

KNUD ENDRESEN SYRE

1763 - 1837

Barth

Farm leader Knud Endresen Syre was a prominent figure in Karmsund's history in the 18 and 1900's. Legends about Knud are on people's lips. Now 100 years after his death he has become almost a legendary hero. Long newspaper articles have been written about this man which in parts are misleading and incorrect. The history about this pioneer ought to be known by his descendants. We have for several years studied community traditions. We must hold on to community traditions, since we can then often find valuable information about our distant relatives.

We have received important insights about this distinguished man from his nearest kin, from those who remember him and from other notable Karmøy people, as well as from historian Jens Kraft and chief reporter Oscar Kristiansen.

A search was made of Oslo and Bergen archives for information about Knud but nothing was found. Most likely documents about this man are buried in the archives down in Copenhagen.

Knud Endresen Syre was the fifth child, and the youngest of Endre Jorgensen's children. He was born in 1763 and died in 1837. Knud was married twice--the first time with Gjertrude Rasmusdatter Syre, born in 1762, died in 1806. The second time he was married to Gitlaug Andersdatter Grødem, born in 1783, and she also died before Knud. Both marriages were childless.

Knud was born and grew up on the Syre farm at Skudeness. From the time he was very young, he helped his father tend the large farm. He was a licensed sea pilot. In his young years he learned to read and had good handwriting. He was, for his time, well educated.

Knud had an impulsive and fearless nature but was

kind to children and he became a spokesman for what he believed was right and true. If he understood that anyone was being treated unjustly he would gladly stand up for them. He was determined and had an aggressive nature which was not easily subdued.

On October 14, 1788, Knud Endresen Syre got a registered lease on his father's farm at Syre--12 spann (ca. \$36.00) grainland rent. In the census of February 1, 1801, we find Knud as three families on Syre: Knud Endresen, 38-year old farmer, farm occupant and pilot, married to Gjertrud Rasmusdatter, 39 years; Parents-in-law Rasmus Hansen, 77 years, Louise Olsdatter, 71 years, benefits from pension from the farm; Martha Andersdtr, 28 years, maid; Johannes Pedersen, 20 years, hired man.

In a document of 1831-32 the farmers met with their leases in court at Kopervik. Knud also met here with power of attorney. Siri Osmundsdatter Syre, who had 8 spann(ca. \$24.00) grainland tax. She had lost her lease.

At a court meeting March 20, 1833, Knud Endresen's foster son Peder Rasmussen met for Knud in his absence.

Historian Jens Kraft states that in the year 1801 the common people of Karmøy demonstrated, in which instance a warship with troops was sent from Kristiansand to restore peace. The riot can no doubt be blamed on the heavy taxes farmers in Karmsund had to pay, which led to dissatisfaction. It's quite possible that Knud Syre also this time spoke for the farmers, but it has no connection with the troubles at Gloppe court (legislature) in Avaldsnes in 1803 and the navy warship that was sent from Copenhagen in 1804.

The Danish bureaucracy was on its last leg (singing its last verse) here in this country, and it didn't look as if people were on friendly terms with judges and officials. It isn't surprising that people also out here at Karmøy felt the tax squeeze--and that extra hard. They had before placed a tax on the most remarkable things. One paid tax according to the number of window panes one had in the

house, or the number of pairs of shoes one had, or how many cattle one had in the herd, etc. These taxes became known as "pane-tax", "shoe-tax", and "tail-tax." In 1803 a meeting was held at Gloppe in Avaldsnes and here a new tax was announced, a "road-tax."

A road was built from Stavanger and past Sandnes, a ways over Jaren, probably from 1789 until into the beginning of the 1900's. Farmers in Karmsund and presumably also in Ryfylke were ordered to take part in the road-building, or else pay the road tax. Many protests were sent in. Karmøy dwellers also protested against this order, which they thought was unfair--yes, altogether unreasonable. Knud Syre was chosen to be the farmers' spokesman.

The judge rose by the bench and announced the new tax and the new order. The farmers now had a choice. Either they would be so good as to pay the new tax or travel south to Jaren for road-building.

The people became restless. They found these requests unreasonable. There were many people gathered here but no one dared complain. There were few in those days who could read or write, and they had an ingrown fear of the authorities, who did not bear the sword in vain. Then a man pushed his way forward to the bench and asked to get to read the letter. That man was Knud Syre. When he was finished with the letter his face turned red with anger and he said, "This letter is worthless." Then he laid the letter back on the table. The judge now had also become angry and pushed the letter off the bench with his elbow.

