

## Scandinavian Settlement at Lake Ozette

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Historical Paper

Word Count: 1,526

The land was rugged, remote and isolated. Why would so many Scandinavians be drawn to the area? The motivation for Scandinavian immigrants to settle in the Lake Ozette area was largely due to a desire for a similar culture to Northern Europe, with the opportunities America provided. It is made obvious through the language, foods, traditions, farming techniques, and even the housing that the people of the Ozette Lake community desired to stay connected with the traditional culture of their homeland. The promise of fertile farmland was also appealing to the many Scandinavian farmers, who were looking to start a new life in this recently discovered American wilderness (Evans 68). Once this promising area was discovered, several homesteaders wrote letters to their Scandinavian friends and family, inviting them to homestead in this developing Scandinavian community (Magnusson 11). The land may have been rugged and remote, but that may have been the reason that this hearty and hardworking Scandinavian community grew.

Scandinavian immigrants were rooted in their values, through traditions and culture (Magnusson 6). They worked hard and were filled with the hope of a new life in America. Whether coming to America was for adventure, new farmland, or simply because of the promise of America, all of these immigrants had several things in common. They were hard-working and they loved their homeland. However, when the First World War and the Finnish Revolution broke out, many people left Scandinavia taking few possessions with them (Magnusson 7). Something very important to a Scandinavian immigrant was his or her *amerikakistor* (America Trunks) (Magnusson 7). These held special items such as traditional clothing, jewelry, dishes and weavings (Magnusson 7). These trunks were important because they held emotional value and some of the items were useful to their everyday lives in their

new country (Magnusson 8). Another link to their home in Northern Europe was the language. Often “the old language” was still spoken at home and around other Scandinavians (Magnusson 7). Churches and other Scandinavian customs, such as baptisms, weddings, confirmation, funerals, Christmas, New Year’s Eve, Easter and Midsummer also kept the Scandinavian culture alive in communities of Scandinavian ethnicity (Magnusson 7). Lastly, letters were undoubtedly meaningful. The Scandinavians in America were interested in what was going on in their homeland. They read and wrote many letters, and followed the Scandinavian press (Magnusson 6). Even though these hardworking newcomers came to America, they still remained connected to their homeland.

To stay connected with their traditions, Scandinavians usually lived near each other in pockets of ethnically and culturally Scandinavian communities. Lake Ozette was an ideal location for a Scandinavian community (Evans 69). With the completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad, it became easier than ever to reach Washington State (Magnusson 9). Washington was said to be a place of good conditions for agriculture and the amount of job opportunities in Washington was growing (Magnusson 11). Once in Washington, many Scandinavians wanted an adventurous and rugged lifestyle. They wanted to farm and live off the land in a community of culturally like-minded citizens. Lake Ozette was a rugged, unsettled area with a beautiful view and excellent farmland. Once this isolated corner of the world was discovered, a small trickle of curious immigrants explored the area and settled there (Evans 69). Then, as they realized just how ideal Ozette was for the increasing Scandinavian population, homesteaders began to urge friends, family and neighbors to come to the newly formed community (Magnusson 9). Soon it was not uncommon to see a Makah canoe coming in from the ocean, laden with luggage,

Scandinavians and hopes for a new community (Magnusson 4, 12). This small community soon began to blossom into a strong and thriving Scandinavian cultural community.

Once reaching Lake Ozette, the Scandinavian immigrants formed a community as similar to those in Northern Europe as possible. One way this similarity was possible was through the strong Scandinavian culture. Proof of this culture is shown in every aspect of life from the techniques used to clear land to how they milked their cows. When first coming to Ozette, the method that settlers used to clear the land was one used in Northern Europe (Magnusson 14). They would first drill holes into the trunks of the extremely large trees of the dense forests (Magnusson 14). Then, they would put burning coals in these holes (Magnusson 14). To fall one huge red cedar could take two weeks of hard work with this method. Another technique that proves how much these homesteaders wanted to create a community of Scandinavian homogeneity is shown in how the Nylund family milked their cows in the summertime. When the Nylunds lived in Scandinavia, they let their cattle roam freely and graze on the bulrushes and other plants by the lake (Magnusson 28). When they settled on Lake Ozette, they didn't change a thing. They followed the Scandinavian tradition of letting the cattle graze and then sending girls out to catch and milk them (Magnusson 28). These two small details show the elements of Scandinavian culture in the everyday lives of the people living on Lake Ozette.

