

Stone Lady on the Hill Wa Over Tiny Black Hammer V

By P. N. NARVESON

SPRING GROVE, Minn. — On the east escarpment of a hill facing the highway in Section 34, Black Hammer Township is a unique landmark, built in the likeness of a woman, which has withstood time and the elements for at least 87 years.

To the residents of the area it has always been known as the "Lady on the Hill." It is not known with certainty by whom or when it was built. One tradition is that it was built in 1878 by Valtin Valtinsen, an early settler on whose land it was located. Another story is that it was built by teen-agers at an earlier date when grazing cattle in the vicinity.

A romantic belief is that there was at one time a statue of a man next to it, of which all traces are now gone, and that the lady will keep a lonely vigil on the hill until the return of her mate.

THE HILL ON which the landmark is located is the most prominent feature of the landscape in the area, and the one from which the township got its name. The name Black Hammer is derived from the Norwegian words sort, meaning black, and hammer, which literally means a tool for pounding, but which was sometimes used in Norway when referring to a hill or knoll shaped like a hammer.

According to early histories of the region, it was so named by Knud Berge, a pioneer in Section 6, Spring Grove Township from whose cabin the hill was sharply silhouetted. The name was suggested to him by the charted appearance of the hill after a prairie fire. It reminded him of a hill in his home community in Valdris, Norway, known as "Sort Hammer."

From its commanding view in all directions and its location near the intersection of the famous Winona-Fort Atkinson In-



BLACK HAMMER VILLAGE . . . Its place. Note the black hammers painted on the store front.
population is 10. This store, owned and operated by Sigurd Evenson, is the only business

ing to retain preemption rights to government land.

WHILE HIS later activities in Houston County are outside of the story of Black Hammer, we mention that Stevens traveled on to Yucatan where he staked out a claim in Section 23, later the site of the Hiram Howe mill. In 1856, when town-site speculation was becoming almost epidemic, he platted the village of Yucatan and built a sawmill there.

After the Money Panic of 1857, when town lots became almost worthless, he vanished from Houston County history. It is reported that he went back to Winneshiek County where he for a time continued in his profession as a millwright and then joined a caravan of emigrants on their way westward to Worth County, Iowa.

The Riceford creek flows through the western tier of sections of the township. By the late 1850s a few settlers had drifted down the Riceford and established themselves along the creek in Section 29. As our

higher ground. Mrs. McCabe and her two children with their home were carried down stream and drowned. The mill and homes were never rebuilt. The Tannen family continued to live their until the 1890s.

THE POPULATION of Black Hammer always has been predominantly Norwegian. The rugged terrain of many parts of the township seems to have had a special appeal to immigrants from the hills and valleys of Norway. The influx of Norwegians into the area started in 1853. It appears to have been a continuation of a movement of settlers fanning out from the Norwegian settlements started in Allamakee and Winneshiek counties in 1850-51, which reached Spring Grove and Wilmington townships in 1952 and finally Black Hammer.

The arrival of Norwegians continued at an accelerated pace until in the late 1860s, when we find them ensconced in almost every nook and valley in the township.

Elijah West, Alexander Simpson, Peter, Silas and William Carrier, Chandler Flemming, Alvin Smith and John Birdsell. Billings, West and Birdsell are known to have been prominent in township, county and state political affairs. Carrier died at Fort Snelling while serving in the Civil War. Flemming and Smith were among those from the township who gave their lives in the war.

THE VILLAGE of Black Hammer located a mile north of the bluff, which we have already described dates from the late 1860s. Unlike most of the small hamlets in the region started in the 1850s when town-site speculation was at its peak, Black Hammer appears to have come into existence from the necessity of having a post office and a place to shop within the community.

Unlike towns started by town-site speculators, it never had any aspiration of growing into a metropolis, nor can it boast of having had any boom days.

dian trail which skirted it on the east, and an ancient trail that extended in an east-west direction between the Beaver and Riceford valleys, it appears that this hill was an observation post and a gathering place for Indians before the arrival of the white man. We can easily turn our fancy back to a time when dusky warriors kept surveillance over the nearby trails from this vantage spot.