"Oh, he threw the king's document under the table," said the judge, with anger in his face. A shock went through the large gathering, people were terrified over what had happened. From the bench came the announcement.

"The man who has committed this unheard of crime of throwing the king's document under the table, shall be put in chains, behind bars." Now came the sheriff,

and he had several men with him. They led Knud Syre away as prisoner while people stood and watched in dismay. But not for long. They clenched their fists and the words flew: "That isn't how it happened. It wasn't Knud who knocked down the letter. It was the judge who pushed it down with his elbow." They saw they would be cleaned out completely. The farmers became more and more angry. Finally one spoke up and others gathered around him. He told them that they couldn't let this happen. Knud wouldn't have been in prison today if it hadn't been for them. And now he urged the people to come along to get Knud out of jail. They agreed to gather together as many men as possible--from the confirmant to the elderly with canes--to meet the next morning at dawn and get Knud out of jail. And woe those who stayed home! During the night it rumbled on all the roads of riding men. They promised each other that as soon as they got there judge and official would get tit-for-tat.

By dawn it was black with people surrounding the jail. One man went over to the sheriff's house and another in the crowd shouted, "Where is the key? Now you must come and take Knud out or else there'll be something else. Have you the key?"

"Yes, here is the key," answered the sheriff, and passed them over on his little finger, but he couldn't open up. "If you want it, take it, but at your own risk." At once the key was gone. "Where is the key?" shouted the sheriff. "Oh, just be quiet. It's nearing the jail," was the answer. One set the key in the door, another one unlocked it, a third opened it, a fourth and fifth went after Knud. In a moment he stood between them, free as a breeze.

Knud now rode home together with his comrades from Skudenes. But even if he was home he did not feel as safe as before, because what had happened spread like wildfire through dry grass. It would likely be told to both judge

and official. They likely wouldn't bother investigating what was done here.

A while after this occurrence Knud was at "Syreglaanaa" on lookout for ships. Out on the horizon he spotted a ship and he was soon certain that it was a Danish warship, which was heading for Skudeness. It went in on the east side of the island and anchored in M^ongaardshavn. From there they could take the road to Syre in order to take Knud off-guard. Knud suspected that and posted sentries so that he could be notified in time.

The Danes landed at Mongaardshavn and marched westward to the Syre farm. At Skudeneshavn they visited the inn of Anna Giese ("Gisa"). In 1800 we find in Skudeneshavn a Jonas Kirsebom Pieters, 40 years, married to Anna Giese Buchoff, 39 years, licensed inn, 8 children. The Danish warriors had guides with them to Skudneshavn. From here they got another man to guide them to Syre. The sentinels, who had good connections with Knud, followed the Danes' actions. Knud, therefore, had plenty of time at his disposal.

The servants provided him with food and he gave them his instructions before he left the farm. He went now to Glaaen (Otterhaalaa) which was in the southwestern end of Syre-neset. On this promontory was a good hiding place, so he was safe. This had been a hunting place for otter hunters. Yes, many an otter had lost his life here by a well-aimed shot.

The Danes were seen in "Trolleskar" when they, with their captain in the lead, marched towards Syre. There were over 30 well equipped warriors. Now was this bandit going to be captured dead or alive.

The foster son to Knud Endresen Syre, Peder Rasmussen, then 10 years old, came running, out of breath, to Valentin Valentinsen, then 12 years old, and said: "Now they're coming to take father!" Knud was uncle to Valentin

Valentinsen and Peder Rasmussen. Peder's mother was Lokris Endresdatter Syre, who was married to farmer and pilot Rasmus Larsen Hennes. His parents died when he was a baby. Therefore he was brought up by his uncle at Syre. Mother to Valentin, Kari Endresdatter was married to farmer Valentin Hansen Syre (his 3rd marriage). Peder (Per) and Valentin now ran to "haaskokken" where they had a good viewpoint when the Danes were looking for Knud.

Syredalen was crowded with people and here Helge Larsen Syre met the Danes. The Captain asked him to show them the way to Knud's home. He begged and threatened, but to no avail. Helge wouldn't betray his comrade. The officer threatened Helge with his sword, sticking the point of the sword to his chest. Helge became angry. With his shirt open in front he went up to the Captain and said: "If you have come here to the king's land, and have permission to stab, then stab right here." The officer exclaimed, "Good grief, what kind of people are these, who so readily offer their lives." Perhaps the Danish officer and his crew began to understand that the mission they had come on was not as easy as they first thought. They found out where Knud's home was and they were soon there. Here the officer came to a halt and had the company surround the house, while he and several others went into the house to carry out their mission. They were astonished when they found only an elderly woman at home. This lady was Knud's mother-in-law, Louise Oldsdatter, 80 years old. She looked very authoritative and gruff (tough) when she asked them to sit down. "Is this where Knud Endresen Syre lives?" She answered, "Yes, what business do you have with Knud?" "He is to be arrested, dead or alive, and taken to the king's Copenhagen" said the Captain, and struck several blows with his sword on the table and on a beam under the attic. Then he wrote on the same beam: "She says that the master of the house is not at home."

