



Elias Gottschalk's blacksmith shop on Center Street during the early '70s prior to being torn down.

Blacksmiths of Scandinavia

1860-1920

by Diane Hesseltvan Dinter

The first recorded blacksmith in Scandinavia, according to the 1860 U.S. census, was John Graham. John came to Scandinavia in 1852 with the Jens Jacob Torgerson family. He was an English engineer who worked at the Ness Iron works in Norway and decided to come to America with the Torgerson family. John helped the Torgerson family settle their land and lived with them for a number of years. He eventually moved to Iola and opened the first blacksmith shop there and the first saw mill. He moved to Rosholt where he had a house with a collection of clocks that he made. His house burned down and he moved to Holt in Marathon County and lived with Adolph Torgerson until his death in 1901.

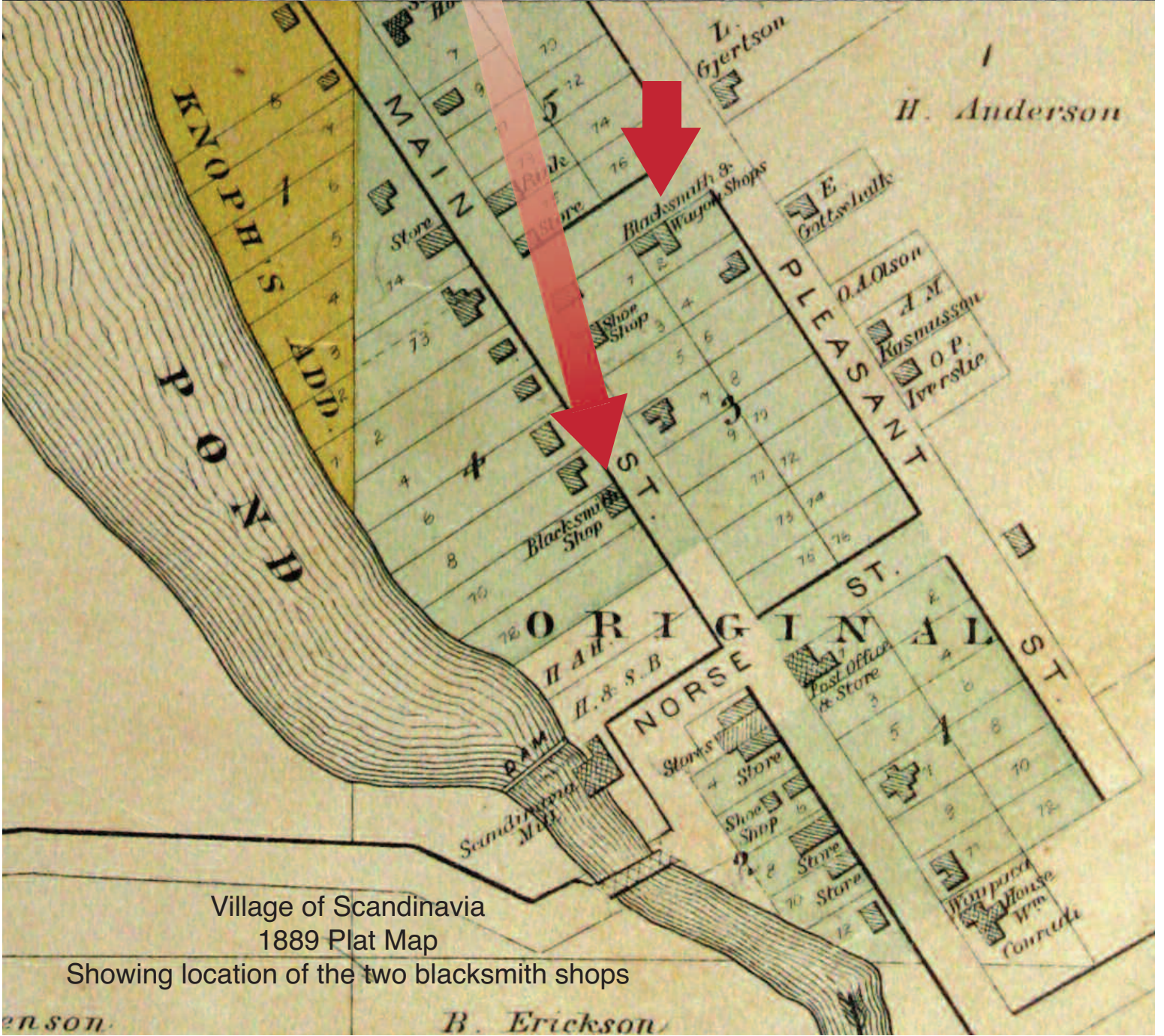
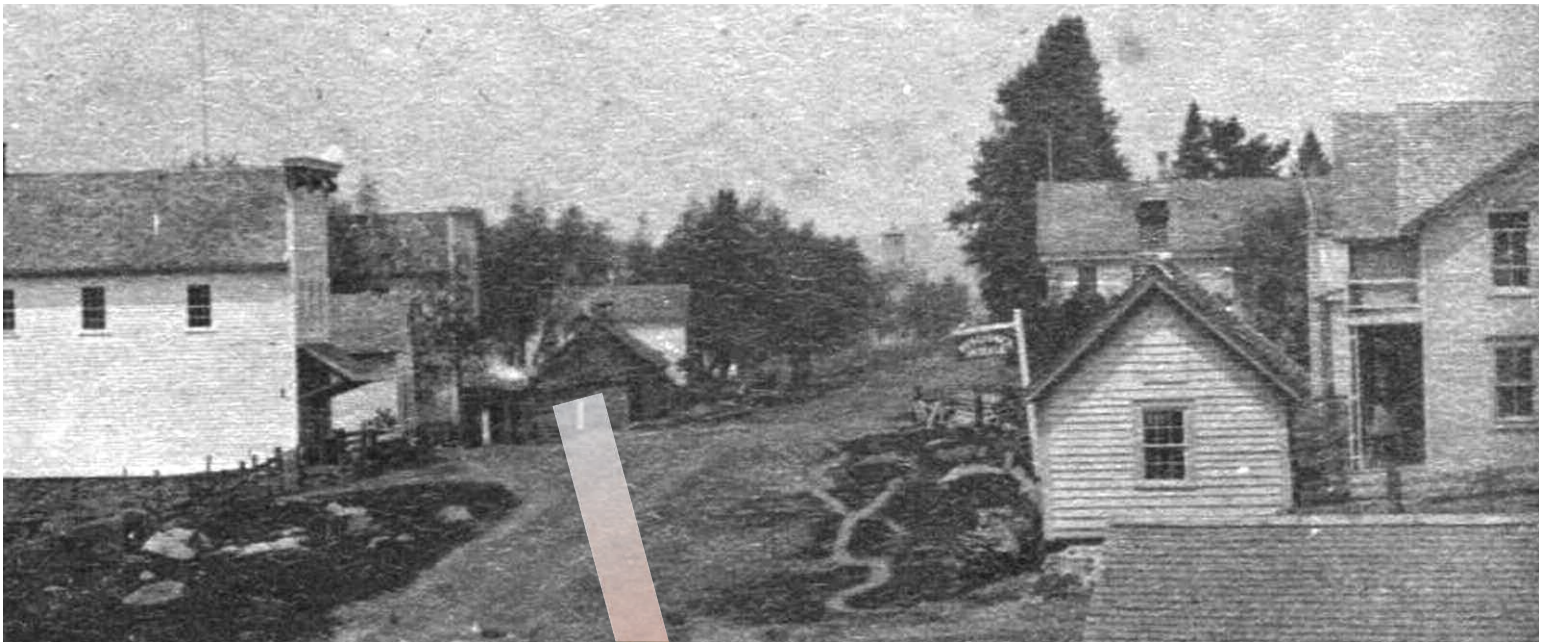
In addition to John Graham the other blacksmith in 1860 was Nils Omit. Nils immigrated to America with his wife and two children. Rosholt refers to him as Nils Nilson Aamodt and wife Sara from Eidanger. He died in 1873 and is buried in the Scandinavia Lutheran cemetery. His wife was still alive in 1880 and lived alone. No record could be found of his children.

