

Confirming Our Faith for 160 Years—Part 3 (Continued)

Rev. Johan Storm Munch's Missionary Visit to Houston

On a trip to Minneapolis around 1990, we went to the University of Minnesota's Wilson Library on their West Bank campus, and it was there that I first held a copy of *The Strange American Way* in my hand. We didn't have much time so I had to rather quickly glance through it, but fortunately my eye caught something on page 120 and to say that what I saw there was a stunning surprise would be an understatement!

Quoting from a letter written on October 28, 1857 by Caja Munch at the Wiota, Wisconsin parsonage:

My dear Munch returned safely and happy, thank God, from his journey in Minnesota, although he had many burdensome functions there....

Munch christened 100 children• during his journey. Some parents had two children to be baptized at the same time, one of whom was usually capable of walking. He baptized one set of twins, who were named after the Emperor of France and the Queen of England; they were the children of a Norwegian woman married to a Frenchman. (• 28 of them in Houston alone—JAS)

In a very fortunate coincidence, I had recently been looking at the early Baptism records for the Stone Church, and there among the lists of Oles, Targes, Gunhilds, Ingeborgs, etc., were two names that always stuck out because of their uniqueness: they were the Swan Twins, Napoleon and Victoria, children of Englishman Benjamin Swan and his Norwegian wife Dagne Kragness!

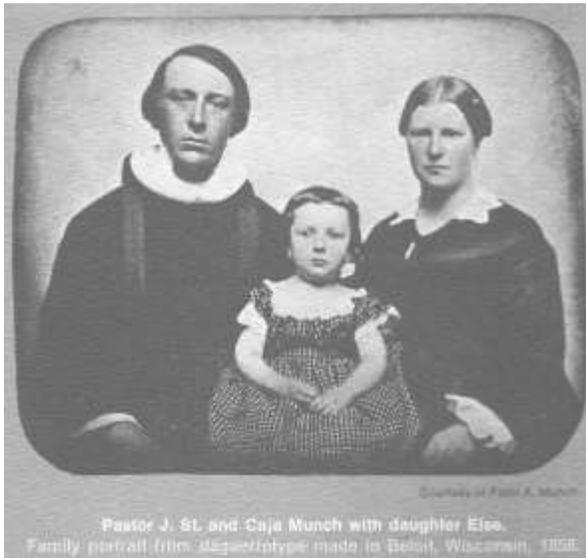
When I read Caja's description of those names they were still fresh in my mind, so I had no doubt that they were the twins she mentioned, and the Baptism was performed at Houston on September 1, 1857. They were first cousins of my grandma Mary Kragness Skree, but I had never heard of them until I first saw their names in the Stone Church records many years ago. The parents supposedly met on the ship on their way to America in 1853. (Rev. Munch baptized 27 On Sept. 1st, confirmed 1 on the 2nd, and baptized 1 on the 3rd.)

Had it not been for the couple breaking with age-old Norwegian naming traditions, together with the mention of Munch's name in the old Telesoga, we would never have heard of him or figured out that it was Rev. Johan Storm Munch who blessed our people with his presence and the performance of his Ministerial duties on that fateful day. Halleluiah! We then knew for certain that he was the one who officiated at our Congregation's very first Confirmation, that of Matilda Bergland in 1857; and furthermore, we are most fortunate to have acquired pictures of both

parties involved. When it comes to research in the early pioneer period, I would say that's almost too good to be true!

N.B.- Unlike the Korens, Johan and Caja Munch did not adjust well to life in the American Midwest and so returned to Norway in 1859.

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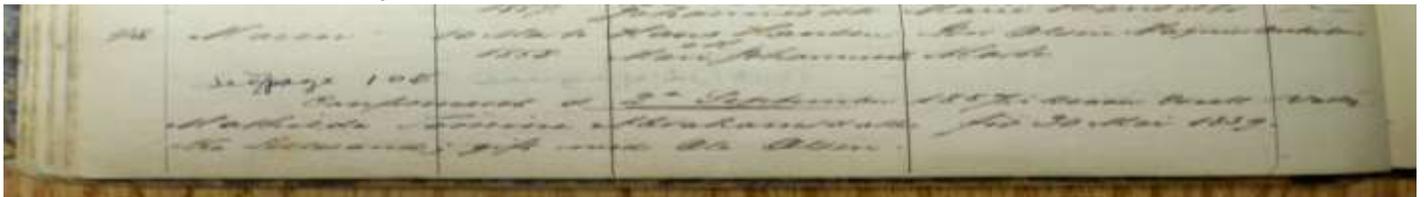


Courtesy of Fred A. Munch
Pastor J. St. and Caja Munch with daughter Else.
Family portrait (film negative) made in Beloit, Wisconsin, 1858.



*Matilda & Ole Olson Bergland
Beaver Valley (Sheldon), Minn.*

— Adele Knutson, who lived on the Bergland farm as a child, identified the photo for us. The farm lies on the east side of Beaver Creek, across from the Grace Nelson farm, and is now a part of it. All the buildings are long gone. Matilda (1839-1924) and Ole (1831-1901) are buried in the Stone Church Cemetery.



— Shelley and Jim, Cross of Christ Archives, March 2020

From the first Stone Church Record Book:

Confirmed the 2nd September 1857 in Beaver Creek Valley (Sheldon)

Mathilde Tomine Abrahamsdatter, born 30 May 1839.

From Lillesand (in Aust Agder); married to Ole Olsen.