"Now, who was it you wanted to get hold of?" asked the woman and opened up her jacket. "Now you can just stab here. Consider it the same as stabbing Knud." The Captain went back and forth on the floor, and then he said: "I think the woman is crazy. Good grief!" They looked everywhere. They stuck their gun barrels and swords into the straw beds and really rummaged around in the house. Finally they had to give up and continue their hunt outside. They were also in the hay barn and stabbed in the straw and haystacks, but the man was and remained gone.

Finally they were on top of Syreglaanaa. There were also some people gathered here. The officer made a fiery speech and promised a reward to anyone who could bring him Knud, dead or alive.

Knud still had his sentinels out and he himself laid well hidden in "Glaaen" (Glaaen that's mentioned in the southwest end of Syreneset (Syre headland or promo v farthest out by the sea). Several authors believe that "Glaaen" is the same, others that Syreglaanaa-Glaaen lies several hundred metres from the last-named place. If Knud had chosen Syreglaanaa for his hiding place, that would have been the same as going into a trap, or let himself intentionally get arrested.

When the Danes had gone Knud went back to his home thankful and happy to have escaped the Danish dungeon.

Knud's parents died before 1800 and are buried at the old cemetery at Alveberg. Before 1800 Knud went twice to Copenhagen with letters of complaint from farmers at Karmøy in regard to the heavy taxes which people out here had to pay. (There's also a story that Knud travelled around in the parish and was also in Bokn and Tysvær and gathered up tax letters. With these letters he travelled in an open boat to Denmark to forward them to the Danish authorities and at the same time hand over complaints from the people in regard to the heavy tax burden.)

The second time he was along in a deputation chosen by farmers in Karmsund and Ryfylke. They were well received

by the authorities in Copenhagen. "You should just take it easy. We will look after your case and do what's best for you." After they came home they didn't hear any more about it, but the taxes became greater and greater. The Danish authorities were really hated by the farmers out here on the islands. They pestered and tortured the impoverished people. They tightened the tax screws harder and harder.

At the aforementioned court at Gloppe there were farmers from Karmsund with Knud Syre in the lead, who refused to take part in the aforementioned roadwork on Jaren, and to pay extra tax for that work. They wanted to first see an authorization by the higher authorities.

After the occurrence at Syre the Danish ship travelled north and anchored in the harbor at Kopervik. After the Danish officer had been there for a while and had gotten to know the people better, he found out that this was not a rebellion on Karmøy--on the contrary. He found it was wisest to put himself on a friendly footing with the farmers. In order to prove his good intentions, the commanding officer put on a party on board ship for the most important men in the community, among whom first and foremost was Knud Syre. Later the ship anchored by Hølevarde. This was where the party was held. The commanding officer sent word southward to Skudenes and invited a number of well known men to the party.

Knud Syre received a friendly invitation from the officer to come. He had found out that the treatment Knud was subject to at Gloppe court and later was unjust. He must be so good as to come north to Hølevarde, where they were now anchored. They would have a party on board and then he would get restitution and at the same time be appointed a royal pilot. To that would he, as a Danish officer, give his word of honor. The guests were served many good things. The commanding officer asked them to take their fill of drinks and a number of guests did that, but others were more careful

and alert. They got a tiny bit suspicious, but were nevertheless quiet. Among the last was Knud.

Some of the other guests had, at the officer's request, taken their fill of drinks, and good-naturedly ended up under the table. Some were sent ashore, and now it was an easy task to overpower the rest.

Knud reminded the Captain about his promise and his word of honor to him. But the Danish officer broke his word of honor and Knud had to share the same fate as the other prisoners onboard.

At once the warship pulled up anchor to set course for Copenhagen. Knud shouted to his comrades, who were to head back south to Skudenes:

"Greet home and say that now they have taken away Knud." Some of the other prisoners were Knud's brother-in-law Ole Torbjornsen Snorteland, Helge Larsen Syre, and Knud Knudsen Vikra. One Rennesøy man and a Ryfylkian also were along as prisoners to Copenhagen.

