

Ole Throndsen Ellingbøe's 1866 Letter from Iowa

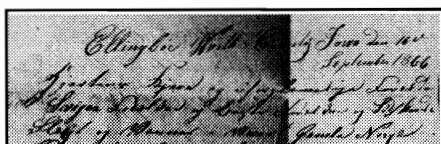
by James Ellingboe

Often very little is known about our immigrant ancestors from Norway except what can be found in letters they wrote to relatives and friends back home. We are fortunate if such letters have been preserved. Written eight years after immigration, Ole Throndsen's letter is characteristic of those from the 1800s, with many references to the grace of God and an encouragement to come to America, where opportunities for poor and rich were extolled as so much better than in Norway.

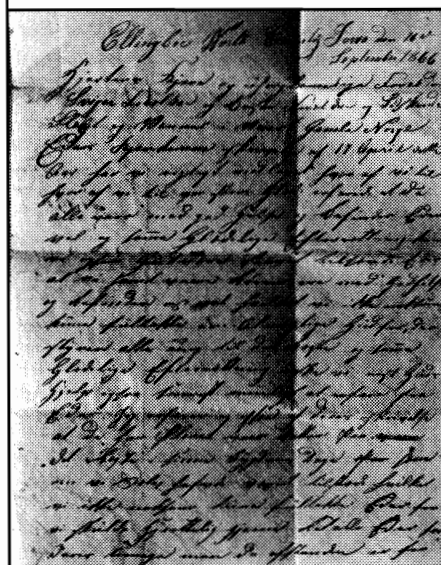
This letter came to my attention when I met Knut Lajord (1926-1998) while visiting Vang in 1967. Knut was an outgoing, energetic, suntanned Norwegian farmer with an enthusiastic smile who spoke the Vang dialect. We became friends immediately and he was eager to show me his home and historic artifacts. Knut was very interested in local history and a founder of the *Vang Historielag*. One of the documents he showed me was an original letter from Worth County, Iowa, written by Ole Throndsen, his great grandfather's brother-in-law. I photographed the letter and translated it into English, but didn't think much about it until many years later when Knut wrote that he and his wife Marit were planning a trip to the States in June 1996. They hoped to see me when their tour group arrived for the annual stevne of the Valdres Samband in Northfield, Minnesota. With this incentive, my daughter Anna and I set off on a road trip from Massachusetts to Minnesota. It was an extremely warm early summer, but we were rewarded when we greeted Knut and Marit at St. Olaf College and enjoyed the fellowship of the stevne. Knut brought me a transcription of Ole Throndsen's letter that was published in *Samhold* in 1975. It was surprising that the author of this Norwegian newspaper article did not look up the meaning of the term "basmе somskaar," which is explained later in my notes. About twelve years after this last visit with Knut, when I started a family history web site, I began to look more carefully at my earlier translation and investigated the identities of persons

mentioned in the letter. I was motivated to write this article because of correspondence with some of Ole's descendants. Details such as dates, ages, and places are provided for the benefit of those who are interested in the genealogy of this family.

Ole was born in 1806 (not 1799 as inscribed on his gravestone) at Bunde 97/1, Høre parish, Vang i Valdres and baptized 28 September 1806. On 6 January 1838, when he was known as Ole Throndsen Tørstad, he married Ingeborg Andrisdatter Ellingbøe. He was 31 and she was 17, the mother of a nearly three-year-old out-of-wedlock son Helge. (In 1835, the year of his birth, twenty percent of children baptized in Vang were illegitimate.) Ingeborg was born on the 24th of April 1814 (not 22 April 1813 as on her gravestone) at Ellingbøe 33/1 Nigarden, Vang i Valdres, and baptized 1 May 1814 in the old Vang stave church, which is now in Poland. Ole farmed Tørstad 105/5-6 on Rødningen, from 1837 to 1850, when he was forced to auction the farm. He then worked it as a tenant farmer for eight more years. Among Ole and Ingeborg's eight children were Sigrid, who died at 3 months of age in 1840, and Thron, who died at age 12 in the summer of 1857 from a fall at *Preikestolen* (the pulpit), a mountain ledge on Kviteberg, near Fagernes. On the 30th of March 1858 the entire family was listed, under the Tørstad name, among those who intended to emigrate. Although included in the church book list, their older daughters – Marit age 17 and Sigrid age 15 –



