

The Norwegian-American Historical Association

Northfield, Minnesota

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NEWS LETTER

FROM THE SECRETARY'S OFFICE TO
THE ASSOCIATION MEMBERS

Edited by J. JÖRGEN THOMPSON, Secretary KENNETH BJÖRK, Co-editor

OUR TREASURER HAS A BIRTHDAY

Mr. Birger Osland, our Treasurer, has repeatedly told us that when he attained to the age of seventy years he would retire from active business. March 1 marked this milestone in his life, and on that day he severed his connection with the firm Birger Osland & Company, Investments, and celebrated the day at home with his genial wife.

In every business activity and enterprise—and there are many—in which Mr. Osland has been affiliated, he has been unusually successful. He organized the American financial participation in the Norwegian-America Steam Ship Line. For many years he was active as a director of this corporation. In 1911 he founded the Birger Osland & Company investment firm in Chicago and he has served continuously as president of this firm. As a member of the Board of Trustees of the Century of Progress Exposition, he rendered distinctive service.

During the World War Mr. Osland answered the call to the colors and served in the capacity of military attaché in the United States army with the rank of major. He was also a member of the American Food Administration for Northern Europe under the leadership of Mr. Herbert Hoover.

Benevolent, social and cultural activities have benefited in a large way from his interest and assistance. He has found time to direct the affairs of the Norwegian-American Hospital Foundation in the capacity of president for many years and is still active as its leader.

The Norwegian-American Historical Association is deeply indebted to Mr. Osland for his outstanding leadership. Ever since its organization he has given generously of his interest, his time and his means toward the advancement that has been achieved. With more time at his disposal we anticipate even a larger participation in the future in bringing the achievements of our Association to new and greater heights. No other man among us enjoys a wider acquaintance and a larger host of friends than does Mr. Osland.

We salute and congratulate our Treasurer, our Major, our Doctor of Laws, our Knight of the Order of St. Olaf! A happy birthday and many more of them!

OUR NEXT PUBLICATION

The eleventh volume in the Association's series of *Norwegian-American Studies and Records* will be published this spring. Dr. Blegen, our Managing Editor, reports that this volume is now in galley proof and that he hopes to have it ready for distribution by the end of March. This volume will contain ten contributions:

A Doll's House on the Prairie: The First Ibsen Controversy in America

By Arthur C. Paulson and Kenneth Björk

Scandinavian Students at Illinois State University
By Henry O. Evjen

Stephen O. Himoe, Civil War Physician
By E. Biddle Heg

A Pioneer Church Library
By H. F. Swansen

Norwegian Emigration to America During the
Nineteenth Century
By Ingrid Gaustad Semmingsen

Jorgen Gjerdrum's Letters from America, 1874-75
By Carlton C. Qualey

The Introduction of Domesticated Reindeer Into Alaska
By Arthur S. Peterson

The Unknown Rølvaag: Secretary of the Norwegian-
American Historical Association
By Kenneth Björk

The Sources of the Rølvaag Biography
By Nora O. Solum

Some Recent Publications Relating to Norwegian-
American History, VI
Compiled by Jacob Hodnefield

DR. BJÖRK AWARDED FELLOWSHIP

President Andersen has asked me to announce the appointment of Dr. Kenneth Björk of St. Olaf College as a research fellow of the Association for 1940-41.

Dr. Björk will devote the year to the preparation of a book on the history of the Norwegian technicians in America, particularly engineers and architects. He has already made a preliminary exploration of this field and will go on to an intensive study of it, gathering materials in various parts of the country. He proposes to make a broad-gauged analysis of Norwegian pioneering on the American technological frontier, dealing with an urban group who have made many contributions to the productive process. The study promises to be of importance not only as a chapter in Norwegian-American history but also for general American history along social, professional, and economic lines.

What Dr. Björk is tackling is essentially a pioneer piece of work, for the field has hitherto been neglected. When the study has been completed, it will be published in book form by the Association. Thus a plan that has been slowly maturing for a number of years and has been often considered by the editorial and executive boards of the Association is now moving toward realization.

The Association will deeply appreciate the co-operation of engineers, architects, and others who may be able to assist Dr. Björk in gathering the information that he needs in order to be able to tell the story of the technicians as adequately as possible.

THEODORE C. BLEGEN

ANDREW J. BERDAHL

On January 5 death claimed in Andrew J. Berdahl another Norwegian pioneer whose life story is intertwined with events of great importance in the history of the American Northwest.

