

Discovering the Identity of Esther (Large) Berg

By Rev. Wayne G. Gillespie

Questions have been asked about the identity of Esther (Large) Berg – the wife of Oliver Kvale and the mother of Basil Kvale – for many years. Preliminary research indicates that Oliver Kvale was born on 18 Sep 1893 and that he died on 21 Dec 1977. Basil Kvale was born in Emmons, Minnesota on 7 Jan 1926 and died in Mankato, Minnesota on 8 Nov 2017. However, information concerning Esther Kvale has been, sadly, missing. And that's where our search begins.

The 1940 Federal Census – Conger Village, Freeborn County, Minnesota

Oliver Kvale	45 (born abt. 1894) in Minnesota
Esther Kvale	35 (born abt. 1904) in Iowa
Sylven Kvale	17 (born abt. 1923) in Iowa
Orvis Kvale	16 (born abt. 1924) in Iowa
Basil Kvale	14 (born abt. 1926) in Minnesota

The 1930 Federal Census – Nunda Township, Freeborn County, Minnesota

Oliver Kvale	36
Esther Kvale	26
Sylven Kvale	7
Orvis Kvale	5
Basil Kvale	4

The 1940 and 1930 Federal Census point us toward the fact that Esther Kvale was born in Iowa; and, hence, we begin our search for her there. Family tradition also tells us that Esther's maiden name was "Large." This can be easily verified by marriage records preserved in Iowa which indicate that Oliver Kvale married Esther Berg on 11 June 1922 in Worth County, Iowa. Esther Berg identified her parents as: Syvert and Boletta (Bakkan) Berg in the marriage record. This seems to resolve the issue of Esther's identity – at least until a closer look at other available records reveals a challenge.

The 1940 Federal Census – Joice, Worth County, Iowa

Syvert Berg	58 (born abt. 1882) in Norway
Boletta Berg	61 (born abt. 1879) in Norway

The 1930 Federal Census – Joice, Worth County, Iowa

Syvert Berg	49 (born abt. 1881) in Norway
Boletta Berg	51 (born abt. 1879) in Norway (7 Sep 1878)

The 1925 Iowa State Census – Deer Creek, Worth County, Iowa

Syvert Berg	44
Boletta Berg	47

The 1920 Federal Census – Bristol, Worth County, Iowa

Sebert Berg	38 (born abt. 1882) in Norway
Vollette Berg	41 (born abt. 1880) in Norway
Ester Berg	16 (born abt. 1903) in Iowa – <u>adopted daughter</u>

The 1920 Federal Census reveals that Esther Berg was adopted by Syvert and Boletta Berg sometime prior to the census; and thus, the family tradition that reports that Esther's maiden name (in the truest sense) was "Large" provides information that leads toward an interesting discovery.

The 1910 Federal Census – Oelwein City, Jefferson Township, Fayette County, Iowa

William Larghe	38 (born abt. 1872) in France
Evelyn Larghe	29 (born abt. 1881) in Iowa
Lyle Larghe	10 (born abt. 1900) in Iowa
George Larghe	9 (born abt. 1901) in Iowa
<u>Esther Larghe</u>	7 (born abt. 1903) in Iowa
Violet Larghe	4 (born abt. 1906) in Iowa

The 1905 Iowa State Census – Fayette County, Iowa

Evelyn Larghe	24 (born abt. 1881) in Iowa – married
Lyle Larghe	born: 1900
George Larghe	born: 1901
<u>Esther Larghe</u>	born: 1903
	Father born in France
	Mother born in Iowa

Thus, available resources seem to indicate that Oliver Kvale married Esther (Larghe) Berg – adopted daughter of Syvert and Boletta (Bakken) Berg – and biological daughter of William and Evelyn Larghe. But this preliminary research only reveals the tip of the iceberg, and further research reveals even more fascinating insights.