Another aspect of life at Lake Ozette that is similar to Northern Europe is their houses. The styles of many of the homes at Lake Ozette share an uncanny resemblance to those in Northern Europe (Magnusson 29). When first arriving at Lake Ozette, settlers would stay in a heavy canvas tent, a small shack or an abandoned hut. The first houses at Lake Ozette were log

cabins with dirt floors and no windows (Magnusson 12). Later dwellings were still simple but they had a few traditional decorations. Many houses had large porches with a symmetrical front (Magnusson 30). A common style of house layout was with pairs of rooms. “On one side of the hall would be *stugan*, the living area, while on the other side one would find *helgstunan* or *kammaren* (fine room)” (Magnusson 31). The roofs of several houses were made of cedar shakes (Magnusson 31). A simple decoration on the front of many houses at Lake Ozette and in Northern Europe was painted window sills (Magnusson 26). This was a simple and practical way to add color to the front of a house. These simple houses, with simple architecture and simple decorations, were yet another resemblance to a Scandinavian community.

Almost every home at Lake Ozette was not just a little cottage on a tiny plot of land. Another motivation to live on Lake Ozette was the good farming land that Deputy Surveyor Lewis Shelton reported as, “almost first in quality and will produce large crops...” (DNR Maps and Surveys). The majority of immigrants to Lake Ozette had been farmers in Scandinavia, so when they arrived in Washington and heard that Lake Ozette had good farming land, it motivated them to homestead at Lake Ozette (Magnusson 11). The land was expected to be excellent for growing plants such as, “potatoes, turnips, and other vegetables, hops, oats, apples, pears, plums, cherries and small fruits,” (DNR Maps and Surveys). However, not all areas surrounding the lake may have been as agriculturally successful as had been anticipated. In an account given by James G. Swan, a teacher from Neah Bay, “He saw twice as much cultivated land as at Neah Bay, but said the potatoes looked very meager”(McDonald 2). Swan also states that the potato patches he walked through were a mile long or longer (McDonald 2). The hopes of acres upon acres of thriving agricultural lands may have brought many Scandinavian farmers

to Lake Ozette but because not all of these farmers may have picked an area with fertile soil and good drainage, several of these homesteads did not last (Magnusson 4).

In the final analysis, the evidences of the houses, farms, foods and culture, it is made obvious why so many Scandinavians chose Lake Ozette. It may, on first glance, have appeared unsightly and ominous. However, in reality it was a pocket of primarily untouched beauty. A culture alike to that of Northern Europe, with the hope of a flourishing homestead and all the opportunities America provides, motivated many Scandinavian immigrants to farm and start a new life on Lake Ozette. When transitioning from Scandinavia to America, many immigrants wanted a similar lifestyle to the one they had left behind (Magnusson 7). An abounding amount of Scandinavians desired a community securely grounded in the values and virtues of their former homes and countries (Magnusson 6). Copious amounts of these newcomers longed for a community alive with the traditional flare of their homeland. They desired homes reminiscent of their beloved dwellings in Northern Europe (Magnusson 29). With a large veranda to take in the exquisite view of the glistening lake, the shore side homesteads at Lake Ozette were picturesque (Magnusson 30). The homesteads these persevering farmers built were sensible, but had traits nostalgic to the immigrants' Scandinavian roots. The opportunity to have an abundant crop on a productive farm was a very appealing offer to these immigrants. Even in this rugged, isolated community, this special group of Scandinavian immigrants forged a vibrant community, combining their love for their roots with a bright hope for their futures.

## Scandinavian Settlement at Lake Ozette: An Annotated Bibliography

Evans, Gail E. H. *Historical Resource Study Olympic National Park*. National Park Service Department of the Interior, 1983. This book gives an overview of the history of the Scandinavian settlement at Lake Ozette. It was relevant to my paper in the quotes about farmland and geography.

Magnusson, Brian B. *Observations on the Material Culture of the Scandinavian Settlement at Lake Ozette and Royal (1880-1910)*. This book contains information on Scandinavian immigration, Scandinavians in Washington, Scandinavian culture at Lake Ozette and architecture at Lake Ozette. This book was important to my paper because it had a large amount of proof Scandinavian culture.

McDonald, Lucile. "100 Years Ago: Lake Ozette's First Visitor." *The Seattle Sunday Times*, 19 July 1964, pp. 2. This article talked about James G. Swan's account of the agricultural opportunities at Lake Ozette. This was helpful because the article had quotes directly from Swan's journal and was relevant in providing proof of the motivation to live at Lake Ozette.