from Gunder  
Opsund right after his return. Hans has received your letter, which he thanks for; he will soon write home  
to someone.

Kristiania 29-11-80

Dear Father,

In order to to surprise you too suddenly I send these lines ahead; I landed here this evening, 3 weeks and 1 day since I left Minneapolis. I am well and active and happy that I can now fulfil my promist to pay you a visit some day. I hope to be on Spjotsod or if the steamship goes into Sundkilen, at Kirkebø the first day the steamship goes next week. Don't make any extra arrangements, let everything be as it is every day. If you like you can keep my arrival secret from everyone except Mother. Live well until we meet and be lovingly greeted from your son.

Olaf.

Kristiania 4<sup>th</sup> March 1881

Dear Father,

The journey went fairly fast; the state of the roads was almost irreproachable. Through Svartdal and Hjertdal the road was now rather loose and heavy, but over Meheim was as good surface as one could wish. I travelled to Sauland on Monday and on Tuesday evening about 10 o'clock I reached Kristiania. The cost of travel from Kirkebø to Kongsberg is about Kr.19.85; the distance is about 117 kilometers. From Kongsberg to Kristiania, a distance of 98 kilometers a 3<sup>rd</sup> class ticket cost Kr. 3.00.

On Wednesday I south out Candidate Sverdrup; he bustled around with me till he found me a comfortable place to live; I rent a little room for Kr.12 a month. Today I heard lecture; afterwards I saw the University's antique collection. Today I am completely organized and am beginning to harvest the benefit and joy of my journey here.

Enclosed I am sending Kr. 45.00 with thanks for the loan. Little things for Mother and Tone I shall send in a little parcel. I think it is very little magenta for K.1.00. It was violet magenta she wanted I seem to remember; if I have bought the wrong thing, she must tell me about it, so that I can buy the right.

Be herewith lovingly greeted altogether.

Your affectionate

Olaf S. Houkom

P.S. Write soon all of you, you can; my address is Eilert Sundt Gade No. 10, Kristiania

Kristiania 17 March 1881

Dear Father:

Today I was with the agent for "Thingvallir" Mr. H. Petersen and discussed the fare. The fare on this line is Kr.10.00 cheaper than on those who go via England; and because none of the Thingvallir steamships will be going at the time I had decided to travel, or for other circumstances I decided to go via England, so he would ship me and those, who are going with me, by whichever of the English steamship lines, which I wish, for the same price. "Thingvallir" of the English steamship lines, which I wish, for the same price. "Thingvallir" line has actually no more than three steamships and will have more people than it can carry, so Mr. Petersen must keep in contact with the English lines; and the reason that he can do it cheaper than even the agents for the English lines is, that he is the direct agent for the railroads in America. As it will be to my advantage to get as many as possible to buy tickets from him, I got the idea that he should send you authority as agent, if there should be anyone, who decides to travel before I come home. He usually gives Kr.8.00 in commission; but because it would be to my advantage, he will not give you any as long as I am at home. He wishes that you would be his under agent after I have left and you would get the commission which he usually gives. I don't know how you like this arrangement, which I have brought on you; but I hope you will excuse my importunity as you however know my circumstances. If those who travel, before I come home, without your solicitation, will sign up with you, will you inform me so, and also when they come to Kristiania, so I will get the compensation for them anyway, if they don't sign in with another agent. The down payment is set at Kr.20.00, but if they don't want to give so much, you can let them go with less, if only the half. The ticket with down payment which should be sent to the head agent you can rather send to me, so that I also right away shall know about them, who have signed up with you. Those, who will be going in company with me, don't need to buy the ticket before we travel; for if I get more than 10 passengers with me, they will perhaps get it a bit cheaper. I would like it if you can get sure information about who will be going with me and send me their names. It isn't possible to get it cheaper from any other agent except the agent for the German line; but I have heard many complaints over the utterly bad treatment, which emigrants get on the German steamships; so I for my part could not take anyone with me on them, even if I for my own part could get it cheaper.

I have found Gunder Dahle; send me the receipt, so I shall take it to him. It gladdens me to hear that all are well, and that little Brun has also become so active. I have had a slight cold for a few days, but today I am a little better. Some days I hear two and some three lectures, and when the Storting is in session I like to go into the gallery and listen for a while. The old giant, Sverdrup, is weak; when he is going to speak, the ting-men all gather around him; because his voice is so weak. Now herewith be heartily greeted dear parents and brothers and sisters! Keep the Lord in your thoughts in all your activities. Your always affectionate.

Olaf.