The 1910 Federal Census – Lake Mills, Center Township, Winnebago County, Iowa

Syvert Berg	29 (born abt. 1881) in Norway
Mallita Berg	30 (born abt. 1880) in Norway

Research, thus, indicates that Syvert and Boletta Berg were living as a couple in 1910 – and Esther (Larghe) Berg joined their household (through adoption) sometime between 1910 and 1920. This can be explained when we discover the sad story of William Larghe's death from appendicitis on 19 October 1911 – which is recorded in Iowa county death records. The obituary of William Larghe indicated that he was living in Oelwein at the time of his death; and that William left a wife (Evelyn), two sons and four daughters behind (note that we only know the identity of the four children listed on the 1910 Federal Census). William's obituary provides another insight. William Larghe married Evelyn Vargason on 3 Dec 1898. The obituary, also, indicates that Evelyn's mother is still living, and that he was buried in the Woodlawn Cemetery. The death record, also, indicates that William Larghe was born on 3 Aug 1870. This information is critically important.

1900 Federal Census – Oelwein, Fayette County, Iowa

Frank Acord	38 (born abt. 1862) in Iowa
Julia Acord	37 (born abt. 1863) in France
Harry Thiele	11 (born abt. 1889) in Kansas – <u>stepson</u>

Marriage records from Oelwein, Fayette County, Iowa indicate that Evelyn Larghe (age 33) married Frank Acord (age 52) on 27 Aug 1913. The marriage record indicates that Evelyn's parents were Bert

and Alice (Crane) Vargason – and that Frank’s parents were Enock and Mary (Madison) Acord. Frank was married to his first wife, Julia, in 1897 (according to the 1900 Federal Census) and was living with a stepson named, Harry Thiele. However, Frank is listed as “divorced” in the 1905 Iowa Census and his marriage to Evelyn is listed as his 2nd marriage in the Iowa marriage records. The marriage between Frank Acord and Evelyn (Vargason) Larghe was, also, apparently short-lived. Frank Acord is listed in the 1920 Federal Census – living as a “boarder” in the home of Lydia Kauffman, and her brother, Jacob Sheller in Rockford, Winnebago, Illinois. Evelyn remained in Oelwein, Fayette County, Iowa – where she married Andrew Shipley. According to the 1920 Federal Census, Evelyn was reunited with her sons, Lyle and George, prior to 1920 and Andrew Shipley adopted them.

The 1920 Federal Census – Oelwein, Fayette County, Iowa

Andrew Shipley	53 (born abt. 1867) in Arkansas
Evelyn Shipley	38 (born abt. 1881) in Iowa
Lyle Large	20 (born abt. 1900) in Iowa – <u>stepson</u>
George Large	18 (born abt. 1902) in Iowa – <u>stepson</u>

One question remains unanswered: What happened to the siblings of Evelyn Larghe after their father tragically died on 19 October 1911? Fortunately, we are given several of the sibling’s names and we can explore their histories easily because two of Evelyn’s siblings were male (Lyle and George).

The 1925 Iowa State Census – Oelwein, Fayette County, Iowa

Lyle Larghe	26 (born abt. 1899)
Leta Larghe	22 (born abt. 1903)
Lyle B. Larghe	1 (born abt. 1924)
Leslie Larghe	0
Andrew Shipley	Stepfather
Evelyn Shipley	Mother

The 1920 Federal Census – Oelwine Ward, Fayette County, Iowa

Andrew Shipley	53 (born abt. 1867) in Arkansas
Evelyn Shipley	38 (born abt. 1882)
Lyle Large	20 (born abt. 1900) in Iowa
George Large	18 (born abt. 1902) in Iowa

The 1915 Iowa State Census – Fayette, Linn County, Iowa

Lyle Large	16 (born abt. 1899)
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The 1915 Iowa State Census – Hazelton, Buchanan County, Iowa

George Large	14 (born abt. 1901)
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The 1915 Iowa State Census – Joice, Worth County, Iowa

Esther Berg	11 (born abt. 1904)
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Very significantly, Lyle Larghe’s parents are listed on the marriage record that is stored in the archives of Fayette County, Iowa. Lyle lists his mother as Evelyn Vargason and Andrew Shipley as his adopted father. The recorder writes: “[Lyle] claims adoption by Shipley. No letter [of adoption].” Lyle seems to indicate that he and George were adopted by Andrew Shipley after he married their mother; however,

there is no verification of the adoption available. Esther, was being adopted by the Bergs at about this point in time.

