

Lars Larson Jeilane

Lars Larsen Jeilane- (Sept.24,1787-Nov. 13,1845)

When the English seized control of the outer Scandinavian seas in 1807, one of their men-of-war captured a small Norwegian smack which had run the blockade with a load of lumber for Holland and was returning with grain on board as one of the three in charge, was a man who was to become the leader of the Sloopers of 1825 and later the owner of the most important Norwegian immigrant station in America. He was Lars Larssen Jeilane, a short, rather stocky, black-haired young man of 20. The farm Jeilane was on Kannikets (church) ground in Frue Sogn and just outside the city of Stavanger in south-west Norway, like his father, Lars was a carpenter, and he plied his trade on the coastal seas. Now with his shipmates, he was taken to England, and all were held captives with other Danes and Norwegians on prison ships on the coast.



Lars Larson after death
(with his son Elias)

Lars at first worked for a canal boat builder but very shortly went into business for himself on the canal near Ford Street. He was successful right from the start and as early as 1827? built himself a fine home about a half mile from his work at 19 (later 37) Atkinson Street in Ward 3. The frontage was 150 feet and on the back of the lot Lars built a large bam. No.19 Atkinson Street was the last address west of the Genesee River at that time — beyond, were the woods. The house, two stories with an attic, was destined to be the most famous Norwegian house in America. Not only was it probably the first frame house constructed here by a Norwegian, but it was to become the most important immigrant way station, visited by hundreds of immigrants enroute from Norway to the settlements in Murray (Kendall) and those in the middle West, and was to exist as the oldest house in the history of Norwegian immigration to America.

Immigrants continued to come to America and to stop for advice and help at Larsens. But perhaps the latter's warnings about not arriving without funds had some results, judging from the account of a group from Voss in July of 1839. Knud Larsen Brekke wrote that his party on reaching Rochester "hired the wife of Lars Larsen to be our interpreter and guide to follow us to Buffalo, where she made arrangements for our journey to Chicago with a lake steamer ... for \$23.00."

The period began with the mysterious death of the Sloopers leader, Lars Larson, Nov. 13, 1845. For fifteen years he had kept his home in Rochester as an immigrant way-station and assisted with his Quaker kindness literally hundreds of his near destitute countrymen who had passed through on their way west. Nearly all of the 6200 Norwegians in America by 1845 had gone via Rochester and most of these had at least heard of Lars Larson. He was a man of good habits and well beloved by his family! His death is best related by his wife Martha in a letter to Ovee Rosdail, who succeeded him in the business aspects of his Sloopers leadership.

A man by the name of Hotaling came to Lars and wanted him to buy an old boat in company so Lars sold his new boat and bought an old one he thought he would do better than to run his new one for that would make it seconded handed he took this man as Captain, he never liked to go Captain. This man was to [have] half of the boat as soon as he should pay his part Lars paid one hundred and fifty dollars down the rest to be paid this Spring Lars repaired the boat and made a good boat of it then he took in a load of flour from Buffalo to Albany \$1.00 dollar a barrel, six hundred and ten Barrel they got as far as Schenectady or rather four miles below Rexfords flats where he was drowned It happened five o'clock in the morning; they were to be in Albany the next day this happened the last night the last hour of darkness how can we but think it very strange now he claims the boat he has got all the freight money and he claimed the horses the horses we got back but the rest is lost. Somehow or other he got the bill of sale in his hands he knew if Lars was out of the way he could claim all so we have every reason in the world to think he was pushed into Eternity he does not own one single cent in this property.

Lars sold his new boat for a thousand dollars because he stood so much in need of money to pay some crowding debts then he went away He paid \$300 dollars on a mortgage of a thousand dollars two hundred dollars comes due the 1st of May and if it is not paid we are in danger of losing it.

Lars Larson was 59 at the time of his death, and his wife was only 42. The family of ten to which she referred included their eight children ranging in age from one to twenty and Lars1 deaf and dumb sister, then 66. Martha was appointed as administrator with another Friend, Silas Cornell.