

The Wald Name, From Norway to America

Valheim

Our earliest known paternal grandfather was called Ole Valheimsvatne which means: “Ole at the lake on Valheim”. His father's name is not known for sure, but there is a confirmation record for “Ole Iversen age 16” in 1771, and this tells us that his father, like his son was named Iver. It states in the Årdal farm book: “Valheim er truleg ein av dei eldste gardane i Årdal”. Translation: “Valheim is probably one of the oldest farms in Årdal”. From the same book: “Earlier written forms of the name include: Volle, Vallem 1563, 1606, Walem, Wallem 1610, Øvre and Nedre Wallimb 1661, and Øvre and Nedre Wallem 1723.” The place called Valheimsvatne is listed under “Øvre” Valheim which means the “upper” or “higher” part of the farm. Ole's oldest son, Iver, was listed in the parish records as: “Iver Olsen, born at Wallem, christened 23 May, 1773”.

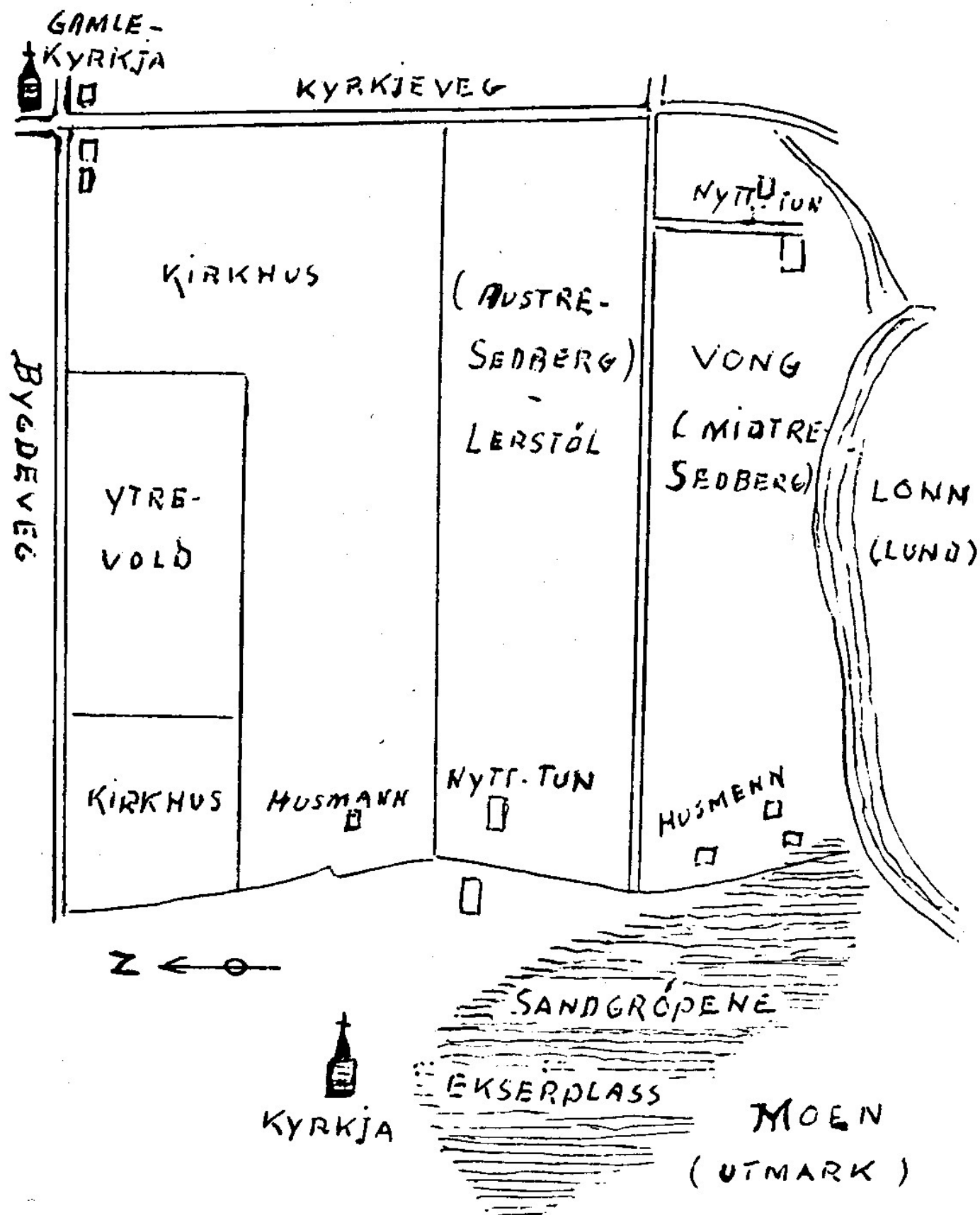
Lillemoe

The name “Lillemoe” means “little mountain”. After 1803, when Iver Olsen was married, he lived at Lillemoe which was part of the Vadla farm in rural Årdal. Also from the Årdal farm book: “Earlier written forms of the name Vadla include: Vald, Vold, Vall, Vadle Woldt 1602, Wold, Walde 1610, 1617, and Walde 1723.” These farm names from Vadla are the earliest origin of our Wald family name. Iver's oldest son, Ole Iversen (Spel-Ola), was also raised on Valda, and lived with his mother at the place called “Lille-Vadla”.

Volden

Ole Iversen raised his own family on the Sedberg farm (later called Østigaard) at a place called “Volden”. Ole was therefore called “Ole Volden”, or “Ole Iversen Volden”. In “The Wald History” by Cleve Darling he was called “Ole Peter Vold”. No Norwegian documents have been discovered that list him with this middle name. However, their was

some apparent confusion by the author of the “Spel-Ola” story where he was at one time mistakenly called “Ola Person” (Per is equivalent to the name Peder). Thus, Peder was very possibly a nick name. Nevertheless, in the Spel-Ole story “Volden” is described as “an old converted smoke house with a turfed roof, on the meadow between the oldest school house and Lonn”. The Norwegian words “voll” or “vollen” mean “a grassy field or a meadow”. Thus, the name “Volden” literally describes the location of his home just as “Lillemoe” and “Valheimsvatne” describe a location. It means: “the place in the meadow”. In the map above, from the Årdal bygdebok, Volden would have been one of the Huusmand places in the lower right corner.



Ekserplassen på Sedberg. (Skisse av R.A.)

