

The Norwegian-American Historical Association

Northfield, Minnesota

Number Twenty-Seven

March, 1951

News Letter

FROM THE SECRETARY'S OFFICE
TO THE ASSOCIATION MEMBERS

THE TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION AT ST. OLAF COLLEGE

The Sponsoring Committee in charge of planning and making preparations for the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary celebration of our Association had done an extraordinary job.

More than 250 friends and members of the Association were in attendance. Some came from distances such as New Haven, Connecticut; Brooklyn, New York; Washington, D. C.; Normanna, Texas; Salt Lake City, Utah; Huntington Park, California; Dearborn, Michigan.

Norway's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Halvard Lange, journeyed from Lake Success, New York, to be present. Vegard Sletten, Associate Editor, *Verdens Gang*, a daily publication in Oslo, Norway, came from Canada.

It is our purpose to acquaint the members of the Association with the addresses and talks made at various programs during the celebration. Some of the lengthy addresses will be published in *STUDIES AND RECORDS*, others will appear in issues of the News Letter.

In this issue we are publishing U. S. Senator Edward J. Thye's opening remarks at the luncheon session, President Olaf Halvorson's remarks of welcome at the afternoon session, and the statement read by our Treasurer, Dr. Birger Osland, at the same session, and the greeting given at the evening dinner program by the Honorable Halvard M. Lange, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Oslo, Norway.

SENATOR THYE EXTENDS WELCOME

Members of the Norwegian-American Historical Association, all of the friends of this Association and the honored and distinguished guests who are here this afternoon: We want to say to you that we are indeed very happy that so many are with us on this Twenty-Fifth Anniversary meeting of the Norwegian-American Historical Association.

I was not with you when you commenced this Association twenty-five years ago, but I have learned a great deal about its great achievements in the years that I have been privileged to serve in public office here in Minnesota, and also now in the nation's capital.

I want to say to those of you who are serving on the Sponsoring Committee that I know that Dean Jørgen Thompson and Herman Roe are very grateful to you for the assistance that you have rendered in making this meeting possible.

I should like also to just speak briefly on why it is necessary to have an anniversary observance in order that we might fully understand and appreciate the achievements of the Association during these past twenty-

five years. Also that we may inspire others to work to achieve in the future that which has been achieved by those who have so ably served during the past twenty-five years, in order that future generations may know what the Norwegian-American immigrant has contributed in the building of one of the greatest nations ever builded by man in all the history of the world.

Nowhere has the achievement of man been greater than in the United States of America, and it is the contributions of the people of all the nationalities of the world who have made possible what this nation is today.

All through the history of this nation, the Norwegian immigrant has made great contributions in building the communities and those communities grew into territories and then finally the territory became a State of the Union.

When we assemble here at this Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Norwegian-American Historical Association we have the opportunity of looking back and recording and noting the achievements of the Norwegian-Americans.

That record will, we hope, inspire the young people of the oncoming generations to do equally as well, and then future generations will know the blessings that those of us of this era have known because of the sweat and the work of the immigrant who bid goodbye to his native shore and came into the wilderness to blaze trails and make possible what we have in the United States.

I am indeed most happy that I have had a part—just a little part in this 25th anniversary observance. But the work has really been done by Dean Jørgen Thompson and by Herman Roe, secretary of the Sponsoring Committee.

GREETINGS: PRESIDENT HALVORSON

Members and friends of the Norwegian-American Historical Association: I bid you welcome to this memorable occasion where we are assembled from all parts of the United States to celebrate the twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Norwegian-American Historical Association.

This Association was formed by men and women of Norwegian origin imbued with the idea of collecting and saving the historical records of our people who came from Norway and settled throughout these United States during the last 150 years.

Communities formed by Norwegian immigrants have already made their influence felt in the various walks of life, such as science, literature and arts as well as in politics. We sincerely hope that our children and grandchildren will continue where we leave off and build on and on.

Our contemporaries have made themselves felt in

literature. I may mention Dr. Knut Gjerset who has written so many interesting volumes on our seafaring people.

Mr. O. E. Rølvaag, the first Norwegian-American novelist, by his novels has done so much to spread the Norwegian culture throughout the United States.

Pastor D. G. Ristad has written some interesting books that will be useful to our organization. Pastor Ristad was a very sympathetic man who wrote about our early settlers.

Our own Dr. Theodore Blegen, Professor of History and now Dean of the Graduate School at the University of Minnesota, has compiled and written many interesting volumes about our settlers in the various parts of the United States.

Dr. Kenneth Bjork, who wrote the masterful work, "Saga in Steel and Concrete," at present is working on the project embracing the Pacific Coast from the Mexican border to Alaska from which we shall receive interesting volumes.