Kristiania 8<sup>th</sup> April 1881

Your loving letter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> with the enclosed bill of exchange I have received. From the bill's redemption I send you herewith Kr.100.00. You see, I have also kept back Kr.80.00 to buy books for Hans. I thought at first to wait with it, until I come here again on my journey to America; but as book-binding is much more expensive in America, I have decided to buy the books before I travel to Telemark so that they can be bound while I am at home. I thank you very much for the offer to keep some of the money; but I hope I shall manage with what I have. I wish you a blessed Easter. Don't forget the Lord and all his benefits. A loving greetings from.  
Your affectionate. Olaf S. Houkom

Augsberg Seminary, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 26<sup>th</sup> April 1883

Dear Sister;

Many thanks for your very welcome letter; it was a complete surprise to receive a letter from you, Thone, and such a beautiful and well-written letter. It is always a great joy to me to hear from home, and I have been especially lucky recently, in that I have read so many Norwegian letters, without having the need to write any myself. There should now be an end to the silence from my side and so, think! You have not had a line from me since I left home for the second time. But many long periods I have sat with the book in my hand while my thoughts dwelt with you, while question after question chased through my soul: How are Father and Mother now? They are old; I wonder shall I see them again? Perhaps one of them lies in bed sick, and what can I do for them? Oh how often have I thought of Mother, who I thought seemed so weak and so depressed and disconsolate many times; oh may she no longer let herself be disturbed by so many unnecessary cares and worries but seek peace with God with her whole heart and cast her sorrows on him, so she will "find rest for her soul". Yes, may God allow, that we all, both old and young, will "seek the Lord while He may be found" and not let day after day and year after year sin rule over our thoughts and our limbs, which should be inhabited and guided by the Holy Spirit, if we are to meet on the shores of blessedness.

How is it with my brother and sisters there at home? I think many times when in quietness I think over my own youth, do also they find happiness in the world's wild noise and think, speak, and act after its fleshy desires? Do they also have dislike and aversion to God-fearing people and live personal Christianity? Dear Thone, and you others of my dear relatives! Do not be offended if I remind you that memorizing God's word and regular Church attendance do not make us true Christians, unless our hearts are moved, under the feeling and acknowledgment of our sin, to see refuge with Jesus as our only and sure Savior; for to this, Church-going and reading of God's word serve as mediators and must therefore be used with devout prayer and self-examination; and where this is done will the Spirit certainly not fail to come but take its dwelling in the heart and therein accomplish its regenerating work.

I am not likely to finish my schooling here this year. I have been strongly exhorted to, but the ministry seems to me to be so great and holy and responsible, that I think, that I can not go into it

without first using all the time and opportunity I have to prepare myself and as that usually is to study theology here for three years so I will not let slip my third year. Two weeks ago Hans left for the place where he held school two years ago. Anders is still here, he will look for work here in the city. Tarjer you have probably heard from recently.

We four brothers and sister have recently been photographed together and send altogether a photograph to each of the following relatives: Father, Uncles Aslak Houkom, Aslak Gadeholt and Olaf Staaland, Aunt Aslaug, Olaf Saltevjje, Halvor Naes, Peder Naes, and Halvor Dalen. I address them all to Father, and you, dear sisters and brother! Will assist him by taking them to the right persons. At present I don't have any portraits of myself alone.

In the summer I shall go to Ottertail County to hold school during the week and preach on Sundays in Pastor Iversen's parish there. There is still no summer warmth here but everything is greening anyway. I am fairly well. Greet relatives and friends, Father and Mother and Family especially. Be yourself lovingly greeted by your ever affectionate brother.

Olaf.