Olsen

Ole Iversen's oldest son was also named Ole. When this son emigrated to America his departure was recorded in the parish records with his name: "Ole Olsen from Vollen, Østigaard, Årdal, son to Ole Iversen Vollen and Siri Pedersdtr." (1854). In "The Wald History" by Cleva Darling, he is listed both as "Ole J. Vold" and "Ole J. Wald". Cleva writes that "Father's name was Vold in Norway but was changed to Wald in America in order to not mix up the mails". In the parish records of the Palestine Lutheran Congregation of Story county, Iowa, his name is written: "Ole J. Olsen Wold" and wife "Udbjor Berthine Olsen Wold". Ole J. almost never used the name Wold or Wald except where it is found in the church book mentioned above. Instead, he used the name "Ole J. Olesen / Olsen / Olson" (all three spelling are found in the records). When the vital records from Illinois and Iowa were searched for Vold, Wold, and Wald, none of Ole J.'s could be found. Ole J.'s wife, Bertha Gaard, was born in Talgje, Rogaland County, Norway, and is listed in the parish records with the name: "Udbjørg Bertine Andersdatter Gaard". When the two were married in Ottawa, La Salle County, Illinois, they used the names "Ole Olson" and "Betsey Anderson", married 15 September, 1855. This may seem odd, but the changing of Bertha's name to an American version was not unusual at that time. Evidence that this couple was in fact Ole J. Olsen Volden and Bertha Andersdatter Gaard comes from the 1860 Illinois state census and the 1880 Iowa federal census. In 1860 this same family was listed as Ole Olson and wife Betsey, both born in Norway, and their two daughters, Serine (Sarah) and Sophia (Susie), born in Illinois. In 1880 the family is listed again, now living in Iowa, but this time as Ole J. Olson and wife Betsey. In this census all nine of their children are listed, the oldest four having been born in Illinois and the youngest five born in Iowa. Since the names and ages of all of these children correlate with those listed by Cleva Darling in "The Wald History", it appears very likely that "Ole Olson and Betsey Anderson", married in 1855, were indeed our great great grandparents. The records show that Ole J. continued to use the surname Olson for much of his life in America. Their grave stone near Slater Iowa has the inscription: "Bertha Olson Wald" which confirms this. (Note: Ole J.'s name was never inscribed on the stone even though there was a place on the stone for the husband. He was buried in the family plot in an unmarked grave near Bertha).