Now we have to stick to community traditions: Knud was sentenced, because of false witnesses in Kristiansand to 6 years in prison, but after some years' detention he was pardoned and set free again. At first Knud was treated quite harshly in prison, but he conducted himself so well that he later had it easier. He became, under supervision, work foreman for a small group of workers on "Holmen", a navy establishment in Copenhagen. Here he also received pay for his work. It is told by older people in this generation that when he came home he had put aside some money so that he was after that circumstance a well situated man. Ole Torbjornsen Snorteland and Knud Syre after a few years' detention in Denmark, were simultaneously freed.

Nevertheless, when Knud Syre came home his hair had turned gray. Knud Knudsen Vikra and Helge Larsen Syre were prisoners a short while, and when they were released and were to head for home, they got a powerful admonition to be obedient subjects in the future and to never again make trouble or uproar against the authorities. When Knud

Syre was in Copenhagen he had learned a little carpentry and blacksmithing.

Even though he no longer was as strong as before, he still had a kind heart. He was as helpful as he could be and fearless when it was necessary. He was helpful in homes where there were contagious diseases.

As we are braiding this memory wreath about Knud Endresen Syre, we include the following (It is, however, dealt with in more detail in a later section):

In November 1812 an English man-of-war "Forward" came into Høinesviken. It wanted to make a foray (raid) in Skudeneshavn. Out from Haga a pilot, Lars Haga, was out fishing. They forced him to come with them and pilot them south past Geitungsodden. Here they met another boat with two pilots. They were Knud Endresen Syre and Hans Faltinsen (Syre), Skudeneshavn. When they saw it was an English warship they wouldn't go aboard, but they promised to row ahead of the vessel with the pilot boat. They took advantage of a stratagem as they set course right over a skerry, which later was called "English Man's Skerry." The Englishmen followed in their wake and because it was low in the water the ship went aground and the seaside settlement was saved from the bandits' plunder. Take a closer look at this in the account: "When the English man-of-war brig "Forward" wanted to raid Skudeneshavn in 1812." Knud Endresen was also one of the commanders of a watch in Syreglaanaa in the war of 1809 - 1814, and Hans Olsen Syre was signalman..

Knud Endresen Syre's house was, in good old Karmøy-style, long and low. It stood in a south-north direction, with windows towards the east. It was 20 feet (1 alen= ca. 2 feet) wide. The living room was 16 x 16 feet. A long table and a window bench stood alongside the windows. In the north end a small room and in the second one there was a kitchen with a fireplace. The ruin of the fireplace can still be seen, and also traces of the house foundation. Along the west side was a long hallway. Later Knud set up

a small guestroom called "Nystova." Before, on the same lot, there had been a "stabbur" with four legs under. It was located about where Kasper K. Syre's potato cellar now stands. "Nystova" was later sold to Endre Risdal. It still stands there on teacher Olai Risdal's property in Øvre Risdal. Peder Rasmussen, who was married to Magrethe Hansdatter Syre, inherited Knud's property, since he was childless. They took possession of this "historical" home in 1835. They had a large family--10 children--who were raised in that home.

During this time the school was "on the go" in the township. The teacher trudged with the chest of books from house to house in order to give the children a little education, and it likely wasn't always so easy. Several who went to the ambulatory (travelling) school with Per, remember well the sword blows which were left on the beam by the Danish officer. Peder Rasmussen took over all of Knud's property in 1837.

Knud Endresen's farmhouse was torn down in the 1880's and the materials were divided among Endre Rasmussen's children.

The beam with the "historical" sword cuts became Jonas Slottebrekk's property (on Syre). It was cut up for firewood in the 1890's. That beam should have been kept as a township historical memorial either in Elias Dyrland's museum or in Karmøy Museum at Utgaarden. With its silent language it would have told a bit about Karmøy's history under Danish rule.

Knud died in his home at Syre and was buried in the old churchyard at Alveberg in September 1837. At that time there was only a pack-horse trail and riding path and these were often in poor condition. If one had to go to a funeral from Syre one often had to go by rowboat.

At Knud's funeral it was Peder Rasmussen, Ole Hansen, Jakob Jakobsen and Valentin Valentinsen who rowed the boat across.

One usually went ashore at Skaalevaag, and then took the highway by Falnes to the churchyard at Alveberg.

Older folks tell that when they were young, they saw the grave-cross in the southwestern corner of the graveyard at Alveberg with the Syre name on it. Probably the "farm chieftain" Knud Syre is buried in the southern section of the graveyard.

Posterity ought to honor his memory. There ought to be a memorial stone raised in the old cemetery at Alveberg with the inscription:

KNUD ENDRESEN SYRE
1763 - 1837