

# Historic Timeline of Tverberg Log House



The Tverberg log house is one of a very few of the cabins built by Norwegian settlers before or at the time of Minnesota statehood in 1858 that has been restored, preserved, and used for public education. Its historic significance is due to its use as a church and school at the very beginning of Norwegian settlement before church buildings or schoolhouses existed.

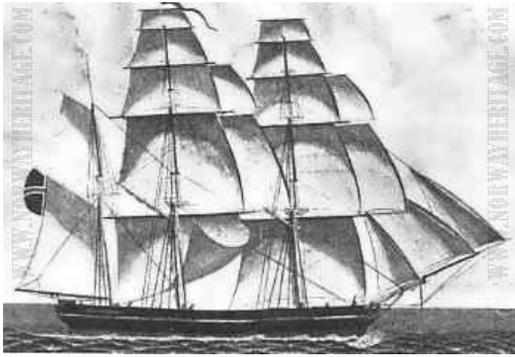
For more than a century, while the structure served as a home to successive families, wood siding and roof shingles preserved its logs from serious decay. In the early 1970's, a new owner made known his plans to demolish the house and build new. Neighbors who knew of the cabin's historic significance intervened to rescue, move, and restore the log cabin as a symbol of the original pioneer community that formed around St. Olaf's Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran congregation, established in 1856.

This historic timeline tells the story of the log house from the emigration of the Tverberg family from Norway to its uses as a home, church, and school in pioneer times, and finally to its restoration and use as a historic monument.

Immigration of Tverberg Family 1842 – John Pederson Tverberg and his wife,



Gro Sondresdatter Tverberg, and their daughter, Kjersti, immigrated from Tinn, Telemark, Norway to the Muskego settlement in Wisconsin. They left Tinn on April 25, sailed aboard the bark ship Ellida from Gothenburg with a group of 170 Norwegian passengers, and arrived in New York August 9. Nine passengers died from cholera or typhus, and 30 were transferred to a hospital upon arrival in New York.



Example of a bark type of sailing vessel.

Wisconsin Years: 1842-1858 – The Tverberg family arrived at their destination, the Muskego settlement, in 1842, one year after John's brother Hans had come to live there. It was a natural choice, since a large group from Tinn had founded the settlement in 1839, under the leadership of John Nelson Luraas. The John Tverberg family soon moved on to Dane County, Pleasant Springs Township, where Rev. J.W. Dietrichson was pastor of East Koshkonong, West Koshkonong and Liberty Prairie churches. The Koshkonong area was a hub of Norwegian immigration and church organizing. Records show that eight children were born to Gro and John Tverberg in Wisconsin, six of whom survived: Peter, Sondre, Gurine, John, Kittel, and Carl.

Settling in Minnesota: – On October 6, 1858, John and Gro Tverberg purchased land in Vernon Township, Dodge County, Minnesota, from John Kittleson, who had owned it since 1856. The land was located 1-1/2 miles south of the current West St. Olaf church. Either that year or the next, the

Tverberg family moved from Wisconsin to their new home in Minnesota. It is not known whether the log house they moved into was already on the property or was newly built by John Tverberg. This is the log house that was moved to Parish Park across from East St. Olaf Church in 1976 and restored for historical preservation.

### Log House Chronology

- Construction – While most settlers lived in small dugouts or one-room log houses, the Tverberg log house was relatively spacious with two rooms on ground level and two rooms upstairs. In addition to Mr. and Mrs. Tverberg, it housed their four sons, John, Carl, Sondre and Peter, as well as two daughters, Kjersti and Gurine.
- Use as School – Records show the upstairs of the house was used as the first township school as early as 1858, the year Minnesota became a state. Fannie Comstock and Sondre Tverberg were among the first teachers. Pupils known to attend the school included Torgrim Torgrimson Mohn, Ed Himle, Ole Himle and Kristens Gilderhus Lee.
- Use for Church Services – St. Olaf's Congregation was formally established on June 12, 1856, at a worship service under an oak tree near the present East St. Olaf, led by Rev. Claus Clausen of St. Ansgar, Iowa. The Tverberg log house was one of several member homes in St. Olaf's parish that was used for religious services before church buildings were available starting about 1870. The first resident pastor of St. Olaf's Congregation, Rev. Lauritz Steen, reported conducting 101 services in the Tverberg home. The homes of Tollef Golberg, Aslak Aaby, and Hans and Saetre Gronsteen were also used.
- Log House as Residence -- The house remained the residence for the Tverberg family for many years. A second house on the same property is mentioned. Ownership passed from John and Gro Tverberg to their son, Carl, in 1885. In year 1928, Berge Senjem purchased the house and lands. One of his sons, Oswald, purchased the property in 1951 and lived there with his wife, Elna, and children JoAnn, James, and Judy, until 1964. Ownership passed to James and Vienna Boe and next, in 1969, to Robert and Mary Ann Senjem. The last married couple to own the property, including the log house, were David and Darlene Lucas, who purchased it on May 6, 1974. The log cabin was removed from the property in 1975.