Pomedetere 24 March 1871

Dear Friend Svenung Olesen Houkom

Your writing of 25 October 1870 have I duly welcomed and read through it many times with great happiness, and it is joyous to hear that you are all healthy and live well; and the same I can report back, that we are will both I and my wife up to now, and we find ourselves fine; and so I must tell you that 11 February 1871 I went to Aleksandri and took Homestead on my land and it cost me 16 dollars. The Homestead costs 14 ½ dollars but so there was 1 acre over which I had to buy so I gave 1 ½ dollars for and now I sit here for 5 years. So I shall get a deed or conveyance. So I shall be full owner of the land. So I can sell it or use it as I will, but not before, and during this 5 years I have no expenses on the land, not one cent, but we have a little expense for the Pastor, as we ourselves will, and so we must set up a school house here in the settlement; and so I must tell you we have got a Norwegian Pastor namely Thorgus Vetlesen Øvrebø from Hvidesø Parish. So we have both Baptism and Communion just as in Norway. So here there is nothing to complain about in religion, except you will go right off the road, and they do that just as fast in Norway as here; and so I must tell you of the times. Here wheat No. 1 costs 75 cents a bushel, maize 60 cents a bushel, barley 70, oats 55, all per bushel. Butter 18 or 20 cents a scale pound, pork 7 ½ cents a pound, a dozen eggs 20 cents; and so I shall tell a little about clothes material. 1 yard cotton cloth costs 12 or 14 cents a yard, linen very good 17 or 18 cents a yard, very good pants cloth costs 50 cents or a half dollar a yard; you must know here are 100 cents in 1 dollar and coffee is 3 ½ pounds for 1 dollar, loose sugar is (for various kinds) 5 or 6 pounds for 1 dollar and tobacco 1 dollar a pound; and the pay for work is different here in the County; it varies from 75 to 1 dollar a day, the day's pay is little because there are not many here who hire workers. Here is too newly settled; but now hereafter will probably be bigger day's pay; but I can get a bushel of wheat for a day so here it is not expensive to get food for oneself; and if you get this letter you will see by the following list of places how it is going with Emigration here to America; and I hear much news from you. I have no news to tell you for here are none of your acquaintances, and if you, Svenning, have not traveled to America, that you get this letter. So must I ask you if you will write from yourself and from Høie Langeli. So I must see if you thought of coming to America and so you must tell of all the news which you know, I think it fun to hear how it stands with Iver Jolstad and of one thing and another, and how the crops were and about prices, and about Rise lun, and whether Else still lives, and about Vol and about Vol and about Gulnes Mine; and so I must finish my simple writing for this time with a friendly greeting to you and your wife, live well in God is the heartfelt wish,

Respectfully                      Gunlek Gundersen

When you write my address so write thus

Mr. Gunlek Gunders Dalen, Pombdetere, P.O. Stivens County Minnesota

This is for a mistake on the letters.

(Written on the edge) Last year we sowed wheat the 7 April but in this year it will be later; now there is snow, it goes even with the shoes or 4 or 5 inches. Write soon.

To G.G.D.

January 4 1871

Dear Sister-in-law Aslau Halvorsdotter Lande

With deep sorrow I must herewith inform you that the Lord in His wisdom has called away my dear wife from this life to a better the 31<sup>st</sup> July last year. According to her request I send you her last farewell, she died in a childlike trust of her Savior. According to her wish you are bequeathed one hundred speciedaler (Translator's Note: The old Norwegian speciedaler was worth 4 of the later Norwegian kroner, but I do not know its worth in the American dollars of 1871. It was, however, perhaps about the same, for the writer uses both the American sign \$ and the Norwegian word speciedaler for the first instalment.) which I have promised to send you in three instalments as follows: 30 specie this year, 35 specie next year 1872 and 35 sp. 1873. With this letter comes the first money order which is \$30 speciedaler; all expenses are paid so that you will not pay as much as a shilling, but you shall have the full value, namely 30 Norwegian speciedaler. But if the above-named widow Aslau Halvorsdotter Lande is dead then shall this money be shared among her children according to their circumstances. Bid Svenung Olsen Houkom from me to have the goodness to help you to obtain the money. Greet Svenung Olsen Houkom and his wife very diligently from me as well as his brother (son ?) Ole Svennungsen.

Write back as soon as you have received this letter and let me know if you have actually received this money order. You will perhaps think it strange that I don't write anything about your brother Svennung but all that I know is that he is with Stener and Gunnil. I must now break off my simple writing with a friendly greeting to you and your children. Adieu; live well in the Lord.

My address is Gregor Kittilsen, Troy P.O. Winona County, Minnesota, North America

Taylor 30 December 1880

Dear Brother

I have long thought of writing to you but time has been so scarce that I have put it off time after time but now I will have it to Christmas morning to write to you how we find ourselves. We live well and my husband like many others has gone to the woods to earn some money. He gets 17 dollars a month. Paul thought also about going to the woods but he became sick and had to stay at home this winter. Olaf works on a farm and cares for the cattle. Hans and Thargjer go to the English school. For the rest we are all healthy and live well. With Knut and Daarte Hansdotter we have a place and food for our cow, winter wood without paying and many other small things which I can't reckon up. He has also promised un a 100 dollar loan. He is a perfectly kind and clever man. He earns many dollars a day. He has many customers waiting for his work and 3 forties of land. A forty is 40 acres; altogether 120 acres. Daarte has certainly done well, she cares for her Mother and clothes her brother Olaf, he is a clever boy and works for Paul for his food. He is also fairly good in the English language to read and speak it.