IN EARLIER years this hill was the scene of many celebrations, public picnics and bowery dances. The story has been told of how at one 4th of July celebration a terrific storm came up late in the evening and people rushed pell-mell down to more sheltered places below the hill. One man who had carried the celebrating a little too far became entangled in a wire fence, in his panic. He was found hanging upside down after the storm, none the worse for his ordeal, except his "hangover" next day was a little more severe.

In 1850 several changes were made in the township organization in Houston County. Some of the townships created the year before were reduced in size and a few new ones formed. One of the new ones was Black Hammer. At an organization meeting April 5, 1859, Helge Solberg moved that the township should be named Clinton. For some reason this name was rejected. At a later meeting, after much deliberation the name Black Hammer was formally adopted.

Little information is available as to what adventurers, land prospectors, or speculators may have visited the Black Hammer regions before the arrival of the first permanent settlers in 1853.

THERE IS a story that an old trapper, who claimed to have roamed the Black Hammer and Yucatan regions before the Territory of Minnesota was created in 1849, would at times when the weather was extreme, call at some settler's cabin asking for food or shelter for the night. Who he was, or where he came from is not known, for he never divulged his life story or his name. When asked his name he would reply, "Just say that Jim the Trapper made his rounds."

Probably the first to stake out a claim in the prairie part of the township was a millwright and speculator named Edwin Stevens. He was one of several millwrights known to have investigated the water-

information is limited in that part of the township it is not known when David Soper began construction of a sawmill at this point. It is probable that he was in partnership with Philander Soper, a resident of Riceford, and that both had been connected with a sawmill at Riceford.

Early histories of the region state that it was in operation by 1857, and that like the other primitive sawmills in the area, it had a reciprocating sawblade, which, while slow and cumbersome to operate, could turn out rough boards with the minimum amount of waterpower. This blade appears to have required less engineering ingenuity to build. The mill was in operation until the fall of 1866, when it was destroyed by a flood.

A FEW residences had sprung up in the vicinity of the mill, evidently homes of employes in the mill, among them John McCabe, Gunerious Tannen and Mathias Nilsen. McCabe was among those from Black Hammer Township who paid the supreme sacrifice in the Civil War.

Mathias Nilsen is best remembered from his curious nickname of "Mathias with the fork." The reason for this name was that he never ventured forth after dark without carrying a pitchfork. Whether he carried this to ward off rattlesnakes or he suspected some Indian lurking around — they were still common along Riceford valley — or he was affected nyctalopia is not known.

Tragedy struck the colony on the night of Aug. 6, 1866, when the most devastating flood ever to strike the Riceford and South Fork valleys occurred. This flood carried away the mill and all the homes, except that of the Tannen family. As the wall of water surged down the valley in the middle of the night without warning, not all the residents had time to flee to

Probably the first upon the scene was Torkel Aageson Rosaaen from Stavanger, Norway, who established himself in Section 22 in 1853. He was closely followed by another family from Stavanger, Knud Olsen Ike, his wife Cecella and five children. They settled in Section 21, on the claim staked out by Edwin Stevens the year before. It is not known whether Stevens had abandoned the claim or Mr. Ike was tricked or intimidated into paying him for what dishonest speculators termed their preemption rights.

LATER THAT year came a group of settlers from Sogn, Norway, and Aurland, an annex of Sogn. Among these were Jens Winjum, Jens and Gutorm Otterness, Kristopher Eriksen, Per Orstad, Lars Findreng, Ole Yitrelle, Ole Hemri, Halvor Lie and the Berquam brothers, Johannes the elder, Johannes the younger, Bottolf, Ole and Iver. During the next decade more immigrants from Sogn continued to arrive. Because many came from this section of Norway, the very musical and rhythmic dialect of the Sognings came to be very much in evidence whenever a group of Black Hammer settlers gathered in the early days.

While no attempt can here be made to name all who did their part in the building up of the township, we can mention a few from other sections of Norway who came before the close of the 1850s including Valtin Valtinsen, Knud Guttormsen, Christian Lamen, Lars Svarthas, Tosten Johnson Lommen, Helge Bergsrud, Helge Bjore, Helge Solberg, Halvor Olsen, Ole W. Olson, Elling Bjertness, Torjus Elken, Osten Burtness, Elling Holm and Nils Ekse.