The 1930 Federal Census – Jefferson, Fayette County, Iowa

Andrew Shipley	63 (born abt. 1867) in Arkansas
Evelyn Shipley	45 (born abt. 1886) in Iowa

The 1940 Federal Census – Oelwein, Jefferson, Fayette County, Iowa

Andrew Shipley	78 (born abt. 1862) in Arkansas
Evelyn Shipley	58 (born abt. 1882) in Iowa

Conclusion

Esther (Large) Berg, the wife of Oliver Kvale, was the adopted daughter of Syvert and Bolleta (Bakken) Berg and was the biological daughter of William and Evelyn (Vargason) Larghe. Esther and her siblings were divided between several families between the time of William's unexpected death on 19 Oct 1911 and Evelyn's marriage to Frank Acord on 27 Aug 1913. Evelyn's marriage to Frank Acord was not to last. Evelyn and Frank were not living together by the time of the 1920 Census (6 Jan 1920), and the census lists Evelyn as the wife of Andrew Shipley (married 1916). Both Lyle and George Larghe are living with their biological mother and their stepfather, Andrew Shipley, on 6 Jan 1920. Evelyn's son, Lyle, reaffirmed his adoptive relationship with Andrew Shipley when he married Lita Sheeley in Fayette County, Iowa on 1 July 1922 and provides information for the marriage records. The relationship between Andrew Shipley and Evelyn (Vargason) and George Larghe continued, and by the time of the 1925 Iowa State Census (Oelwein, Fayette County, Iowa), Lyle Larghe has established his own household and has welcomed Andrew L. Shipley (his stepfather) and Evelyn Shipley (his biological mother) to live in his home with his wife (Lita) and sons. By 1930, however, Andrew and Evelyn (Vargason) Shipley have established their own home. Evelyn Shipley died on 17 Sep 1941. The report of Andrew Shipley's death in Evelyn's obituary indicates that Andrew died between 7 May 1940 (when the 1940 Federal Census counted him) and 17 Sep 1941 when he is described as preceding Evelyn in death in her obituary.

Postscript

Final consideration of resources provides important details that add depth and complexity to the story of Esther (Larghe) Berg and her family. I have already indicated that William Larghe (Esther's biological father) died on 19 Oct 1911 in Oelwein, Fayette County, Iowa. The obituary of William Larghe indicates that he was injured at work (while employed as a laborer) about three weeks before his death and that he remained in poor health until finally succumbing to appendicitis. The obituary names Evelyn (Vargason) Larghe as his wife and indicates that William fathered six children: two sons and four daughters. The names of William and Evelyn's children are not provided in William's obituary – but further investigation reveals that the six children, who are mentioned in William's obituary, are clearly identified in the obituary that announced the death of Evelyn Shipley. Evelyn Shipley's obituary indicates that she died (at the age of 61) on 17 Sep 1941, and that she was preceded in death by her husband (Andrew Shipley) and by one of her daughters (Violet). Evelyn's remaining descendants are: Lyle Larghe (who is living in Denver, Colorado), George Larghe (who is living in Huron, South Dakota), Esther (no last name is mentioned – however, the obituary indicates that Esther is living in Kavyer, Minnesota which is most likely a typographical error. Kavyer, Minnesota

does not exist. The typist may have confused “Kavyer” with “Kvale.” The corrected obituary would name a daughter, Esther, Kvale, who lives in Minnesota.), and Vera and Viva (no last name provided) of Des Moines Iowa.

The 1910 Federal Census – Oelwein City, Jefferson Township, Fayette County, Iowa

William Larghe	38 (born abt. 1872) in France
Evelyn Larghe	29 (born abt. 1881) in Iowa
Lyle Larghe	10 (born abt. 1900) in Iowa
George Larghe	9 (born abt. 1901) in Iowa
<u>Esther Larghe</u>	7 (born abt. 1903) in Iowa
Violet Larghe	4 (born abt. 1906) in Iowa

Since the obituaries of William and Evelyn (Vargason) Larghe name six children, further research and investigation is required and leads to the following conclusions:

1. Vera and Viva are the children of William and Evelyn (Vargason) Larghe who are not named in the 1910 Federal Census. The failure to include Vera and Viva in the reported family unit cannot be explained. The “corrected” family unit would include:

