

TO MY RELATIVES OF NORWEGIAN DESCENT

The year 1981 marks an important centenary for our extended Larsen family because it was in 1881 that my grandfather Hans Larsen, known in Norway as Hans Larsen Ullerlien, and his friends and relatives who had emigrated from Scandinavia during the preceding nine years, achieved something that was very important in their lives — their own house of worship.

Although members of The Church of Norway (Lutheran) at the time of emigration they accepted the Methodist faith soon after arrival in New Zealand because of the activities of The Scandinavian Home Mission of the Methodist church in the absence of any Lutheran pastor.

Hans Larsen was one of the original trustees of the Mauriceville North church. Today the church land forms part of the farm owned by Ted Seymour — a great grandson of Hans. In the churchyard adjacent to the church rest Hans, his wife Karen, his mother Eli, and many other of our kin.

The history of the church has been written by Enid Seymour of Takapu, whose late husband Claude was also a grandson of Hans and Karen. Mrs Seymour is paying for the total cost of printing the history in booklet form and the gross proceeds of its sales will go towards the cost of the preservation of the church which was the first to be built in The Forty Mile Bush. It occupies an important place in New Zealand colonial history. It is doubly important in our family history. You and I, and those yet to be born, who are descended from Hans' mother Eli and father Lars Hansen (buried in the ancestral parish of Sør-Odal in Norway) must keep alive the memory of our intrepid Norwegian forebears and their triumph over adversity in Norway and New Zealand.

The centenary of the church will be celebrated on Sunday 12 July, 1981. There are many families other than our own who should be sharing in the tributes to the Scandinavian pioneers of Mauriceville North, but because of the sheer volume of descendants of Lars and Eli, an estimated 3,000, it may develop — despite our intentions — to become largely a Larsen reunion. There will be a Larsen family reunion on the Saturday, 11 July 1981, the exact form to be decided but will probably include a Scandinavian Ball at Masterton or Ekerahuna on that night.

Enclosed with this greeting card is a reply coupon which I would like you to complete and return to me if you are interested.

This will help us in our planning for the forthcoming celebrations.

MAC LARSEN

OUR ROOTS

Most of the descendants of my great grandparents Lars Hansen and Eli Torkildsdatter (known in New Zealand as Eli Larsen) are aware of the family research I commenced in 1972 as a project to mark the 100th anniversary of the arrival of our Norwegian forebears. However, for those whose knowledge of that history is incomplete, I give this brief outline of our family saga.

Our Norwegian ancestors were tenant farmers in the district of Odalen in County Hedmark about 80 km from Oslo on a road that leads from Oslo to Stockholm, and about 60 km from the Swedish border. They had probably lived in that area for a thousand years or so. The nearest small town to their tiny farms

was Skarnes and the nearest large town was Kongsvinger. The tenancies of their farms were renewed every March and there was some movement between various farms fairly close to each other, but generally they lived and died on the farms Spigset and Ullern, which were subdivided in due course into smaller farms with slight variations to the original farm names. Under the patronymic naming system existing in Norway until 1923, a child took the Christian name of his or her father as his or her surname, e.g. Hans Larsen was the son of Lars Hansen, Karen Hansdatter (Hans' wife) was the daughter of Hans Arnundsen. The names Hans (John) and Lars (Lawrence) were saints' names and very popular in religious Norway, hence there were many people in each parish with the same names. To avoid confusion the surname was followed by a third name, the name of the farm on which they currently lived. For the latter part of their life in Norway the final name was Ullerlien, previously it had been Spigset. Today we still have relatives by both those names living on those same farms.

We are fortunate that church records in our part of Norway were not destroyed in church fires — a fate common to many parish records. From records so far researched I have the names of many ancestors — suffice to give here the direct male line only.

Lars Nilsen Vestre Spigset died 1759 father of Hans Larsen Vestre Spigset born 1756 father of Hans Hansen Lille Ulleren born 1783 father of Lars Hansen Nordre Ulleren born 1813 died 1867 (later known as Lars Hansen Vestre Spigset and Lars Hansen Ullerlien)

Lars Hansen was born 6 February 1813 and died 3 January 1867. He is buried at Ullern churchyard and his grave is marked by a memorial stone made from a rock from his son Hans' farm at Mauriceville North, taken from Mauriceville to Ullern by a pilgrim-age party of descendants in 1975. On 26 December 1845, Lars Hansen married Eli Torkildsdatter Vestre Spigset, born 15 February 1816, died 28 January 1896, and buried at Mauriceville North.