Among people of other nationalities than Norwegian who were early settlers in the township were Julius Billings,

or days of decline, but seems to have clung tenaciously onto life until the present day. Not even the proposed Houston, Hesper and Southwestern Railroad surveyed across the township in the 1880s seems to have caused much of a stir or done anything to draw prospective businessmen.

The village has at the present time one store, one church, four residences and a population of 10 persons. The Black Hammer store is one of the few remaining country stores in the county. While the pot-bellied stove, the cracker barrel and the "Poor Box," where the customers filled their pipes at the storekeeper's expense are gone, cronies still gather there in the evening to swap stories, reminiscences over the past or review the day's happenings.

When the first business establishment was started in Black Hammer is not known with certainty. We do know that by 1871, mail stages on the Houston-Decorah route by way of Riceford were going through the town and that a post office had been started there that year, with Gunder Mathison holding the keys to the mail pouches. It is also known that by that year he was operating a store and a blacksmith shop at that point.

IT IS PROBABLE that he may have started the store in the late 1860s. About 1873 the property came into the hands of Bernt Hanson. He was a blacksmith by trade, and while working at his trade he also kept the store going.

In the late 1880s the store was purchased by Throned Jacobson, a thrifty man who believed in the saying, "A penny saved is a penny made." The story is told of how before becoming a storekeeper himself, he once carried a basket of eggs to Spring Grove. On arriving there, he found out that the stores in Caledonia were paying a cent more per dozen, so he trudged on to Caledonia with his eggs, making a round trip of over 20 miles before he got home.

His business is reported to have been on a rather modest scale. It has been told that he sometimes carried from Spring Grove enough goods on his back to replenish his stock from the prior week's sales. In 1895 he leased out the store to Peter Glasrud. After a year he found time hanging on his hands so he went back into the store and kept it going until 1913, when it went out of existence.

power possibilities of the different streams in the county before the arrival of the first settlers. Stevens had come originally from Wisconsin but had spent some time in Winnebago County, where he had assisted in designing and constructing some of the earliest grist mills in northeastern Iowa.

In 1852, when on an exploration trip into Houston County in quest of a suitable mill site, he is supposed to have tarried long enough in what is now Black Hammer Township to stake out a claim in Section 21, now the Arnold Walhus farm, and to have made the other improvements on the claim as required by law of those intend-

NORWEGIAN LUTHERAN CHURCH . . . The congregation dates back to nearly 1853 when the first Sogns and other Scandinavians moved to this rugged terrain that was so much like home.

... of the late 1880s.
In the late 1890s the blacksmith shop operated by Hanson came into the hands of Henry Peterson of Spring Grove, who started a wagon maker's shop, and kept the forge going.

SOMETIME in the late 1880s a second store was started in Black Hammer by Hans Hanson, a brother of Bernt Hanson and Erik Karlsbraaten. Karlsbraaten seems to have been a silent partner in the venture, soon sold, and Hans Hanson kept it going until 1903 when he sold out to Oscar Bagley.

Before coming to Black Hammer he had operated a store at Newburg. Bagley operated

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the store until 1952 when his health began to fail. It was then taken over by his son, Milton, who carried on the business until his father's death in 1955. It was then sold to Sigurd Evenson, the present operator.

In his many years as a merchant Bagley saw many changes in the store business—from the horse and buggy days when he had to haul all his goods from Spring Grove by wagon to the time that trucks delivered the merchandise to his door. In early days many items were sold by bulk and had to be laboriously weighed by hand. Bagley, who for almost half a century operated the store in Black Hammer, was probably the most well known country storekeeper in this part of the county.

THE PRESENT brick church in Black Hammer was built in 1898 to replace a smaller wood building erected in 1868. The history of the Lutheran congregation at Black Hammer dates back to the early days of the settlement when the spiritual needs of the settlers were administered to by occasional visits from such missionaries of the Norwegian Synod as the Revs. V. Koren, Nils Brandt and F. C. Clausen, first regular pastor at Spring Grove.

The congregation was organized in 1858 at the home of Knud Ike. It was affiliated with Spring Grove until 1895, when the charge was divided and Black Hammer, Riceford and Newburg called a pastor of their own.