Mr. Birger Osland has been the treasurer of the Norwegian-American Historical Association for twenty-five years, and the treasury has been replenished from time to time through his financial management and leadership. Some years ago he wrote his reminiscences and called it, "A Long Pull from Stavanger." It is a very interesting volume and reads like a novel.

During the past twenty-five years many of our members have passed away, members who no doubt could have added considerably to our known historical wealth. It is therefore fitting that we who are left do all we can to assemble as much material as possible of historic value for the benefit of future generations. I leave to others the review of our numerous accomplishments during our first quarter century.

At this time I should like to thank, on behalf of the Norwegian-American Historical Association, all who have worked so diligently and contributed so much time and effort to make our twenty-fifth Anniversary celebration such an enjoyable occasion.

It is my hope that the accomplishments of our Association during the next twenty-five years will equal or exceed those of the past twenty-five years.

TREASURER OSLAND REVIEWS THE ASSOCIATION'S FINANCES

My friends, Senator Thye, and Mr. Chairman: As you know, I am not a professor or a teacher. I have had the good fortune to work with these men now for the past twenty-five years and I can feel in myself a great improvement in my views and in my attitude. So I am very thankful to them for that. (Laughter)

My speech is a report on the financial history of the Norwegian-American Historical Association in the past quarter century, during which I have served as treasurer. It was Dr. Knut Gjerset who sent out invitations for a meeting of persons who he felt might be interested in forming an historical association. Fourteen persons responded to his invitation and came to the meeting, which was held at Decorah, Iowa on July 25, 1925.

The first financial move toward building up the Norwegian-American Historical Association was to collect a contribution of ten dollars from each participant in this meeting, and this yielded a fund of \$140.00. The sum was placed at the disposition of Dr. Gjerset to de-

fray his travel expenses in searching for more members. With the active aid of another strong enthusiast, Professor Rølvaag of St. Olaf College, he succeeded in enlisting more than a hundred members in a few weeks.

In the fall of the year of 1926, the executive committee and the Board of Editors held a meeting at the Norske Club in Chicago to consider ways and means to enable the editors to publish our very first book, "Volume One of Studies and Records." The problem was solved by contributions from some of the persons present and the cost of that first publication was \$888.50.

Since then the Association has now published thirty-two books, most of them at the cost of from one thousand to three thousand dollars each, with the exception of two, namely, Dr. Blegen's "Norwegian Migration" in two volumes, and Dr. Bjork's "Saga in Steel and Concrete" which have cost to produce, including years of research, about ten thousand dollars each.

During the last three years Dr. Bjork has spent one full year with furlough from St. Olaf College, and his entire summer vacation in two years more, doing traveling and research for material for his next great work on the Pacific Coast and Alaska. This preliminary work has cost the Association up to date, \$8,600.00.

The secretary, Jørgen Thompson, reports to me as of July 1, 1950, that he had on that date 1,036 members, of whom 45 had taken out life membership at \$100.00 each, with the exception of two persons who had paid a good deal more for their memberships. Adding to this the fees paid by former life members who have passed away, the total sum amounts to \$8850.00. This sum constitutes a permanent fund out of which only the interest can be used for expenses, and it is so ordained in the by-laws of the Association.

During the early years dues received from members averaged \$2500.00 per annum. During the depression in the thirties, annual dues reached a low of \$950.00 for the year 1935. Since then there has been a healthy growth and collections of annual dues now run around \$3500.00.

During the depression we tightened our belt by placing all income received from interest and all receipts from the sale of books in a special reserve fund. During that period when Dr. Blegen called for more money to defray the cost of another publication, it devolved upon the Board of Finance to rustle for funds from private sources, which never failed to meet the need.

In addition to the permanent fund of \$8,880.00, which I referred to, the Association owns a reserve fund which today amounts to \$18,000.00, a large part of which represents bequests and sums donated by individuals. With one exception, all of the monies held at the present time in both the permanent fund and the reserve fund are invested in U. S. Treasury two-and-one-half per cent bonds.

During these twenty-five years, every dollar of interest due has been collected on the securities held from time to time. In addition to this interest, we have made a profit of \$2900.00 on sales of first mortgage bonds which we had bought at a discount.

With the several books now in the finishing stages of publication, and with Dr. Bjork's book on the Pacific Coast and Alaska in the offing, it is my estimation that our reserve fund, which now seems pretty ample, is

fully engaged in order to produce these when the time comes.

The total funds received by the treasury during the entire period from all sources amount to very nearly \$120,000.00. Approximately ninety-one per cent of this sum has been expended for the making and distribution of our publications and for research work in connection therewith.

