

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

NORWEGIANS IN THE GOLDEN WEST

Address delivered by Dr. Kenneth Bjørk at the dinner session of the Eighth Triennial Meeting of the Association.

When I was asked to speak at this gathering, I naturally interpreted the invitation as being in some manner linked with the publication of *Saga in Steel and Concrete*. I was pleased to be thus asked, but also hoped that you would not expect from me more than a few remarks about the *Saga*. The reasons are several. The effort of completing and putting the book through the press—though made endurable by the assistance of Helen Katz—drained away for some time to come any interest in the volume beyond its general physical appearance, notably the fine jacket designed by Jane McCarthy. Furthermore, it deals with a subject that lies outside the limbo of common experience for most of us. And, finally, for better or for worse, it represents a completed task. The *Saga* is another volume in the shelf of publications about which the late Prof. Gjerset dreamed and often spoke. And there, in your bookcases, I should prefer to let it rest.

What then? The new project, of course. Ours is a forward-looking organization and it is already making possible the study of the Norwegians in the Golden West—or, to be more precise, on the West Coast from Mexico to and including Alaska. During the current year I have been working with materials preserved here in the Middle West and in the archives on the Pacific. A research fellowship from the Association makes this work possible.

The Norwegians, as you all know, were well represented in the Gold Rush to California after 1848. Many of these argonauts remained in California, taking employment in various trades and professions, and their numbers were reinforced from time to time by new arrivals from Europe. In San Francisco, where most of them lived, they joined with the Danes and Swedes in 1859 to form a successful and influential Scandinavian Society, which assumed a protective attitude to the vigorous Scandinavian colony. Later, they again joined in a Scandinavian congregation linked with the Norwegian Synod. Thanks to these organizations and their leaders, it is possible today to picture the lives of the Norwegians in California between the time of the gold rush and the recent heavy migration to the coast.

From California it was an easy sea voyage to Portland, Oregon, and there at a fairly early date a small Norwegian group began to assert itself in the life of that important commercial center.

Less publicized than the gold-seekers, except in a violently negative manner, were the Norwegian (or Scandinavian) Mormons, who walked behind pushcarts or rode in immigrant trains across the plains and mountains to

the Great Salt Lake Basin of Utah. After the first trek of the Latter-Day Saints, new recruits came largely from Europe, the overwhelming majority from the British Isles and the Scandinavian countries. The Scandinavian Mission was begun in Copenhagen in 1850; soon thereafter Mormon missionaries were active in Sweden and southern Norway. In the years that followed, shipload after shipload of mixed British and Scandinavian Saints became a familiar sight in Liverpool and New York. These people hurried on to Utah and there eagerly threw themselves into a great religious, economic, and social experiment that had as its goal nothing less than the creation of Zion. Today in town after town in Utah one sees few but Scandinavian names. Their story would be significant enough if it ended in the valleys and canyons of the Wasatch Mountains, but it did not. The Mormons spread into Idaho, California and elsewhere, and among them, of course, were the Scandinavians. They also served as a kind of half-way house in the overland journey to the coast. Emigrants may have feared them but in the days before the Union Pacific they were glad to pause in the Promised Land for food and other provisions.

The gold-seekers and Mormons began the Norwegian movement to the West Coast, but so far as the Upper Midwest was concerned, both, in a sense, had to be "rediscovered" after 1870. In the years that followed, the Norwegian newspapers of the Midwest contained an ever-increasing number of stories about California, Oregon, and Washington Territory—and little by little an almost complete ignorance about these places gave way, first, to curiosity, next, to a small migration, and, finally, in the 1890's, to a relatively heavy movement of population, especially to the areas of the Puget Sound, the Columbia River Valley, and eastern Washington and Idaho.

The student who thoughtfully examines the records of this migration to the West Coast quickly senses numerous parallels with the larger story of Norwegian migration to America. The filling up of the arable land in the Upper Midwest and the increase of population there resembles the situation in Norway that Dr. Blegen and Mrs. Semmingsen have described. The Mormons correspond to the Quakers and other dissenters of 1825. The gold-seekers are like the first shiploads from Europe. The vast stretches of plain and mountain and desert are, if anything, a more hazardous barrier than the Atlantic. The railroad is the equivalent of the steamship. There are the same strong leaders and the same disputes over the wisdom of migrating. More important still is the new tearing up of roots, the starting of a new life, and with these the speeding up, in the second migration, of the process of assimilation. The journey from, say, southern Minne-

sota to the Puget Sound, even after the coming of the railroads, was for a long time almost as momentous a step as that from Europe to America. The "America letters" find their counterpart in the letters from the West Coast, and while, thus far, I have found no Cleng Peerson, there are other pathfinders who hunted out the desirable places for settlement and left records of their travels.

