

## A SPECIAL GIFT FROM NORWAY

By Fred Matson



December 2020. Over forty years ago, Summer 1979, a Tøten parish choir of Oppland fylke (county), Norway toured the United States of America.

By then, my father had twice been to Norway, not deterred by a stroke eight years prior. His purpose, to research Norwegian ancestry and meet relatives and others.

Unlike today, Norwegian birth and baptism, confirmation, marriage, death and burial and other church and census records were not on the Internet, free and retrievable from one's home. Internet didn't exist. One had to review microfilm, write to record centers in Norway or visit the Oslo archives.

As Dad explained well before 1979, he had early interest in family and community history. One example he'd share was the 1930s bank closings. His was a small village. On the job at the Ford Garage, one day, he heard loud voices outside and near the bank's front door not fifty yards from the garage. He listened and watched. Village and rural farm residents were trying to enter the bank. It was locked, no one inside. Their savings lost. Later, he learned that his father and mother's savings and not yet paid off farm loan were also with the village bank.

Dad recalls, he watched grown men turn away from the locked bank door, hang their heads and walk away. Just as quickly, Dad noticed a large sign two doors down from the bank, outside the grocery and clothing store. It said, "YOUR CREDIT IS GOOD HERE." Devastation and Hope in one view.

Dad researched and wrote the village and township community story. Research began as a kid. Final edit and printing was after death. He told me that because of early young man interest in his family and community history, though born in 1909, he had talked, had conversations, with many area original Norwegian settlers and their children. Dad heard and then forever shared stories and accounts from early immigrants. Many such were about why and how they came to America and Wisconsin, their trials and tribulations, successes and failures.

Dad's interest in Norwegian immigrants and their stories lead to more interest in their Norway homelands. It was about all Norway. He'd have an accurate picture of area Norwegian immigration only if he learned about the many areas of Norway represented by local

immigrants. From Oslo on the South to Lofoten Islands just above the Arctic Circle. All parts of the homeland were important to and understanding of local Norwegian immigrants.

Dad's mother was born in Wisconsin of Tøten and Hurdal Norway immigrants, his father born in Tøten. Vestre and Østre Tøten are in Oppland fylke (county); Hurdal is in Akershus fylke (county) and adjacent to the Tøtens. Dad's grandparents are Norwegian born.

Dad's Norwegian Language skills were considerable, read, wrote and spoke the language. He was confirmed in Norwegian and even to 1950, the local Norwegian Lutheran Church held one service in Norwegian and a second in English. He lived among Norwegian family in a community of Norwegians and a few New England families of England descent who fit right in. Dad knew the languages, knew the people.

Because he knew the Norwegian Language and was interested in Norwegian immigrant history and geography, when he wrote to Norway in their language to locate people who might help with his research, response was quick. Relationships developed. Soon, Dad was helping Norway Tøten and Hurdal researchers track down immigrants in the USA. Researchers wanted to know where those who left the homeland landed and settled in America. Dad assisted with that. His work with pictures is included in one of the Hurdal Bygdeboks.

Dad's assist, visits and personal relationships with Norwegians in Norway, both family and non-family, lead to a special gift. The little carved wood Norwegian fiddler (above) traveled to America in the company of the Tøten Norway Choir in 1979. Their performance schedule included a small West-Central Wisconsin community. There a member would present Dad with a special gift from a good friend in Norway.

Dad died two days prior to the choir's performance. He looked forward to hearing and seeing the choir sing in Norwegian and English. He knew many Norwegian songs, knew a few choir members, met them in Norway. He didn't know of the gift he was to receive.

Dad's sister, my Aunt Mariann, very musical, organist and choir director, also with a keen interest in all things Norwegian, had planned to be at the music event with her brother. She was there. Aunt Mariann accepted the gift for Dad and family. We gave the gift to Aunt Mariann and for years she proudly displayed her brother's Norwegian Fiddler until it was her time to leave this Earth.

The Fiddler of Tøten now lives in our home with my wife and I. Appropriately, he watches over us from above our patio door where we and all can see him and imagine the music he plays on his violin. He is there for all family and visitors, for our children and grandchildren. The Tøten Fiddler reminds us of Dad and Grandpa's love of family, all people, community and of Norway.

Dad spent many hours in Oslo archives. Twenty-five years ago, my cousin, Dad's nephew and Aunt Mariann's son, encouraged me to complete Dad's work. Under much different conditions including Internet and free Norway records, I did. And wrote Dad's family story.