Beginning of
Ole Throndsen's Amerikabrev



First Page of
Ole Throndsen's Amerikabrev
Photos: Courtesy of Jim Ellingboe

decided to remain in Norway. Ole and Ingeborg sailed from Christiania, bound for America with their four younger children – Anders age 11, Randi age 7, Endre age 3, and Ingeborg age 1. They debarked at Quebec, then traveled by way of the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes to Milwaukee. When they arrived in Wisconsin they worked at odd jobs while making their way to Calmar, Iowa, where Ole found regular employment. By 1866 the family had moved to Worth County, Iowa, and settled in Silver Lake, near the Minnesota border, where they were still farming in 1870. In 1875 Ole and Ingeborg were living with their son Henry's family in Martin, Rock County, Minnesota. In 1880 they were with their single daughter Isabelle in McCook County, Dakota Territory. By 1990 Ingeborg was living as a widow in Nunda, Minnesota, about twelve miles north of Silver Lake, with Henry's family. When she died in 1905, she was staying with her daughter, Rachel Iversen, in Hills, Rock County, Minnesota. Ole's son-in-law, Lewis Larson, described him as a large and powerful man, over six feet tall, with curly dark brown hair and blue eyes. He was easy going, pleasant and always helpful. Ingeborg was remembered as a strong-willed person, tall and thin with reddish hair and blue eyes. At the age of ninety

46	"	Oluf Olethronson	53	} to America.
47	"	Ingeborg Andrus	45	
48	"	Randi	18	
49	"	Ingrid	16	
50	"	Andrus	11	
51	"	Randi	8	
52	"	Endre	4	
53	"	Ingeborg	3/4	

Vang church book entry for intended emigration of Ole and Ingeborg's family - 30 March 1858

Photo: Courtesy of Digitalarkivet
<http://digitalarkivet.uib.no>

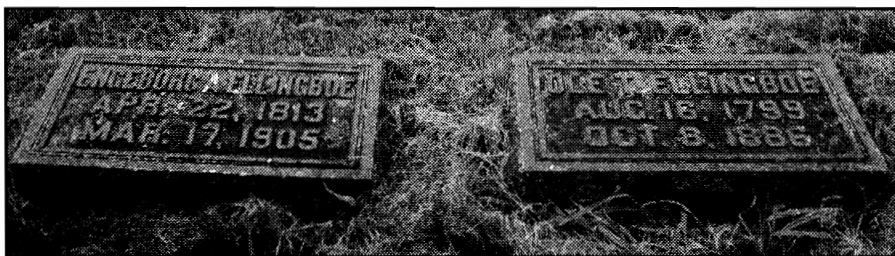
she smoked a pipe and wore a white cap. When Ole's *Amerkabrev* was written, he used the surname Ellingbøe. (It was not uncommon, especially for a tenant farmer, to take his wife's surname.) Both of their gravestones bear the name Ellingbøe. In America, Ole used Thurston as his middle name, while their children adopted Americanized given names and the surname Thompson. Anders became Andrew, Randi became Rachel, Endre became Henry and Ingeborg became Isabel or Belle. All left many descendants in America. Ole died at the age of 80 on the 8th of August 1886 and Ingeborg was 91 years old when she died on the 17th of May 1905. Although their deaths occurred in Minnesota, they were

interred in the Silver Lake Lutheran Church Cemetery in Iowa, near graves of Henry Thompson's family.

Other persons named in the letter have been researched and are identified briefly in numbered notes following this translation.