From 1857 to 1870 the congregation was served by Rev. Clausen at Spring Grove. After his death the Rev. S. S. Reque was called to Spring Grove and he continued to serve Black Hammer until the charge was divided.

During Rev. Reque's ministry the congregation decided the call was too large for one



MYSTERY WOMAN . . . Who built this statue of a woman in Black Hammer some 90 years ago isn't known, but it's said she's

keeping a lonely vigil until the mate. She's on the highest hill ship.

gations and served until his death in 1905.

THE FOLLOWING pastors have served since that time: Rev. Carl Kasberg, 1905-1912; Rev. Hemming Hanson Frost, 1912-1927; Rev. Borg - Breen, 1927-1949; Rev. Obert Rust, 1949-1955; Rev. Paul Reque, 1955-1958; Rev. Richard Johnson, 1958-1961; Rev. Vernon Aaes, 1961-1965, and the Rev. Jesse Thompson, 1965-.

And so reads the story of the progressive, prosperous, and civic minded community of Black Hammer. The village of Black Hammer appears lately to have taken on a new lease of life with the building of a large parsonage with Sunday school rooms and several new homes. Whatever the future of the village, the "Lady on the Hill," will keep her lonely vigil on the crest of the bluff for many years to come.

The farm on which the landmark stands now is owned by Mr. and Mrs. James Evenson. Their home is not much more than a stone's throw from the bluff. Mrs. Evenson, the former Iola Ike, is the daughter of the late Martin Ike, who for many years owned the farm. He was a lifetime resident of Black Hammer and was much interested in the history of the community.

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Rev. Eskild Jensen was
next called as assistant to
Rev. Reque. He served until
1895, when he became regular
pastor to the Black Hammer,
Riceford and Newburg congre-

Mr. Ike often told how when
he arose early the landmark
would come into view through
the morning mist, and at sun-
down it would be outlined in
the western sky.

Mr. Evenson was recently
injured in a car accident, but
is now reported to be on the
road to recovery.

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SPRING GROVE, Minn. — On the east end of a hill overlooking the highway in Section 34, Black Hammer Township is a unique landmark, built in the likeness of a woman, which has watched time and the elements for at least 87 years.

To the residents of the area it has always been known as the "Lady on the Hill." It is not known with certainty by whom or when it was built. One tradition is that it was built in 1839 by Valter Valterinen, an early settler on whose land it was located. Another story is that it was built by teenagers at an earlier date when grazing cattle in the vicinity.

A romantic belief is that there was at one time a statue of a man next to it, of which all traces are now gone, and that the lady will keep a lonely vigil on the hill until the return of her mate.



BLACK HAMMER VILLAGE . . . Its place. Note the black hammers painted on the stone front.

THE HILL on which the landmark is located is the most prominent feature of the landscape in the area, and the one from which the township got its name. The name Black Hammer is derived from the Norwegian word for hammer, meaning black, and however, which literally means a tool for pounding, but which was sometimes used in Norway when referring to a hill or knoll shaped like a hammer.

According to early histories of the region, it was named by Knud Berge, a pioneer in Section 3, Spring Grove Township, from whose cabin the hill was sharply silhouetted. The name was suggested to him by the church appearance of the hill after a prairie fire. It reminded him of a hill in his home country in Valderia, Norway, known as "Sert Hammer."

From its commanding view in all directions and its location near the intersection of the famous Winona-Port Adairson Indian trail which skirted it on the east, and an ancient trail that extended in an east-west direction between the Berge and Blackford valleys, it appears that this hill was an observation post and a gathering place for Indians before the arrival of the white man. We can easily turn our fancy back to a time when dusky warriors kept surveillance over the nearby trails from this vantage spot.

IN EARLIER years this hill was the scene of many celebrations, public picnics and bawdy games. The story has been told of how at one of the July celebrations a terrific storm came up late in the evening and people rushed pell-mell down to more sheltered places below the hill. One man who had carried the celebration a little too far became entangled in a wire fence, in his panic he was found hanging upside down after the storm, and the worse for his ordeal, except his "hangover" next day was a little more severe.

In 1854 several changes were made in the township organization in Houston County. Some of the townships created the year before were reduced in size and a few new ones formed. One of the new ones was Black Hammer. At an organization meeting April 1, 1854, Judge Selberg noted that the township should be named Clatia. For some reason this name was rejected. At a later meeting, after much deliberation the name Black Hammer was formally adopted.