Lars and Eli had nine children. Two daughters, Christine and Gørdine, died before emigration, as did Lars also. From the others we get

THE SEVEN HOUSES OF LARSEN ULLERLIEN

Hans Larsen — born 4.8.1839 died 4.10.1918 : some descendants still living at Mauriceville and other Waitarapa towns and farms, and all over New Zealand.

Karen Isakson — born 20.11.1842 died 6.5.1933 : descendants all over North Island.

Christian Larsen — born 10.4.1850 died 13.9.1882 : descendants in Norway but one family recently emigrated to Canada.

Lars Larsen — born 4.3.1853 died 1.9.1927 : descendants still living at Mauriceville and all over Waitarapa, but as with others also to be found all over New Zealand and one great grand-daughter currently living in Norway.

Elizabeth Fredericksen — born 15.2.1857 died 29.4.1924 : descendants in North Island and some overseas, but strangely only two known to be in Waitarapa and these are ex Hawke's Bay

Halvor Larsen — born 14.1.1859 died 21.1.1938 : descendants mainly in Queensland.

Charles Larsen — born 2.4.1861 died 5.7.1933 : a Hawke's Bay family now scattered over North Island and overseas, but very few in the Waitarapa.

In the 19th century there was insufficient land in Norway to sustain the population and almost one million Norwegians emigrated to U.S.A. In the 1870's the New Zealand Government sought immigrants for the Seventy Mile Bush which extended from Opaki north of Masterton to somewhere near Takapu. The Norwegians were particularly suitable because of their experience in forestry and to make a long story short, that is how our mutual forebears came to be in New Zealand.

Hans' family was the first to emigrate. They sailed from Christiana (now known as Oslo) on the steamship Oder on 30 November 1871 for Gravesend, Kent, where they transferred to the sailing ship England which sailed on 8 December arriving Wellington 9 March 1872. With Hans were his wife Karen and their children Elisabeth, Lauritz, Hans and Carl. Lauritz and Carl died at sea, Carl near Tristan da Cunha and Lauritz in Cook Strait. The full story of that tragic sailing is given in my book "Happiness Is Sharing Your Heritage".

Hans commenced working in the Seventy Mile Bush for the Public Works Department on the construction of a road that would link Wellington and Napier, the money from his contract to pay for his forty acres of forest. He could see a future in New Zealand and soon sent for his brothers, sisters and mother. Karen and Jacob Isakson, then spelt Isaksen, and the children Carl and Ole, sailed on the ship Håvding from Christiana 24 August 1873 arriving Napier 1 December 1873. Eli, Lars, Elisabeth, Halvor and Carl left Christiana on the steamship Hero on 14 November 1873, transferred to the ship Invererne at Gravesend, and arrived Napier 8 March 1874.

101 years after my grandfather arrived in New Zealand, I set off on his birthday for Norway to look for my relatives living there. That was in 1973. Time was long and I found distant relatives only — fourth cousins i.e. people with whom I shared great great great grandparents. Through research I learned that Christian Larsen had not emigrated and when I was there again in 1975 I was able to meet Christian Larsen's grandson Magnus Arnesen through newspaper publicity about our visit. Magnus and I are second cousins. More recently, in August 1980, I met many more relatives. Research had taught me that Lars Hansen had had sisters and a brother and that Eli had had a half sister. Newspaper publicity before I arrived back in Norway was seen by descendants of Lars' sister Anne, and by descendants of Eli's sister, also known as Eli Torkildsdatter — later Eli Nestebø. There were many invitations to visit these new found relatives at their homes and in the end, because there were too many people to visit at their homes in my limited time, I had to invite them to visit me at a picnic, and about 80 relatives arrived for the occasion.

In 1976 we had a very successful family reunion at Masterton. Following on this, I published the first portion of the provisional edition of "Happiness Is Sharing Your Heritage". The second portion is well overdue — it will consist mainly of a table of descendants of Lars and Eli but for reasons of time and money, the information has been tabulated more slowly than I would have preferred.