No author of any book published by this Association has received a cent in remuneration for his work which, in several cases, has meant years of preparation and research. These able, learned and recognized historians, headed by Dr. Blegen, have made an enduring contribution to the Association. However, entire overhead expenses have consisted of partial wages to an assistant in the Secretary's office, travel expenses for the executive committee to meetings in various states, commissions to solicitors for new members, et cetera, and all of these overhead expenses have never exceeded over four hundred dollars per annum.

It is stated in our by-laws that the Association shall help to maintain and develop the Norwegian-American museum at Decorah, Iowa. The Association has in its possession at this unique and interesting museum a valuable collection of replicas of Norwegian antique furniture which was presented to us some years ago by the famous Sandvigske Samlinger in Lillehammer, Norway.

Our by-laws also stipulate that our Association shall help to maintain and develop Norwegian-American archives, and we have deposited considerable material at St. Olaf College and small collections at Luther College.

There has from time to time been appropriated to the archives at St. Olaf sums aggregating two thousand dollars.

In a modest measure we may feel satisfied with our financial history and with our present status due to the splendid support we have enjoyed on the part of our membership, whose dues, gifts and legacies have meant so much. However, it is other factors which have brought our organization the widespread recognition which it presently enjoys among professional historians and the public generally, both in the United States and in foreign lands.

Most important has been the solid and discerning work of the editorial board, at the head of which has served all these years Dr. Theodore C. Blegen, a distinguished historian and an accomplished writer whose kindly but critical eye has scanned every line of the manuscript received for publication.

The Association also owes a great debt to the faculty and administration at St. Olaf College, where our indefatigable secretary, Professor J. Jørgen Thompson, has handled faithfully and well the considerable work of collecting dues, attending to gathering funds and other matters, and he received the same salary as the editorial board, namely, none whatsoever.

The Association owes a debt to the late president of St. Olaf College, Dr. L. W. Boe, for inviting us to make our headquarters at this renowned college. His successor, Dr. C. M. Granskou, has extended us the same understanding courtesy, and we thank him.

The Association has been very fortunate in its leadership. Our presidents, D. G. Ristad, Magnus Swenson, Arthur Andersen, and presently Olaf Hal-

vorson, have been men of deep understanding and lively interest in the work. They have also been able and willing, by substantial contributions, to further our work.

That, ladies and gentlemen, was the report, but my boss, Jørgen Thompson, has suggested that I might bring before you something in regard to finances. I am not asking for a penny; not one single penny! I want to call to your attention that in the original by-laws it was stipulated that the associate members first pay two dollars, and they now pay three dollars a year, and were to receive only copies of the Studies and Records. We have never followed that rule at all.

Every book has gone to every member of the society, with perhaps one exception. I have figured out that our good members have received, with the exception possibly of two years, enough books, if they went to a book store, to cover their dues. One year they got nine dollars worth; this year they will be getting seven dollars worth.

Well, that is not business, but that isn't the main thing. The point is this, as has been stated by our President, Olaf Halvorson. Someone has to support it. Now, one gets tired of looking around the corner for a rich man every day. This is not democratic at all, and we have an organization here that should be able to stand on its own legs.

New demands are coming up. I hear they are talking more and more about the archives; that will take money. Well, we have got to get that money some place. I am going to ask now for an advisory vote from you right here, an advisory vote, to be put in the record, whether we should not increase the annual dues from three to five dollars. I think that if you think that over, what we are giving, what we propose to do and what we need, I can't see that there can be very much objection to it.

Now, I am going to ask—this is an advisory vote— all those in favor of recommending to the board of directors that we raise the associate dues from three to five dollars a year, to please say "Aye" loudly.

The majority of the members voted affirmatively and there were no negative votes.

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[Editor's Note—The Executive Board will meet in Chicago on Saturday, April 7th. At that time consideration will be given to Mr. Osland's proposal to increase the annual associate membership fee. Such a step will necessitate a change in the constitution of the Association. The Board will therefore have to draft a resolution to be presented for final action to the NINTH regular triennial meeting of the Norwegian-American Historical Association which will be held in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Saturday, May 5, 1951.]

Since January 1, 1950, ninety new members have been added to the roster of the Norwegian-American Historical Association. Of these three are Life; six are Sustaining; 81 are Associate; three have changed from Associate or Sustaining to Life membership and one from Associate to Sustaining.

We plan to publish a complete list of these members in the next issue of the NEWS LETTER.

A GREETING FROM HALVARD LANGE

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Oslo, Norway

At the program following the evening banquet, Herman Roe, secretary of the 25th Anniversary Sponsoring Committee, was the master of ceremonies and introduced the speakers who brought greetings.

