



Madison County Genealogical Society



Madison County Genealogical Society
P.O. Box 1031, Norfolk, NE 68702-1031
mcgs@telebeep.com
www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nemcgs/
www.nesgs.org/~mcgs

Norwegian names in the Newman Grove, Nebraska area

The tri-county area is the southwest corner of Madison County, the northwest corner of Platte County, and the east adjoining area of Boone County, Nebraska. While researching the book Tri-County Pioneers, I found reference to an ethnic naming custom peculiar to the Scandinavian regions.

Norwegian people came to this country in the 1800's with their own general naming customs. This custom is called patronymic or father name. In this naming pattern a child receives a given name, for example Peter. His name is his father's name with the suffix 'son' or 'sen' added, Peterson. A daughter would use the suffix 'datter'. Generally after a girl married she would keep her surname.

As the population of an area increased, this custom would prove confusing, with more than one person with the same name. To solve this problem, Ole Johnson would add the name of his farm to his name, Ole Johnson Vik to differentiate himself from other Ole Johnson's in the parish. The changing of a person's name became commonplace when the sons joined the military. When they joined up, they were given a different name to help in recordkeeping. At the end of their military service, a man could take his old name back, or keep his new name. When more than one Ole Johnson pioneered in Madison County, the post office asked them to add a name after Johnson. This was either their middle name or the area name in Norway, where they came from. Ole Johnson Haugen and Ole Johnson Bergen came from those areas in Norway. They were known as Ole Johnson H. and Ole Johnson B.

In the late 1800's the Norwegian government outlawed patronymics. They tried to get families to 'choose' a surname. Immigrants to the U.S. in the mid to late 1800's had pressure both in their homeland and in America to convert to our standard surname custom. Simon Christianson came to Wisconsin and later Nebraska about 1870. His son Christian Simonson accompanied him. All his subsequent children took the Simonson surname.

Patronymics presented a problem for me as I indexed Tri-County Pioneers. Was Ole Johnson Haugen to be listed under the H's for Haugen or under the J's because his real name was Johnson? The writer of Tri-County Pioneers mistakenly believed Haugen was his middle name, consequently he is shown as Ole H. Johnson. A researcher in Scandinavian names should be aware of this practice especially in regard to using indexes. My choice as an

indexer was to list Ole both under Johnson and Haugen. I am thankful for my understanding of patronymics from two articles by Johan I. Borgos and Jan Oldevoll. By John Kielty