Born December 10, 1848, in Sogn, Norway, Berdahl came with his parents to the United States in 1856. After living near Decorah in Winneshiek County, Iowa, for four years, the family settled in Fillmore County, Minnesota. In 1872 Andrew accompanied his father on a scouting expedition into Dakota Territory, the results of which led to experiences that have been immortalized in Rølvaag's *Giants in the Earth*.

In the late spring of 1873 a caravan of ten wagons set its course across the prairie to the fertile valley of the Sioux River. In the human cargo of 49 were fourteen members of the Berdahl family. Andrew, aged 24 and recently married, homesteaded in Minnehaha County, about fourteen miles northeast of the present city of Sioux Falls.

After several years of farming, Berdahl moved to Baltic, where he engaged in the mercantile business; later he entered the same business in Garretson; in 1896 he resumed the management of his farm. But it was in the field of public affairs that Berdahl's name will be remembered in South Dakota.

Besides holding a number of offices in local government agencies, Berdahl was chosen as a delegate to the constitutional convention of 1885. One of the leaders of the movement to divide Dakota Territory and to have the northern and southern areas enter the Union as full-fledged states, he is credited with writing the preamble to South Dakota's first constitution. This preamble was unchanged when the convention of 1889 completed the work of the first gathering. Present also at the second convention, Berdahl was the only surviving delegate when South Dakota celebrated its fiftieth anniversary last year. At the age of 90, he delivered an address on the founding of the state at a Sioux Falls school; during the entire address and a long period of questioning, he remained standing and drew upon a memory that was phenomenally clear and well informed.

Berdahl also helped organize a Farmers' Mutual Fire and Lightning Insurance Company and served as its first secretary in 1885. He was one of the leaders in organizing and secretary of the Minnehaha County Vigilance Society, which sought to insure the settlers against horse theft, and tracked down horse thieves, thus giving a measure of security to pioneer life. As county commissioner he served during the drouth year of 1894 when the county was forced to provide the farmers with seed. During the years 1915-35 he served as clerk in the county auditor's office in Sioux Falls.

In the educational field, too, Berdahl played an interesting if minor role. Educated in the public schools of the communities where his parents lived, he also had some advanced training at a private school in Chatfield, Minnesota. He later attended Augustana Academy and Theological Seminary at Marshall, Wisconsin. He taught school for several years in Minnesota and later for several terms in Dakota Territory. The first school in Edison Township was Berdahl's claim shanty. In 1901, when Augustana College was located at Canton, South Dakota, he was named secretary-treasurer of the school's building committee. A few years ago the Alumni Association of Au-

gustana College made him an honorary life member, partly in recognition of his work and in part because he was believed to be the only person still living who had been a student of the school when it was located at Marshall.

Berdahl was the father of twelve children, eight of whom are living. Among these are Dr. Clarence Berdahl, professor in the department of political science at the University of Illinois, and Mrs. O. E. Rølvaag.

Persons familiar with Berdahl's life will have little trouble identifying numerous incidents in *Giants in the Earth*. While writing this novel, Rølvaag drew heavily upon Berdahl's rich store of experience. A modified version of the caravan story, the grasshopper plague, the references to the Trönders, the Indian story, and other experiences of the immigrants are the literary result.

New Members Since December 1, 1939

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FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK

The sag in the membership roll caused by the depression is steadily being leveled out. Many who found it necessary to cancel their membership have again joined in the work. New names have been added to the list with the result that we are again at the 800 mark. This gain has in a large measure been due to the untiring efforts on the part of a few of our members. Why should not everyone connected with our Association join us in this task? There are many people who would join the N.A.H.A. if they were asked. During the past year your Secretary has received inquiries about our work, and when persons have been informed about our activities they have sent in their applications for membership. Only yesterday the following letter was received.

Dear Sirs:

I am interested in your Society—do not know just exactly what it is, but would like some information, please. What are the requirements for membership and what are your dues, etc., etc.?

Thanking you, I am,

Very truly yours,

A. M. T.

There are interested people who should become members. Will you kindly help us enlist these people? We should be able to increase our roll to the one thousand mark by April 1. At that time our next publication will be ready for distribution. Will you help us? Make March *the get-a-member-month!* You are hereby entrusted with the duty of securing at least *one new member*.