Ellingbøe Worth County Iowa the 16th of September 1866

Dearly beloved and unforgettable parents, parents-in-law, grandparents, brothers and sisters, kin and friends, in our Old Norway. Your precious letter of April 17th this year was indeed received by us and from this, to our delight, we learned that you are in good health and all right, and the same happy news, God be praised, we can send to you that we and our children are in good health and doing well, for which we cannot thank enough the almighty God, who directs everything for the best, and the same happiness we wish you, with God's earliest possible help for you. I also gather from your letter that you tended for our daughter [1] in the best possible way during her days of illness, as if we ourselves had been



Ingeborg and Ole Ellingbøe's gravestones
 at the Silver Lake Lutheran Church Cemetery, Silver Lake, Iowa
 Photo by: Darrell Larson

there, for which we couldn't thank you enough, we would really gladly pay for your trouble, but because the distance is so great, we must include you in our prayer to God that he will reward you for your great kindness to her in her last struggle on earth and then with the necessary arrangements for her funeral. Your God will repay you in this world and the next, and should any of you desire to come over here you must write to us a bit ahead so we can pick you up in Calmar, where the train stops. Dear brother [2], you say that your daughter Guri [3] wants to come over here and that you ask us what we think about it and if it could be worthwhile for her. As to that, we can answer that in case she wishes to do so, it would no doubt be worthwhile for her, but she can certainly have it as good as she wishes in Norway as well, because they don't have more than the two girls and

because she has the right to the farm, so she can certainly find a lot of good opportunities there, but if any of you decide that you really want to come, there are much better prospects here than in Norway, both for poor and rich when God grants them health and gives them success, so the working class here lives better than the upper class in Norway, as one says. I see also from your letter that Tollef Ellingbóe [4] set out for America and that he arrived healthy and sound in Chicago, but where he is or where he is living, I don't know, and the book that you sent with him for us hasn't been received, but I hope to get it eventually, and if one of you comes, I wish you would bring along a 10- and a 12- basme somskaar [5], and in case someone travels nearby and can lend Helge Olsen [6] the money he needs to come over, I, Ole Thronsen, his step father, promise to pay back every

single cent with interest as soon as they come here, and if it is reported that Helge Olsen has died on the voyage, I am prepared to pay what he agreed for the loan. This is confirmed by my handwritten signature in the presence of two witnesses. Ole Thronsen Ellingbóe

Witnessed by Ole Olsen Bóe [7] and Daniel Bertelsen Nepstad [8].

We don't have any news to send you other than many greetings to you all, especially to my dear parents who I thank for the prized psalm book, and likewise to my brother Endre [2] and his family, to Anders Gróv [9] and his family, to Johannes Norland [10] and his family, to Gudmund Remme [11] and his family, to Endre Hóle [12] and his family, and then to relatives and friends with affection.

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Respectfully Ole Throndsen and Ingeborg Anders Datter Ellingbøe and children send many greetings to our son Helge [6] and to our daughter Marit [13], and we ask you to send us her address as soon as you write to us.

With affection, Ole T. S. Ellingbøe

I, Ole Olsen Bøe [7] send many greetings to you all, and also to John Qvalle [14], with his wife and children, we send many greetings.

Footnotes:

1. **Sigrid Olsdatter** (1842-1865), Ole and Ingeborg's daughter who remained in Norway. Four years after her death, her widowed husband Andris Nilsen Skogstad (1836-) emigrated from Vang to Minnesota with their two young children, following his brother Nils who had immigrated earlier.

2. Ingeborg's brother **Endre Andersen Ellingbøe** (1822-1907) was married to Marit Helgesdatter Ellingbøe (Nordigarden) (1826-1916). Their only children were Guri (1845-1915) and Sigrid (1852-1951).

