

Legacy Family Tree Webinars: Presentation 11th February 2025 7pm

Norwegians in the New World: Tracing Norwegian Immigrants in the American Midwest

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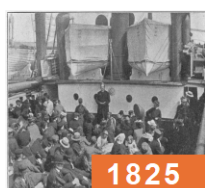
The immigrant experience is a core part of the American story. Many of us have ancestors who undertook similar journeys. Whether from Norway, Ireland, or a number other places, these migration stories help us understand our heritage.

1. The Push Factors & Historical Context

Timeline as a Framework: A historical timeline helps situate personal stories within broader events. Think of your family history as part of a larger picture—a frame that includes cultural shifts, economic forces, and legal changes.



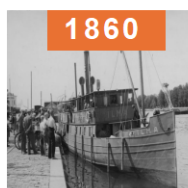
Timeline of Norwegian Immigration



1825

Emigration Began

In 1825 a group of Quakers left for America to practise religious freedom.



1860

Mass Migration

The invention of the steamship made travel safer and quicker, increasing the number emigrating to America.



1862

Homestead Act

A law that allowed citizens to claim 160 acres of government land in the American West.



1920

End of Mass Migration

Emigration to the USA from the Scandinavian countries largely slowed at this time, the US immigration restrictions of 1929 impacted this.



Norwegians in the New World

Norway in the 1800s:

- **Economic Constraints:** Rapid population growth in Norway, limited job opportunities, and scarce housing—especially in rural areas—pushed many to seek a better life.
- **Cultural and Social Factors:** A phenomenon known as “America Fever” gripped many young Norwegians. Letters from early emigrants described freedom and opportunity, sparking hope among those still in Norway.

Key Historical Points:

- Between the early 1800s and the 1920s, nearly 900,000 Norwegians emigrated.

- Innovations like steamships and policies such as the U.S. Homestead Act facilitated these migrations.
- Legal changes in the 1920s eventually slowed mass migration.

2. The Role of Letters & Newspapers

Letters as Inspiration: Early migrants like Gjert Gregoriussen Hovland wrote letters home in the 1830s, describing the promise of America.

These letters—shared and printed in Norwegian newspapers—served as informal testimonials, inspiring further migration.

Immigrant Newspapers:

The Decorah-Posten: Founded in 1874, it was one of the most influential Norwegian-language newspapers in the Midwest.

Functions of the Newspaper:

- Kept immigrants connected with news from Norway.
- Offered stories about Norwegian-American life.
- Provided a platform for preserving cultural identity and a sense of community in a new country.

Newspapers acted as a vital record of personal milestones such as listing deaths, marriages, and community events which modern genealogists can also use to piece together family narratives.

3. Unearthing Personal Histories Through Newspapers

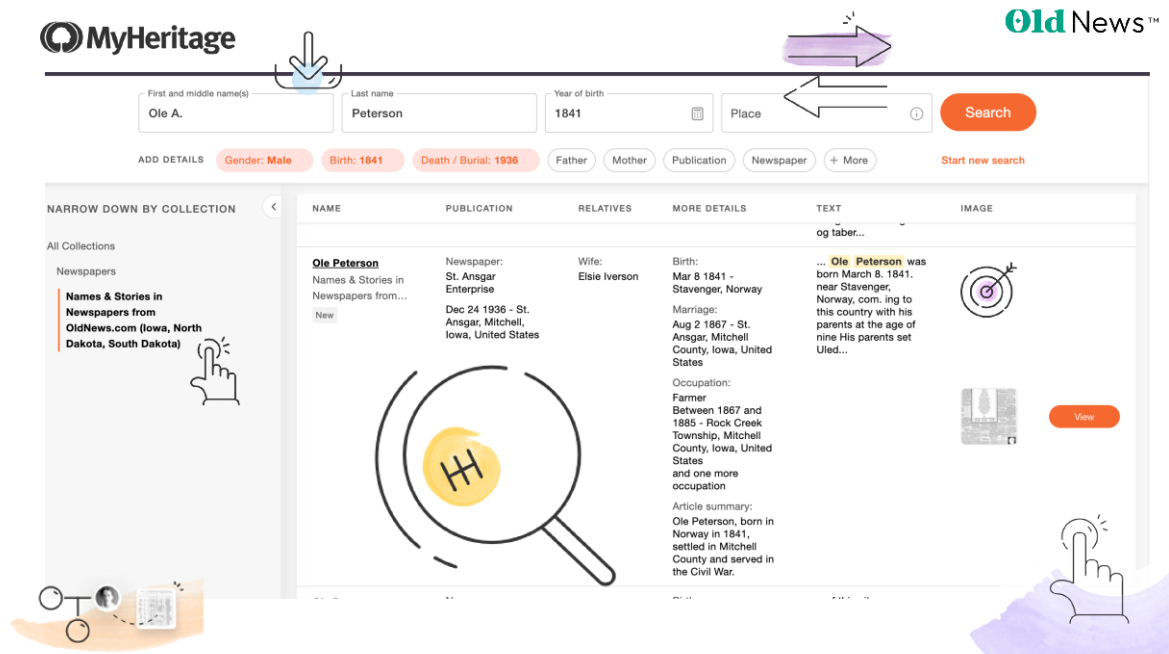
While censuses offer dates and facts, newspapers add human details, such as the surprising elopement of a daughter or local community news.

Example: The life of Ole Peterson was traced not only through official records but also through newspaper clippings that detailed his military service, personal struggles, and eventual obituary.

Tools for Research:

MyHeritage and OldNews: Access to scanned newspaper articles and use of Optical Character Recognition (OCR) to convert old text into searchable, translatable data, makes it accessible.

Here is an example of ways to focus your search on Newspapers:



Translation Aids:

- Tools like Google Lens can quickly translate Norwegian text, making it easier to read and understand historical documents.

4. Migration Timelines and Passenger Lists

Key point: many Scandinavian migrants did not travel directly to the U.S. Instead, they passed through ports in the UK, such as Liverpool. Records from countries that functioned only as part of the journey can be useful too.

Useful Links and Resources:

- <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/immigration/scandinavian/the-norwegians/>
- Blegen, Theodore Christian. *Norwegian Migration to America, 1825-1860*. New York: Arno Press, 1969.
- Haakenstad, Liv Marit. *A Guide to Norwegian Genealogy, Emigration, and Transmigration*. Hamar, Norway: AG, 2022.
- Østrem, Nils Olav. 2012. "Ireland, Sweden and the Great European Migration 1815–1914." *Scandinavian Journal of History* 37 (5): 669–72.
- <https://vesterheim.org/an-informal-chat-about-decorah-posten/>