William Larghe	born: abt. 1872 in France
Evelyn Larghe	born: abt. 1881 in Iowa
Lyle Larghe	born: 1899 in Iowa
Viva Larghe	born: 1900 in Iowa
George Larghe	born: 1901 in Iowa
Esther Larghe	born: 1903 in Iowa
Vera Larghe	born: 1904 in Iowa
Violet Larghe	born: 1906 in Iowa

2. Available records, also, provide the following dates of death:

William Larghe	19 Oct 1911	Oelwein, Fayette, Iowa
Evelyn Larghe	17 Sep 1941	Oelwein, Fayette, Iowa
Lyle Larghe	1983 (84)	Denver, Colorado
Viva Larghe	aft. 1941	Des Moines, Iowa
George Larghe	1980 (79)	Huron, South Dakota
Esther Larghe	14 Nov 1989	Albert Lea, Freeborn, Minnesota
Vera Larghe	aft. 1941	Des Moines, Iowa
Violet Larghe	1928 (22)	Chicago, Illinois

3. The story of Violet Larghe (Esther’s sister) is a tale filled with intrigue and complexity.

The 1910 Federal Census – Oelwein City, Jefferson Township, Fayette County, Iowa

William Larghe	38 (born abt. 1872) in France
Evelyn Larghe	29 (born abt. 1881) in Iowa
Lyle Larghe	10 (born abt. 1900) in Iowa
George Larghe	9 (born abt. 1901) in Iowa
<u>Esther Larghe</u>	7 (born abt. 1903) in Iowa

Violet Larghe 4 (born abt. 1906) in Iowa

The 1910 Federal Census – Oelwein, Jefferson Township, Fayette County, Iowa

John Human	40 (born abt. 1870) in Illinois
Nellie Human	32 (born abt. 1878) in Sweden
Sarah A. Human	12 (born abt. 1898) in Minnesota

The 1920 Federal Census – Chicago Ward 12, Cook, Illinois

George W. Hill	49 (born abt. 1871) in Canada
Adalia Hill	49 (born abt. 1871) in Illinois
Nellie Human	42 (born abt. 1878) in Sweden
Violet Human	13 (born abt. 1907) in Iowa

Available information indicates that John/Nellie Human and William/Evelyn Larghe were all living in Oelwein, Jefferson Township, Fayette County, Iowa on 25 Apr 1910 when the information for the 1910 Federal Census was gathered. Violet was adopted by John/Nellie Human sometime after the death of William Larghe on 19 Oct 1911. Violet was living with her new stepparents in Oelwein, Iowa when her stepfather, John Human, died on 26 Sep 1918 (at the age of 47). Violet's obituary indicates that she moved to Chicago in 1919 – where she appears, with her stepmother (Nellie) – in the household of George and Adalia Hill – when the 1920 Federal Census information was gathered on 5 Jan 1920.

Violet was graduated with honors after completing her work at Xaviers College in 1924 and she entered the Nurse's Training Hospital in Oak Park, Illinois in Sep 1924. She was able to complete her nurse's training in Nov 1927 even though she began to experience major health challenges. Violet struggled with times of illness throughout 1925 and she suffered a major breakdown in Dec 1926. Her obituary indicates that she underwent surgery in May 1927, and that she visited with her mother and friends in both Iowa and Minnesota in the Fall of 1927. Sadly, Violet was forced to return to the hospital once again in Nov 1927. Violet spent the last few months of her life in the Wisconsin Lake region – before being forced to return to the hospital for several additional emergency surgeries. Violet died in the hospital after struggling with appendicitis and pneumonia on 7 Dec 1928. Her last wish was that her body be returned to Oelwein, Iowa, so that she could be buried beside her father, William Larghe.

4. Evelyn (Vargason) Shipley lists four surviving brothers and five surviving sisters (in 1941):

Sam Vargason	Hazleton, Buchanan County, Iowa
Richard Vargason	Randalia, Fayette County, Iowa
Wright Vargason	Brookings, South Dakota
Bruce Vargason	Oelwein, Fayette County, Iowa
Myrtle Lahner	Fairbank, Fayette County, Iowa
Katherine Thompson	Washington, Washington County, Iowa
Clara Gerstenberger	Oelwein, Fayette County, Iowa
Zeta Pudil	Bachon, North Dakota
Mildred Mahoney	Randalia, Fayette County, Iowa