## Historic Events

- Sioux Uprising – In 1862, riders came through the area to alert settlers that the Indians were coming. An uprising had begun around New Ulm when some half-starved Dakota Indians, deprived of promised federal government payments, attacked area settlements. Vernon township settlers gathered at the Tverberg house armed with axes, hay forks, and breach-loading rifles. However, no confrontation occurred.
- Lincoln Assassinated – President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated on April 14, 1865, by the well-known actor John Wilkes Booth, while attending a play at the Ford Theater in Washington D.C. This occurred five days after Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Union Army General Ulysses S. Grant, at Appomattox Court House in Virginia. Stories from immigrants tell of settlers gathered for church at the Tverberg home when a rider came by shouting, “Lincoln is dead! Lincoln is shot!”



## Historical Preservation

- Saving from Demolition – A neighboring farmer, Harry Mohn, learned of Lucas’s plans to demolish the old Tverberg home and build new. He and Earl Himle, of Hayfield, knew the home’s historical significance, and wanted to save it from destruction. After informing Lucas of their interest, in 1975 Mohn secured it from demolition with a \$75.00 payment. Mohn and Himle then began to gather expert opinions on the potential for preservation.
- Decision to Restore – Mohn and Himle contacted the historical societies for Olmsted County and Minnesota. Both Henry Herron of the Minnesota

Historical Society and George Terrel of the Olmsted County Historical Society inspected the building and agreed it should be preserved.

- St Olaf Heritage Association – After experts agreed that the Tverberg log house should be preserved, Mohn and Himle organized the St. Olaf Heritage Association. Eventually its membership included representatives of East and West St. Olaf and four area “daughter” churches that were established after 1878: St. John’s (Kasson); Trinity (Hayfield), Evanger (Sargeant) and Zumbro (Rochester).
- Moving the Log House – The historical societies advised that the house be moved to the parsonage park across from East St. Olaf, where the St. Olaf’s Congregation was established in 1856. With the help of donated labor and a grant of \$2,500 from the Minnesota Historical Society, the house was moved to its present location in 1976. No further work was done on the building at that time except the removal of siding.



Tverberg house being moved with siding still on. It was moved to Parish Park across from East St Olaf.

- Initial Restoration: 1976-81 -- Himle contacted the Vesterheim Museum in Decorah, Iowa. They made available Assistant Curator Steve Johnson



Members of Green Thumbs, with Steve Johnson and Harry Mohn (furthest right).

(later to become museum director) to help with the restoration. Johnson planned the work schedule and consulted with Brad Linder of the Olmsted County Historical Museum. Mohn secured the help of the “Green Thumbs”, a senior citizen

work project, who carried out much of the restoration work. They removed the wainscoting that covered the walls and ceiling; removed the old chinking and whitewash from the logs inside and outside. Then Johnson sprayed the logs with preservative.



. Four sides of the Tverberg house as it appeared at the beginning of restoration in 1976.

- **Missing logs replaced:** Johnson obtained high quality logs from an abandoned cabin near Decorah to replace those that were missing. As on the original structure, basswood logs were used on the upper rows, oak logs on the lower ranks. Then the log walls were chinked and whitewashed inside and outside. On the roof, a host of volunteers removed old asphalt shingles and replaced them with cedar shakes. The chimney was extended with old bricks from Decorah.
- **Interior Re-design:** In the late 1800s the stairway had been moved and new doors cut in for a kitchen addition. It took considerable work to

patch up these openings, splice in ceiling beams, and install doors in their original location. Lester Trygstad did much of this work. Richard Fjerstad installed doors and windows. Existing frames had to be removed and cut to fit the logs without wainscotting. Johnson brought custom-made windows from Decorah; Toni Phenix obtained door hardware from a log house in Byron built in 1856.