In 1870 another Nils Omit, age 35, was listed as a blacksmith. He lived with his wife, Elizabeth and four children. Rosholt mentions a Nils N. Aamodt Jr., and wife Ingebor, but also talks of Nels Aamodt and his wife Ingeborg as a blacksmith in Iola. In 1860 the census of

Scandinavia lists a Nils Omitt, as a teamster, and his wife, Ingeborg. The ages of the 1860 and 1870 Nils match as does the age of his wife and the names of the children. In 1880 Nils Jr. and his wife were in Iola Township farming.

Finally in 1870 there was Gullick Thorson. Gullick came from Lunde, Telemark, Norway in 1861. According to his GG Granddaughter he was a goldsmith in Norway. Gullick had eight children who lived in Scandinavia. Two of his sons started the Thorson's Brothers General Merchandise. One of his Grandson's was a Brigadier General during World War II and part of Eisenhower's staff during the invasion of Europe. Gullick remained in Scandinavia until his death in 1909. He is buried in the Lutheran Cemetery in Scandinavia along with his wife and four of his children. By 1880 Gullick was listed in the U.S. census as the only blacksmith in Scandinavia.

Sometime around 1883 another blacksmith came to Scandinavia, Gunder Knutson and his son. Gunder was born in 1845 in Norway and immigrated in 1883. In 1900 he and his son were blacksmiths in Scandinavian. A short notice in the Iola Herald noted that he was "building a large addition to his blacksmith shop to accommodate his increasing business." In the 1910 census he was still listed as a blacksmith with his own shop, his son was



Village of Scandinavia
1889 Plat Map

Showing location of the two blacksmith shops

no longer with him. His his wife died in 1905. He died in 1918 and was recognized in the Guyant reading of the cemetery as a blacksmith. In the Iola Harold his shop was identified as G. Knutson and Co. Rosholt refers to Gunder as “Gunnar Knutson, a blacksmith and wife Birgitte (1849 1905).”

By 1896 Elias Gottschalk who immigrated from Denmark in 1881, had opened a blacksmith shop. “Elias was a blacksmith, the trade of his father, Jens Gottschalk in Denmark. His employer P. Fedvelborg in Denmark gave him a recommendation letter dated March 1, 1881 when he decided to emigrate.

“Elias Gottschalk I can recommend as a good worker. He has worked for me from May 1, 1879 to March 1, 1881. He now wants to try his fortune in America. I would have liked to have kept him in my employ.”

His intention was to go to Australia, but when he arrived in America he learned of a Danish settlement in Waupaca, Wisconsin. This was his first home in the new land. First he was employed in Waupaca and then in Iola prior to settling in Scandinavia. He opened his own blacksmith shop on a corner across the road from the home he built on Pleasant Street.” In 1900 he had a helper Warren Williams who emigrated from Ireland in 1884. In 1905 James Anderson, an immigrant from Denmark worked for him and boarded at his home. Elias’s son Irving became a partner sometime around 1914.

In January 1920 Elias sent out a letter to his customers to thank them for their business and let them know he was available. According to his letter head he was an agent for Champion Repairs and supplied new parts for leading makers of mowers and binders.

“At a comparatively low cost to you we can repair your old tools and machinery, so they will be practically as good as new. We can save you considerable money in this way, for new farm machinery is very high prices.

We are not busy just now. All work brought to us at this time will have our very best attention: later on we will be more rushed. Get the best possible job by bringing in your spring repairing to us NOW.”

By 1930 Elias and his son Irving were the only blacksmiths left in Scandinavia.

Andrew Olaf Skye worked in Scandinavia in 1901 and 1902.

Iola Herald-April 26, 1901: Having rented Mr. Knutson’s new blacksmith shop on the west side of Main Street in this village (Scandinavia). I wish to announce to the public that I am prepared to do horse shoeing and all kinds of blacksmithing promptly and at general prices. Give me a call. Olaf Skye.

Andrew married the first cousin of Elias’s wife. Prior to settling in Scandinavia Andrew spent thirty three

months in the Yukon during the gold rush. After the death of his wife in 1905, he went to Saskatchewan and eventually came back to Iola around 1920. He married for a second time and moved to Waupaca where he had his own blacksmith shop.

According to a plat map of Scandinavia in 1889 there were two blacksmith shops. One was off of Pleasant Street. This was built by Elias Gottschalk around 1886. The other shop was on the west side of Main Street north of Norse Street.

This was the time when the blacksmith shop had a significant impact on a community. Not only did the blacksmith make the shoes for horse and oxen he also made the nails and tools used by the farmers and other trades. In 1852 the first nail factory was started and the need for nails to be made by the blacksmith was lost. Later many other tools were made in a factory setting. By the turn of the century the blacksmith worked mostly on wagons and some farm equipment. The next decrease in the blacksmith business was the advent of the tractor and the automobile.

Several other blacksmiths were mentioned by Malcolm Rosholt in his book *From the Indian Lands*. Peter Knutson from Holt according to Rosholt Knutson had a blacksmith shop on his farm which was located near Helstad School. He appeared in the 1860 census as a farmer. Rosholt says he did not farm and eventually moved his shop into the village of Scandinavia. Peter owned property in two locations. One was near Helstad School and the other was near Elm Valley School. No census record could found for him in 1870 and he was not buried in Scandinavia.

Hans Iverson was mentioned by Helgeson as being a blacksmith. He might have had a shop on his farm, but there is no direct mention of blacksmithing in any census data. He probably came to Scandinavia around 1855 and emigrated in 1854 from Norway. He appeared in the 1860 and 1870 census of Scandinavia on a farm. In 1900 he was in Wittenberg and employed as a janitor at the Hommes Orphan home. He died in 1903 and is buried in the Scandinavia Cemetery, but there is no headstone for his wife although she is mentioned in the church records with only a birth date.

The last of the blacksmiths mentioned by Rosholt was Jens Thorson (Hellom). According to Helgeson he had a blacksmith shop on his farm and “preferred to stay there and work rather than attend church.” He probably came in 1854 from the Rock River settlement in Jefferson County. Jens died in 1872 and is buried in the Scandinavia Cemetery under the name of Hellum. According to the Guyant reading of the cemetery his wife Karen died in South Dakota, where she is probably buried.