Life information is available as to what adventures, and misadventures, or speculations may have settled the Black Hammer region before the arrival of the first permanent settlers in 1833.

THERE is a story that an old trapper, who claimed to have hunted the Black Hammer and Tuxton regions before the Territory of Minnesota was created in 1858, would at times when the weather was extreme, call at some settler's cabin asking for food or shelter for the night. Who he was, or where he came from is not known, for he never divulged his life story or his name. When asked his name he would reply, "Just say that Jim the Trapper made his mark."

Probably the first to make a claim in the prairie part of the township was a millwright and speculator named John Stevens. He was one of several millwrights known to have investigated the water-power possibilities of the different streams in the county before the arrival of the first settlers. Stevens had come originally from Wisconsin but had spent some time in Winnebago County, where he had gained in designing and constructing some of the earliest grist mills in northeastern Iowa.

In 1852, when on an exploratory trip into Houston County in quest of a suitable mill site, he is supposed to have turned long enough in what is now Black Hammer Township to make out a claim in Section 21, and to have made the other improvements on the claim as required by law of those times.

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The Blackford creek flows through the western tier of sections of the township. By the late 1850s a few settlers had drifted down the Blackford and established themselves along the creek in Section 28. As an information is limited in that part of the township it is not known when David Soper began construction of a sawmill at this point. It is probable that he was in partnership with Elmer Soper, a resident of Blackford, and that both had been convinced of a sawmill at Blackford. Early histories of the region state that it was in operation by 1862, and that like the other positive sawmills in the area, it had a respectable production, which, while slow and cumbersome to operate, could turn out rough boards with the minimum amount of waterpower. This blade appears to have required less engineering ingenuity to build. The mill was in operation until the fall of 1862, when it was destroyed by a flood.

A FEW residences had sprung up to the vicinity of the mill, evidently homes of employees in the mill, among them John McCabe, Gumerous Tannon and Mathias Nilsen. McCabe was among those from Black Hammer Township who paid the supreme sacrifice in the Civil War.

Mathias Nilsen is best remembered from his claim to the name of "Mathias with the fork." The reason for this name was that he never ventured forth after dark without carrying a pitchfork. Whether he carried this to ward off rattlesnakes or he suspected some of the Indians lurking around — they were still common along Blackford valley — or he was afraid of rattlesnakes is not known.

Tragedy struck the colony on the night of Aug. 6, 1862, when the most devastating flood ever to strike the Blackford and South Fork valleys occurred. This flood carried away the mill and all the homes, except that of the Tannon family. As the wall of water surged down the valley in the middle of the night without warning, not all the residents had time to flee to higher ground.

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The arrival of Norwegians continued at an accelerated pace until in the late 1850s, when we find them encamped in almost every creek and valley in the township.

Probably the first upon the scene was Torkel Aagaard, known from Slaveren, Norway, who established himself in Section 21 in 1835. He was followed by another family from Slaveren, Knud Olsen, his wife Gertrude and five children. They settled in Section 21, on the claim staked out by Edwin Stevens the year before. It is not known whether Stevens had abandoned the claim or Mr. Olsen was tricked or intimidated into paying him for what dishonest speculators termed their preemption rights.

LATER THAT year came a group of settlers from Sogn, Norway, and Aarland, an ancestor of Sogn. Among these were Jens Winjans, Jens and Gustav Olmussen, Kristopher Kristians, Per Gustaf, Lars Plandeg, Ole Vitrois, Ole Henri, Halvor Lie and the Berquist brothers, Johannes the elder, Johannes the younger, Rolf, Ole and Iver. During the next decade more immigrants from Sogn continued to arrive. Because many came from this section of Norway, the very musical and rhythmic dialect of the Sognian came to be very much in evidence whenever a group of Black Hammer settlers gathered in the early days.

While no attempt can be made to name all who did their part in the building up of the township, we can mention a few from old sections of Norway who came before the close of the 1850s including Valter Valterinen, Knud Gustafsen, Christian Larsen, Lars Svanen, Torkel Johannes Larsson, Helge Selberg, Helge Bjore, Ole W. Olson, Erling Hestenes, Torkel Eken, Ole Hestenes, Erling Hestenes and Nils Eken.