If for a moment we close our eyes to the continuous stream of emigrants from Europe, We find ourselves dealing with a significant population migration within the United States. I refer, of course, to the movement of peoples to the Far West from the tier of states now known as the Upper Midwest. This began even while the more gradual shift to the Red River Valley, the Dakotas, and eastern Montana was in full swing, and it cannot be fully explained unless agrarian discontent, depressions, a severe climate, and grasshopper plagues are given the consideration that they deserve. To persons already unhappy in their Iowa or Dakota homes, the appeal of the West Coast, especially of the Pacific Northwest, was almost irresistible. The pamphlets, circulars, and newspaper advertisements of the Northern Pacific and of other railroads and the activities of their far-flung agents built up in the minds of the Scandinavian immigrant a picture of the "New Wonderland" as a paradise of fertility and miraculous climate.

The Norwegian who had lived for a decade or more in the Midwest was fast becoming adjusted to New-World life and was cooperating in the development of a peculiar Norwegian-American pattern of thought and activity. When he left on the second migration—to the west coast—he had to unlearn much that he had learned of American life, and he inevitably shed more of his Norwegian heritage as he crossed the Rockies to a new frontier. He had to learn, for example, that in the Sound area ten acres of land, once cleared, would do what 160 acres or more would do in Minnesota; that soil which at first glance resembled the poorest soil of Wisconsin was in fact wonderfully productive. He had to cease thinking in terms of an exclusively wheat or corn culture and learn to see the possibilities inherent in fruits, hops, berries, dairying, lumbering, and fishing. In fact, he often found himself engaged in much the same diversity of activity that he had known at home in Norway—in a natural setting suggestive of the valley he had loved in the homeland.

In the spiritual realm, too, the Norwegians underwent a marked change. Pioneer life left little time for books. The religious controversies of the Midwest, too, seemed to them at first somehow very remote and unreal. In politics they very frequently joined with the Populists and in other ways showed a perhaps greater independence of spirit than they had in the East. They were again, as they had been earlier in the Midwest, potential recruits to Baptist, Methodist, and other churches, which were zealous in organizing Scandinavian congregations. Because of the scattered nature of settlement, many were at once assimilated into the general population. Only after many years did the eastern pattern of Norwegian-American spiritual life reproduce itself on the coast, and then only in greatly altered form.

As might be expected, the Norwegians on the West Coast soon after their arrival again took to the life of the sea. It is no accident that the coastal fleet plying be-

tween San Francisco and the red wood forests of northern California and Puget Sound was known in the nineteenth century as the "Scandinavian Navy." Norwegians also captained and manned many of the steamboats on the rivers and the ferries of San Francisco Bay and Puget Sound. They fished the salmon of the rivers and the Sound and pioneered in the fisheries of British Columbia and Alaska. Today, in some branches of this industry they constitute an unquestioned majority.

In other respects, too, they left a strong imprint. I refer to lumbering, ship building, mining, and engineering. Norwegians pioneered in the Alaskan reindeer and fish canning industries, and many other fields. They were active in politics, in fraternal organizations, in choral singing, and in education. The spunky efforts to launch Pacific Lutheran University after 1889—to mention only one project—is as interesting and revealing a study in pioneer educational work as one could hope to discover.

It would be possible to talk for hours about the fascinating subject of the Norwegians in the Golden West. But time does not permit; nor is it desirable to generalize further from an incomplete study. What has been said, however, may suggest to you, as the records have revealed to me, a story of epic proportions that in a quite different way is as original as the *Saga in Steel and Concrete*; certainly it is one with a universal interest and a very real significance in understanding the westward movement of people within the United States.

MEMBERSHIP MEETING

The Eighth Triennial Meeting of the Norwegian-American Historical Association was held at the Curtis Hotel, Minneapolis, Minnesota, May 4, 1948. More than seventy members were present. The report of the Credentials Committee shows that 199 proxies had been sent in.

The President, Mr. Olaf Halvorson, appointed the following to serve on the Nominating Committee: Dr. Carlton C. Qualey, Northfield, Minn., Dr. J. C. K. Preus, Minneapolis, Minn., Mr. Andrew Stenseth, Albert Lea, Minn.