Wold

Our great grand father, Ole Olson Wold, was the third child and the oldest son of Ole J. Olson. He used the surname "Wold" from a young age as is clearly shown in the Palestine church book. In his official capacity as a minister in the Lutheran Church, and on his own letter head he called himself O. O. Wold. In the county records which list the birth of his children, he and the children are listed with the surname "Wold". However, in all of the records of the children who were born in Fertile (Worth county), the surname "Wold" was later crossed out. Then, written above the original "Wold" is the name "Wald". An explanatory note is also written in the margin of the records thus: "Corrected by affidavit on July 3, 1942...Ole O. Bakker, clerk, and Edith Hanson (secretary)". The late date of this name change is interesting, and leads one to wonder why this was done. The death record of Ole J. lists him as "Wald, Ole J. O.", died 1 June, 1908 in Thor, Humboldt County, Iowa. This record tells us that the spelling "Wald" was used in the family at least as early as 1908, but this does not necessarily prove that Ole J. himself chose to use this spelling. Bertha died in 1899 and, remember, her grave stone also bears the name Wald.

Wald

A few years after Pastor O. O. Wold died at the age of 47, his wife Augusta came to Slater Iowa to live near the family of the Pastor's brother Severin O. Wald. Our grand father, Ferdinand Oliver Wald (also the oldest son), used the surname Wold for at least part of his own life as a young man. So the question remains: why was the name changed from Vold to Wold and then to Wald? One possible explanation is that the names Vold and Wold were actually identical to the Norwegians. There is little doubt that they would have pronounced these two names the same, both with the "V" sound, because there is no "W" sound in their native language. Also, the capital "V" when written in Norwegian records often looks like "W" because of the elaborate way it is written. Also, the "W" spelling may have seemed more American at the time. Then, why was the name changed to Wald? Should we just accept that it was "in order to not mix up the mails"? A different explanation, and perhaps a better one, is that Augusta Simerson (wife of O. O. Wold) wanted to keep her family name the same as that used by the rest of the family. We know from a 1908 obituary for O. O. Wold that Severin O. (younger

brother of O. O. Wold) had chosen to spell the name "Wald". In fact, since Severin O. was the informant for Ole J.'s death, this probably explains why Wald ("Wald, Ole J. O.") was given as the surname on Ole J.'s death record.

So, we have the mails, the pronunciation, and the choice of the extended family. There were possibly other reasons for the change, and we may never know them all. When one looks at the family plot in the Slater Cemetery in Iowa, one can certainly see that "WALD" was their final decision.

Slater Cemetery - Center Section

(located 2 miles south of the east end of Slater Iowa)

Row 13

1. WALD, Bertha Olson WALD Jul 10 1835-Aug 19 1899
2. Burton O. WALD Nov 20 1875-Dec 13 1900
3. Ole O. WALD 1861-1908
- * Ole O. WALD (This is known to be the grave site of Ole J. Olsen, but no marker exists)
4. Augusta WALD 1872-1953
5. Lowell M. WALD 1901-1975
6. Melba F. OLSON 1910-1964
7. WALD Minnie E. 1875-1961; Severin O. 1865-1941