Among people of other nationalities than Norwegian who were early settlers in the township were Julius Billings, Elijah West, Alexander Simpson, Peter, Elias and William Carver, Chandler Finning, Alvin Smith and John Birdsell. Billings, West and Birdsell are known to have been prominent in township, county and state political affairs. Carver died at Fort Snelling while serving in the Civil War. Finning and Smith were among those from the township who gave their lives in the war.

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Unlike towns started by town-site speculators, it never had any aspiration of growing into a metropolitan area. It was a hamlet with no more than a few days or days of decline, but seems to have clung tenaciously to its life until the present day. Not even the proposed Houston, Hepler and Northwestern Railroad surveyed across the township in the 1890s seems to have caused much of a stir or done anything to draw prospective businessmen.

The village has at the present time one store, one church, four residences and a population of 10 persons. The Black Hammer store is one of the few remaining country stores in the county. While the peddler's store, the cracker barrel and the "Pop Box," where the customers filled their pipes at the storekeeper's expense are gone, crumies still gather there in the evening to swap stories, reminiscences over the past or to view the day's happenings.

When the first business establishment was started in Black Hammer it was the "Pop Box," where the customers filled their pipes at the storekeeper's expense. It was the evening in crumies, reminiscences over the past or to view the day's happenings.

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In his many years as a merchant, Bagley saw as a by-product in the store business— from the bare and buggy days when he had to haul all his goods from Spring Grove by wagon to the time that trucks delivered the merchandise to his door. In early days many items were sold by bulk and had to be laboriously weighed by hand. Bagley, who for almost half a century operated the store in Black Hammer, was probably the most well-known country storekeeper in this part of the county.

THE PRESENT brick church in Black Hammer was built in 1888 to replace a smaller wooden building erected in 1860. The history of the Lutheran congregation of Black Hammer dates back to the early days of the settlement when the spiritual needs of the settlers were maintained by occasional visits from such missionaries of the Norwegian Synod as the Rev. V. Koenig, Nils Brandt and P. C. Jensen, first regular pastor at Spring Grove.

The congregation was organized in 1852 at the home of Knud Lie. It was affiliated with Spring Grove until 1918, when the charge was divided and Black Hammer, Blackford and Newburg called a pastor of their own.

From 1857 to 1870 the congregation was served by Rev. Clausen at Spring Grove. After the Rev. S. S. Rege was called to Spring Grove and the Rev. E. Jensen was next called as assistant to Rev. Rege, he served until 1898, when he became regular pastor to the Black Hammer, Blackford and Newburg congregations.

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MYSTERY WOMAN . . . Who built this statue of a woman in Black Hammer some 90 years ago isn't known, but it's said she's keeping a lonely vigil until the return of her mate. She's on the highest hill in the township.

24 Sunday, December 23, 1955 WINONA SUNDAY NEWS

Kenosha Has Christmas Amid Layoffs

Kenosha, Wis. (AP)—They bought toys first, and spent less money on adult gifts. For Kenosha, the layoffs means less of a payroll of \$1.5 million a week. But workers will still receive half or more of their normal wages in state and company unemployment benefits.

But shoppers in Kenosha were like a lot of other Americans Friday. They waited until the last minute to do their yuletide buying, as a move fell on the community of 58,000.

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Triplets Born On Christmas

INDIANAPOLIS, Ind. (AP)—Saturday was a very special day for the family of the triplets born in Indianapolis — Santa brought triplets.

Mrs. White, 37, of St. Vincent's Hospital here for the birth of her fourth child, unexpectedly gave birth to the triplets early Saturday.

The children, a girl weighing 7 pounds, a boy weighing 5 pounds, and then a girl, 5 pounds, 14 ounces, plus three other White children, ages six, four and two.

White, 45, a department store saleswoman, was quite calm. But she noted the likelihood of increased laundry bills and the possibility of sleepless nights.

"We were expecting only one child and couldn't decide on a name," she said. "Now we'll have to come up with three."

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NORWEGIAN LUTHERAN CHURCH . . . The congregation dates back to nearly 1853 when the first Sogn and other Scandinavians moved to this rugged terrain that was so much like home.