

New Book from Norway Features Houston Pioneers

Last Month's *Parish Visitor* reported on the arrival in Houston of a shipment of remarkable books published by the West-Telemark Museum in Eidsborg, Norway, titled *Red River Girl*.

Direct Descendants in Houston

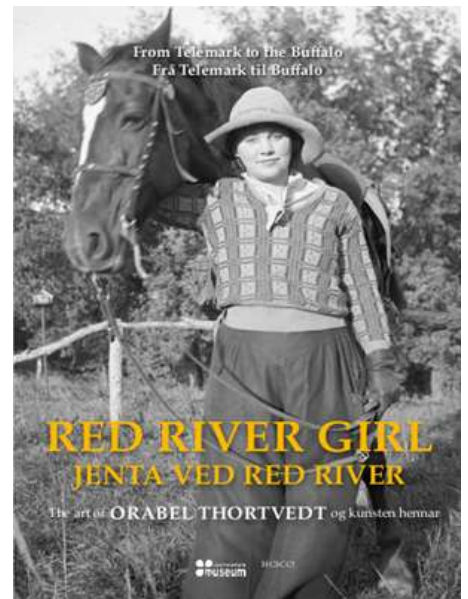
There are no descendants of Ole Thortvedt in the Houston area, but the same cannot be said of his older brother, Bendik, who used the patronym "Gunderson" as his official last name here in America, since their father's name was Gunder (*Gunnar* in Norway).

Bendik Gunderson (drawing below) had a large family with lots of descendants, the closest of whom around here are the offspring of Peter and Senell Gaustad. One of his sons was born *Andreas*, but as the times became more modern, he went by *Andrew*, the English form of his Norwegian first name (as did so many others of his generation). Andrew

Gunderson grew up in in the Buffalo Settlement and like all the others would have been well aware of Houston and his familial connections to it. Since so many people were related in the two settlements there was much traveling back and forth, which was quite convenient by rail.

Eventually Andrew became acquainted with my grandmother Mary Kragness Skree's, sister Kari, later known as Carrie, which led to their marriage up in Clay County in 1895. They began raising their family first in the Buffalo River settlement where a few of the children were born. The older kids were grown enough to attend school when they moved west to a little town outside of Minot, North Dakota called Benedict. It was here that both parents died in middle age, within two years of each other, when several of the children were still young—a great tragedy for that branch of the family.

The two older sisters, Alice and Senell, were grown-up enough to make their own way, but their younger siblings could not, so our very caring and conscientious great uncle John Kragness, my



Bendik Gunderson - pioneer of 1871. civic-minded and the main 'push' for a church in the new settlement

grandmother's brother, went up and got the kids and brought them back to Houston where they stayed with their oldest aunt, a widow with no children by the name of Annie Kragness Findreng, in the house on Sheridan Street recently occupied by Russell and Eileen Sather. Dealing with four rather rambunctious youngsters was just a little too much for her to handle, so it wasn't terribly long before they were sent to live with other relatives.

Burdeen and Lester came out to Badger to live with their aunt and uncle, Knut and Bertha



*Andrew & Kari (Kragness) Gunderson,
Alice & Senell-circa 1903*

(Lee) Kragness, on the Kragness home farm now owned by Doug and Julie Heintz, while Blanche and Ethel were sent to Douglas, North Dakota, another small town outside of Minot where their Kragness uncles, Ole and Andrew, had a general store, so that's where they grew up. On her visits to family back home here Senell became acquainted with Peter O. Gaustad and they eventually married and raised their family at Houston on the old Gaustad home farm on Twin Ridge, now owned by another branch of the family, Elmo and Avis (Gaustad) Wojahn.

Peter and Senell's children were Lloyd, Russell, Margaret Anderson, and Kenny so as you can see many direct descendants of old Bendik Gunderson still live in the Houston area to this day, who will no doubt be quite interested in this in-depth story of the lives and adventures of their worthy pioneer ancestors.

Collateral Relatives

Collateral relatives include the entire Kragness family of greater Houston—old Ole Targeson Kragnesses' wife, Anne Roholt/Vraa, was a first cousin of "Gamle Jorand," who was the mother of Ole Thortvedt, Bendik Gunderson and the rest of their siblings, as stated in the story. So, that encompasses everyone descended from Ole and

Anne Kragness: the Targe & Gunhild Kragness family on Holty Ridge; the Leiv & Sigrid Kragness, Hans & Ingeborg Dahle, Ole & Katrine Sanden, Targe & Tone Findreng and Kristen & Gunhild Folson families of Badger; the Sandens and Heglands of Crystal Valley; and the Swan family of Sheldon, who later moved to Osage, Iowa. In short: *thousands of people!*

I know this can get very confusing, very quickly, so if you recognize any of the above-mentioned people in your own ancestry just let me know and I will gladly explain how you are related, and provide a basic chart showing your connection that you can keep in the book. How's that for an incentive to make a purchase for yourself and your children? (jimskree@gmail.com or 896-3709)

—This exceptional coffee table-style, 9.5 x 13 inch, hardcover book weighs in at over three pounds, and its 193 pages are printed on luxurious, semi-gloss, art silk paper, profusely illustrated with black & white and color photographs, including numerous scans of Orabel's artwork. The entire text appears in both English and Norwegian, so you can try your hand at reading *Norsk*, as well! Contact: Shelley Jerviss smjerv@goacentek.net or 507-459-2143 or P.O. Box 292, Houston MN 55943.

(As distributors of *Red River Girl* in the United States, we are working to get word of the book to all who would have an interest in it, and to help the Vest-Telemark Museum in Norway recoup their considerable investment in our history. As such, we receive no monetary gain from its sales.)

— *Shelley and Jim, Cross of Christ Archives, October 2020*