The officers and members of Boards elected for the current triennium are

EXECUTIVE BOARD

President—Olaf Halvorson, Huntington Park, California
 Vice President—Lionel G. Thorsness, Chicago, Illinois
 Vice President—Soren Roinestad, Oakland, California
 Secretary—J. Jørgen Thompson, Northfield, Minnesota
 Treasurer—Birger Osland, Chicago, Illinois
 S. J. Arnesen, Brooklyn, New York
 Frederic Schaefer, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
 A. N. Rygg, Brooklyn, New York
 David T. Nelson, Decorah, Iowa

BOARD OF FINANCE

Egil E. Krogh, Winnetka, Illinois
 Thorsten Y. Olsen, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

BOARD OF EDITORS

Theodore C. Blegen, St. Paul, Minnesota,
 Managing Editor
 Kenneth Bjork, Northfield, Minnesota
 Einar Haugen, Madison, Wisconsin

Carlton C. Qualey, Northfield, Minnesota
Clarence C. Clausen, Minneapolis, Minnesota

BOARD OF ARCHIVES

Jacob Hodnefeld, St. Paul, Minnesota, Chairman
Agnes Larson, Northfield, Minnesota
Karen Larsen, Northfield, Minnesota
O. M. Norlie, Northfield, Minnesota
John Frohlin, Bayonne, New Jersey

LOCAL VICE PRESIDENTS

C. Martin Alsager, Chicago, Illinois
Helmer Blegen, Sioux Falls, South Dakota
Magnus Bjørndal, Weehawken, New Jersey
J. N. Brown, Moorhead, Minnesota
G. M. Bruce, St. Paul, Minnesota
Mrs. Kristine Haugen, Seattle, Washington
O. I. Hertsgaard, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Frida Bue-Homnes, Crosby, North Dakota
Carl E. Abrahamson, Chicago, Illinois
Peter Myrvold, San Francisco, California
Carl Søyland, Brooklyn, New York
Arne E. Williamson, Chicago, Illinois
Mrs. Inga Norstog, Decorah, Iowa

The Committee on Nominations called attention to the fact that Mr. Birger Osland had requested that he be relieved of his duties as Treasurer of the Association. His resignation had been discussed by the Executive Board in executive meeting held at 10:00 o'clock, when the Board adopted the following resolution:

"With full understanding of the situation, the Board nevertheless declines to accept Mr. Osland's resignation and voices the hope that he will continue to hold the office, with the privilege of authorizing, at his discretion, the appointment of an assistant treasurer to aid him in the duties of the office."

This resolution was presented to the Triennial Meeting before a vote was taken on the slate presented by the Nominating Committee and was unanimously adopted.

CHANGES IN ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION

Upon recommendation by the Board two changes in the Articles of Incorporation were unanimously adopted:

1. Associate membership dues will be changed from *Two Dollars to Three Dollars* per year, beginning January 1, 1949.

2. In place of the first Tuesday in January as the date for the Triennial meetings, as designated in the original Articles of Incorporation, the second Saturday of May was decided upon.

OUR FINANCES

By Birger Osland, Treasurer

REPORT for 1947

Balance from last year	\$ 2,820.39
Receipts:	
Associate and sustaining membership dues.....	\$ 1,903.57
Book sales	385.57
Duplicates sold, for the Archives	8.00
Interest on investments	774.26
Profits on bonds sold	31.57
Contributions:	
Rev. O. Glesne, Northfield, Minn.....	\$50.00
Churchill Cabinet Co., Chicago.....	50.00
Ole Gulickson, Chicago.....	50.00
E. K. Wennerlund, San Francisco..	10.00
	160.00
	<hr/> \$ 6,083.36
Cost of \$10,000 U.S. Treasury 2½s sold.....	\$10,134.06
	<hr/> \$16,217.42

Disbursements:

Publications (postage, freight, express inc.)..	\$ 8,111.92
Research	2,782.60
News Letter	87.50
Archives	1,005.19
Books purchased, Ole Rynning Fund.....	23.49
Assistant to the Secretary.....	600.00
Stationery and office supplies.....	71.81
Postage	60.00
General expense	
(bank's safekeeping fee \$25.56).....	40.86
Traveling expenses	88.03
Exchange on checks	27.30
Telephone and telegraph	8.45

Total expenses for year.....\$12,907.15

Balance in bank.....\$ 3,310.27

ENDOWMENT FUND

Investments

Par Value

\$ 8,000 Laclede as Light Co. 3 ½s 2-1-65
7,000 U.S. Savings Bonds, Series G 1-1-56 and 6-1-58
4,000 U.S. Treasury 2 ½s 12-15-72
100 U.S. Savings Bond, Series F 11--1-56

\$19,100 par value, at a total cost of \$19,367.72 with an annual interest income of \$555.00 or 2.87% on the invested amount.

SUMMARY

of total income and expenditures of The Norwegian-American Historical Association, covering entire period since its organization in November 1925 to May 15, 1948, a period of 22 years and 4½ months.