- First Restoration Completed: The blue casein paint was barely dry on the doors and window frames in time for the 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of East and West St. Olaf, held July 11-12, 1981. Festivities were held in Parish Park by the newly restored Tverberg Log House, which was dedicated by Pastor Lester Peterson.



The Tverberg house after the first restoration was completed in 1981.

- Second Restoration in 2000: After the passage of almost two decades, some of the logs were deteriorating and had to be replaced. As before, old chinking had to be knocked out, decayed logs cut out and replaced with intact logs taken from old, abandoned log houses, and fresh chinking and whitewash applied inside and outside. Also as before, dozens of volunteers from area churches did the work, which was completed in the months of August, September, and October 2000.
- Third Restoration: 2007-2009: After being unattended for several years, the log house suffered deterioration: a large hole in the roof, racoons inside, doors and windows and some logs in need of replacement. New volunteers rose to the emergency, establishing a St. Olaf Heritage

Committee in September 2007 to restore the Tverberg Log House. That fall, the hole in the roof was closed with a temporary fix, debris left by rodents was cleaned up, and cracks and crevasses in the building closed.

- The new committee reconstituted the St. Olaf Heritage Association as a 501c (3) non-profit corporation. It took out a loan, signed by the members, raised additional funds, and set about restoring the structure from head to toe. Starting in August 2008, old shingles were removed and replaced with cedar shakes, exterior log chinking was removed, and the logs power washed. Rotted logs were replaced with logs from a dismantled log cabin out west. The log walls were re-chinked and treated with preservative. Next, windows and doors were replaced. In 2009, focus shifted to the interior. Old chinking was removed, logs were re-chinked, walls were whitewashed, and wood trim covered with Norwegian Blue paint. The restored log house was re-dedicated June 27, 2010, with pastors of all the daughter congregations and St. Olaf churches present. Rev. Myrwood Bagne, of Trinity Lutheran in Hayfield (retired), officiated at the rededication.



Logs were shaped to replace those decayed.



Eight new logs were used to fill this gap.

- The first visitors to tour the restored cabin was a group of 100 from Voss, Norway, as part of a 10-day bus trip on June 24, 2009. After eating lunch, including Norwegian specialties for dessert, at West St. Olaf, they toured the historic Tverberg home and examined the Norwegian inscriptions on tombstones in the East St. Olaf cemetery. They continued on to Albert Lea for a 100<sup>th</sup> year celebration of immigrants from Voss the following day.



A group from Voss, Norway, visited the log house shortly after its third restoration on June 24, 2009

Historical Marker Installed in 2022 –



Mike, Norman, and Steve Senjem installed a historic Marker along East St. Olaf cemetery road.

The St. Olaf Heritage Association, with support from a Minnesota Historical Society grant, installed a historical marker on the north side of the cabin off the East St. Olaf cemetery road. The legend describes the original use of the Tverberg home for church and school, and the story of its restoration and use as a symbol of St. Olaf's parish dating back to pre-statehood times.



Members of St. Olaf Heritage Assn. in 2008 in front of restored log house.

The St. Olaf Heritage Association committee which was established in 2007 to undertake the third restoration of the Tverberg Log House continues to meet regularly. Our priority is proper care and maintenance of the log house on an ongoing basis, so that this significant historical structure will not lapse into decay and disrepair requiring a costly major renovation. As a non-profit organization, we depend on voluntary funding, which includes memorials, direction of Thrivent Choice Dollars, donations from individuals and congregations, Rochester Area Foundation dividends, and government grants.

We sponsor community events, such as the Ice Cream Socials held from 2011 to 2019, and the Taste of Norway event held currently at the Tverberg Log House. We also promote education about local history.

The Association convenes monthly from April to October. We meet the second Monday of these months at 10:30 a.m. at the log cabin or the East St. Olaf church basement, depending on the weather. All who are interested in local church history are invited to attend. In particular, we seek membership of interested parties from East and West St. Olaf and daughter congregations: Evanger (Sargeant), Trinity (Hayfield), St. John's (Kasson) and Zumbro (Rochester). Those related to the Tverberg and Senjem families and others who lived in the log house are also welcome.

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