Paul Hansen is also doing fairly well, he is a clever man at building houses and earns well, a clever wife and 3 children and a lovely home.

Now I will also tell you brothers and sisters and friends that in the Spring we intend to buy ourselves a piece of land near Stener Amunsen, Railroad land. The price is one dollar 55 cents per acre or 62 for every 40, perfectly good land but it is overgrown with woods and expensive to clear. But if God gives us health we hope to get ourselves a little home again.

I must now break off my simple writing with friendly greetings from us altogether. Greet Sister and Brother and friends from us.

Bergit Olsdotter

Address Taylor Tromlo Chonty, (County ?), Veskonsin Noramerica

Taylor Station 6 January 1881

Dear Brother;

I will now after a long time since having received your letter send you a few words again; it is long between letters; as you know I can not write myself, so there is usually something the matter with the others, so it isn't often as it should be you get a letter, therefore please excuse me. We are all healthy and live well and I hope that these few lines must find you all in the same good condition. I am now with Dorthe and Knut but I was with Bergit and Paul in the summer when they to their great joy were blessed with a plump little daughter who was named Emma Tonete after me and Tone. Olaf is with an American and goes to English school. He works for room and board so it is not expensive for him. He will also be confirmed in the Spring so soon he will have to take care of himself. God grant that he will be honest and orderly and heed admonitions. Olav and Paul Bakken are in the woods, Elling also. Margit Løvestad has been with us and since she came, and will be here till Spring till Gunnar comes from the woods. She was with the Pastor in the summer and wet-nursed a little baby which could not get enough from its mother so it was fairly sick but Margit's girl is healthy and big and looks much like Gunnar. Margit had a letter from his brother Tarald a couple of days ago, so it is quite often we hear from you but more seldom that you hear from us I think. Bergit Bakken and the children are healthy and find themselves very well, they bade me greet you in friendship from them.

I must at last try to send you a portrait, which I have long thought about but have never been able to do, it should have been a New Year's gift to you but it will come far into the New Year but will anyway wish you everything good and happy. I will send you and Svennung in this letter so I will have to send the others in another. You must greet all the others and tell them that they shall soon have theirs, they also; you must greet all relatives, friends and acquaintances from me and mine. God's peace hold and joy follow you all in the New Year. Live well, that is the wish of your dear sister.

Egelev O. Midtsund

A little postscript, I will beg you in case anyone comes in the Spring who considers these parts so send me a pair of good kaler, they are so poor here, we will pay those who bring them.

Write back immediately so we can hear whether they have arrived and if you think they look like me.

Farewell.

Taylor, Jackson Co. Wis. April 5<sup>th</sup> 1891

My Dear Uncle and Aunt,

Mother received your letter Tuesday the 1<sup>st</sup> of this month and she thanks you very much for remembering her with a few words. She thinks and speaks of you often and was delighted that there is a possibility of seeing you again. When we got your letter we had the happiness of talking to your son Anders who came from Blair on Monday and stayed with us until Tuesday when he went by train back to Minneapolis. It was just as surprising as it was enjoyable to see and talk with him; he is a very understanding young man, whom we wish and hope that he may go forward in wisdom to the best. We were not able to congratulate him as he was just leaving but that will have to wait till another time. Mother is fairly well now, but last summer she had erysipelas and was weak the whole summer. Also she has a sore on her nose which is very bad but she can not get a remedy for it because it is erysipelas and cannot be cured.

My brother Olaf is at home now but will leave at the end of this month for Cyrus, Poe County, Minnesota where he was last summer and worked at a Creamery and got 50 dollars a month, now he will have 60 dollars. Paul continues with carpentry almost all the time as his sons are now so big that they can do almost everything on the farm. Aslak and Signe have everything very beautiful now that they have a home for themselves which they can call their own, and not have to move from place to place as that was much against Signe's nature. Poor Aunt, she has longed so much to go back to Norway that it has been very hard for her. But now she is well contented and thanks God who has arranged everything so well for them; for they cannot other than say that all has gone well for them so far.

Of myself I can say that I am fairly well and healthy now, but not quite as strong as before I was sick, but it will probably come with time; however I will praise and thank God for such a great grace, as that I am allowed to be with my own still for a time; however I know that I can do nothing myself so I hope that He has compassion for me.

I wish that you would take a trip here, it would be almost as if you came to Kviteseid, there are Telemarkinger all around here, and you would not be finished in many weeks if you would stay a little while with each one; yes, you must come, if not before then - - - you know what I mean; but now I must end with a loving greeting from all you know to all of you together.

Dorthe Bergaeth

Bergit and Olaf have the same address as we.