MR. ROE: On behalf of Senator Thye and his colleagues of the Sponsoring Committee for this Twenty-Fifth Observance, on behalf of the officers, members of the Executive Board, all the committee members, and members of the Norwegian-American Historical Association, I want to express to our distinguished guests, the Foreign Minister from Norway, Halvard Lange, and his wife, Fru Lange, that we are delighted that it was possible for them to visit Minnesota, Northfield and St. Olaf College on this particular day. I understand that this is the minister's first visit to Minnesota, and it certainly is our good fortune that he could arrange his busy schedule so that he could make that first visit on the day we are having our twenty-fifth anniversary celebration. Before calling on the Minister, I would like to ask Fru Lange to please stand and take a bow. (Applause.)

Minister Lange, it is with real pleasure that I present to you this group of cultured leaders, educators, historians, newspapermen, business and professional men who are here and who represent a cross section of America and of the membership of the Norwegian-American Historical Association. It is a real privilege to hear from you at this time.

MINISTER LANGE: Mr. Chairman and friends. It is a very great privilege indeed to be present here on this occasion, and that this first, and I sincerely hope not last, visit to Minnesota should give my wife and myself the opportunity of meeting such a representative group of leaders of cultural life among Americans of Norwegian descent.

We, back home in Norway, appreciate immensely the keen interest that all of you over and over again show in the old country. We appreciate the help you have sent and are sending to friends and relatives back in Norway, the help which during these strenuous years of reconstruction have meant very much indeed to Norwegian families. And it is a pleasure to be able, here at this twenty-fifth anniversary of the Norwegian-American Historical Association, to extend to you all the congratulations and good wishes of the Norwegian Government.

In Norway we warmly appreciate the back-breaking work performed by your Association during the last quarter of a century in charting many phases of the life and accomplishments in America of men and women of Norwegian birth or ancestry.

In all frankness I must say that it took a long time, too long a time, before we in Norway fully understood and appreciated what a tremendous factor in the history of the Norwegian race was the immigration to the United States from 1825 on.

For a long time it was for most of us something distant, something of a fear daily nourished by the sometimes enthusiastic and even fantastic descriptions of the New World contained in the letters from the immigrants.

I don't mean to say that we were indifferent to this new Norway across the sea and the life of our countrymen there. On the contrary; but what we learned about

the conditions under which they lived was somewhat casual and fragmentary. What we heard were stories rather than history.

Then soon after the turn of the century when prominent Norwegians such as Fritjof Nansen, Roald Amundsen, Bishop Bang, and others, visited Norwegian settlements in America and gave us firsthand and more comprehensive information than we had before, this and the strong expressions of good will and solidarity which reached us during the political crisis in 1905 led to the formation in 1907 of Nordmanns Forbundet.

We all know that this organization, to a large extent, has been responsible for the vastly increased understanding in Norway of our countrymen beyond the seas, but the systematic research into the original development and contribution of Norwegian-Americans began only twenty-five years ago.

It would seem that the Centennial of organized Norwegian immigration to the United States in 1925 could not have been commemorated in a more appropriate way than by founding the Norwegian-American Historical Association. Since then a truly magnificent work has been performed by the Association and its untiring, devoted leaders.

The list of your publications through these twenty-five years is impressive indeed. The sixteen volumes of Norwegian-American STUDIES AND RECORDS, and about fifteen other important volumes are a genuine treasure house of historical material bearing on the history of the Norwegian contributions to the making of America.

The high standard of these publications has been fully recognized by scholars, not only in this country, but I can assure you also in Norway. And having dabbled in history myself some, way back in my career, I would like to add my personal tribute to the high standard you have maintained. This is not only American history, but also vital fragments of history of sons and daughters of Norway outside the homeland.

We share with you the admiration of those pioneers who broke the prairie and founded that remarkable thing which, for lack of a better name, we have called the Norske-America, characterized at the same time by its undivided loyalty to America and its warm feelings for the old country.

We are indeed grateful to you of the Norwegian-American Historical Association for having dug so diligently into the rich material while there was still time, and for having recorded for us and for posterity such important phases of the saga of Nowegians in America. We want to thank you and wish you all possible success in your continued work. (Applause.)

Tri-ennial Meeting

According to the articles of incorporation of our Association the Ninth regular Tri-ennial Meeting of the Norwegian-American Historical Association will be held in Minneapolis, Saturday, May 5th at two o'clock in the afternoon. Details about place of meeting, program and proxies for those members who will find it impossible to be present will be mailed to the members immediately following the Executive Board meeting in Chicago April 7th. You will also be informed about whatever important recommendations the Board may decide to present to the general membership meeting.