3. **Guri Endresdatter Ellingbøe** (1845-1915) became the second wife of Tomas Tomassen of Haugen on Nedre Kvåle (1835-1886). She married just one year after this letter was written and moved to her husband's farm. Otherwise, she would have inherited her father's farm, as was indicated by Ole in this letter. Instead, her younger sister Sigrid inherited the farm. Sigrid was engaged to Ola Andersen Kvale, who drowned in Vangsmjøsa only ten days after the birth of their daughter Marit.

4. **Tollef (or Torleif) Ellingbøe** (1835-1907) is also mentioned in Christopher Helgesen Ellingbøe's *Amerikabrev* from Two Rivers, Wisconsin, in 1854 (see *Budstikken* 39:6-9, 2009). He is listed in the

Vang church book as a bachelor among others intending to emigrate in 1866. In the 1900 U.S. Federal Census, he and his family were found at Deer Creek Township, Worth County, Iowa, where he died.

5. A "basmе" is a group of warp threads on a loom. The number indicates the number of threads or number of teeth in the "somskaar," now called a "vevskje," which is a sort of comb that is used to hold the group of threads and separate them while weaving. Ole requested two sizes of this device.

6. **Helge Olsen Ellingbøe** (1835-1915) was Ingeborg's illegitimate son by Ole Helgesen Ellingbøe. He never emigrated and remained in Vang. In 1866 he married Ann Jørgensdatter Ellingbøe. They had seven children together.

7. **Ole Olsen Bøe** was probably Ole Olsen Sparstad (1814-), who took over Bø (Klukkargarden) in 1850, but then immigrated in 1853.

8. **Daniel B. Nepstad** (or Nefstad) appears with no family in the 1870 U.S. Federal Census for Silver Lake, Worth County, Iowa, as a farmer, born in Norway, age 30. Although there is a Nefstad farm in Vang, his parentage and place of birth are not known.

9. The parents of **Anders Andersen Grøv** (1841-) were Sigrid Andrisdatter Ellingbøe (1810-1875) and Anders Torleivsen Ellingbøe (1792-1877). Anders (Andrew Grove) and his family immigrated in 1877 and were found in the 1880 U.S. Federal Census in Bridgewater, Rice County, Minnesota. By that time everyone in the family had anglicized their names. He was most likely the Andrew Grove who died at the age of 100 in Northfield, Minnesota, as a widower after two marriages.

10. **Johannes Andersen Nordland** (1821-1904) was born on

Nordland 57/2 Nordigarden, in Vang. He married Ragndi Andrisdatter Ellingbøe (1826-1920), sister of Anders Grøv's wife Sigrid from Ellingbøe 33/1 Nigarden, mentioned in note 9.

11. **Gudmund Jonsen Remme** (1820-1907), from Remme 65/2 in Vang, was married to Guri Torsteinsdatter Ellingbøe (1831-1891) from Ellingbøe 33/1 Nigarden.

12. **Endre Knutsen Holien** (1818-1885), from Holien 18 in Vang, was married to Ragnhild Gudbrandsdatter Bø (1827-1907). One of their daughters, Sigrid (1856-1944), married Torstein Helgesen Ellingbøe (1861-1931), the proprietor of the Fagerlid hotel.

13. **Marit Olsdatter**, Ole and Ingeborg's oldest daughter, was born 16 Jul 1840. Her twin sister Sigrid died 27 Oct 1840. Although Marit is listed among the family members who intended to emigrate, she stayed in Norway, as indicated by this letter.

14. **John Qvalle** was probably John Pedersen Kvale (1802-1878), who married Marit Torsteinsdatter Kvale/Skjelhaugen, whose mother was Ingeborg Helgesdatter Ellingbøe (1867-1836). John was a third cousin of Ole Olsen Bøe (see note 7), who sent him greetings in this letter.

Further details about this family, persons named in the letter, and sources, can be found on the Ellingboe family history website <http://ellingboe.us>. Another source of well-documented genealogical information has been provided by Katherine Howard in her Howard/Messing public tree on Ancestry.com. Inquiries may be directed to the author by email: jim@ellingboe.us.