INCOME

Membership dues	\$ 41,029.38
Donations:	
Life memberships	\$ 7,850.00
Cash contributions	22,692.91
Bequests	7,338.27
Ole Rynning Fund	185.51
	\$ 38,066.69
Earnings	
Book Sales	\$ 8,528.67
Interest on investments	15,814.98
Net gain on sales of investments	2,910.55
Income not specified.....	5.18
	\$ 27,259.38
TOTAL INCOME	\$106,355.45

EXPENDITURES

Publications (29)	\$52,654.62
Research work	14,780.06
Travel expenses (solicitors and officers)	3,412.09
Secretary's office (postage, supplies, etc.)	12,977.68
Archives	1,262.65
Ole Rynning Fund	56.04
	\$ 85,143.14
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 85,143.14
EXCESS OF INCOME OVER EXPENDITURES	\$ 21,212.31
Represented by cash and securities at cost now on hand	\$ 21,212.31

A BEQUEST

October 8, 1947, death came to Atty. B. L. Wick, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Mr. Wick became a member during the early days of the Association. He served faithfully as a local Vice President since 1928. After his passing it was disclosed that he had willed \$4,000.00 to the Norwegian-American Historical Association. According to a standing rule, this amount will become a part of our permanent fund, The Ole Edvard Rølvaag Memorial Fund, as soon as the legacy is received from the court of probate.

A MEMORIAL GIFT

From Mrs. Martin B. Ruud, Minneapolis, Minnesota, the Association has received a gift of \$500.00 in memory of her husband, Professor Martin B. Ruud, who died February 8, 1941. In her letter to Dr. Theodore C. Blegen, Mrs. Ruud explains that the Association, in its aims, is entirely in sympathy with the interests of Dr. Ruud, and she therefore wishes to make this gift in his memory.

In forwarding the check to our Treasurer, Dr. Blegen makes the following statement about Dr. Ruud which we shall quote in full. "He was a scholar of catholic interests, a much respected and loved teacher in the University of Minnesota, a writer of singular distinction, one of the most gifted Norwegian Americans that I have ever known. You will recall that Martin B. Ruud and I col-

laborated in the volume entitled *Norwegian Emigrant Songs and Ballads* and that he contributed to our series of *Studies and Records*. He was a member of our Association and was deeply interested in our work. He was a professor of English who was particularly versed in medieval lore, and he had a peerless knowledge of Norway from early times to the present."

The Executive Board will at its next meeting, in consultation with Dr. Blegen, decide upon the manner in which this gift will be dedicated to the memory of Dr. Martin B. Ruud.

SMALLER GIFTS

For several years Mr. Ole Gullicksen, Founder and President of the Churchill Cabinet Company in Chicago, has sent the Association a Christmas gift of Fifty Dollars as his personal gift, and Fifty Dollars as a gift from the Churchill Cabinet Company. We will not be receiving these checks any more, since Mr. Gullicksen passed away on May 28, 1948. It is our hope that some other members of the Association may find it possible to send in some gifts before the fiscal year closes. The Secretary's office has the assurance of the Treasury Department that gifts to the Norwegian-American Historical Association may be deducted when the annual Federal Income Tax report is made out.

Last Christmas we also received a gift of Fifty Dollars for the publication fund. This came from the Rev. O. Glesne, Northfield, Minnesota. We should like to suggest to Reverend Glesne that he place the Association on his list for Christmas gifts for this year also.

From other members of the Association we have during the current year received gifts ranging from One Dollar to Twenty-Five Dollars. These gifts total \$310.00.

Our Editorial Board reports that they have several manuscripts ready for publication as soon as the necessary funds are available. What can you do to help?

MUSEUM

The Board of Trustees of Luther College made an excellent choice in the appointment of Mrs. Inga Norstog as Curator of the Norwegian-American Historical Museum in Decorah, Iowa. During the short time since Mrs. Norstog took over the responsibility of Curator she has effected outstanding results. Make arrangements to visit the Museum next time you come in the vicinity of Decorah.

"A HISTORY OF NORWAY"

Dr. Karen Larsen, Professor of History at St. Olaf College, has written a History of Norway. This history is being published by the Princeton University Press under the auspices of the American-Scandinavian Foundation. The book is to be ready for distribution the latter part of October. This is the second large work from the pen of Dr. Larsen. In 1936 Dr. Larsen wrote *Laur. Larsen, Pioneer College President*, which is one of the publications of our Association.

TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

On October 6, 1950, the Norwegian-American Historical Association will be twenty-five years old. The matter of an appropriate observance of the day was briefly discussed at the last meeting of the Executive Board. Preliminary plans will undoubtedly be drawn up at the next meeting of the Board.