

The Norwegian-American Historical Association

Northfield, Minnesota

Number Ten

February, 1939

NEWS LETTER

FROM THE SECRETARY'S OFFICE TO
THE ASSOCIATION MEMBERS

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

WHY I AM INTERESTED IN THE WORK OF THE ASSOCIATION

(Highlights of Address Given before Fifth Triennial Meeting)

By ARTHUR ANDERSEN, President

1. I am of Norwegian blood and my pride of race compels me to recognize the fact that our Association is the only agency in this country whereby the true facts regarding the history of our people in the U. S. can be brought to light and be presented with authoritative voice and scholastic prestige.
2. I am an American; and as such am interested to see that American history is written honestly and that it reflects truly the part played in its settlement and development by various racial groups, particularly the Norwegian. Research work done by our members, both as individuals and for their group, has been of great importance in writing American history honestly so far as the Norwegian part of it is concerned.
3. Norwegian culture, tradition and philosophy represent a heritage which all of us here (possibly unconsciously) draw upon and live by. I, for one, am not willing to see it die out or melt away with the growth of coming generations without contributing some effort to preserve it; or at least have a part in making a record of it. Again I find the N.A.H.A. the vehicle for the preservation of this heritage.
4. If we of this generation do not make every effort to obtain and preserve records of the part the Norwegians played in the development of our country, there will be no authoritative data available for our sons and daughters and their sons and daughters. Even now there are very few people living who can give us first hand information regarding the pioneer days. In a few years it will be too late. We must therefore strike while the iron is hot or our cause is lost.
5. Our organization and the marvelous work that it has done is to me manifestation of one of our strongest racial traits—the ability to organize and work together for mutual interest. It is said of our group that it is the outstanding example of organized effort of any racial group in the country to preserve records of its people. Our pride will not allow us to lose this reputation.

FIFTH TRIENNIAL MEETING

Generating a contagious spirit of optimism and enthusiasm, a large number of members gathered at the Leamington Hotel, Minneapolis, on Tuesday, January 3, for the fifth triennial meeting of the Norwegian-American Historical Association. In retrospect the meeting looms large as a chapter in the history of the Association.

While the most significant features of the gathering con-

sist of intangibles, several important decisions were arrived at that deserve mention here. These include constitutional changes and the election of officers.

CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

Accepting the recommendations of a constitutional committee appointed by President Arthur Andersen, the members in business session agreed to the following amendments to the Certificate of Incorporation and the By-Laws of the Association:

1. *Certificate of Incorporation.*

- a) Article VI was changed to permit the election of five (instead of three) members to the Executive Board in addition to the President, Vice-president, Secretary, and Treasurer.

2. *By-Laws.*

- a) Article II. Memorial membership fees were added to the life membership fees, which are set aside as a permanent fund.
- b) Article VI, section 4 was amended to relieve the secretary of responsibility for the archives.
- c) Article VI, section 6. The president and treasurer were empowered to invest the funds of the Association.
- d) Article VIII was amended to include the provision that the regional vice presidents should annually report on their activities and make recommendations for the work of the Association.
- e) Article IX, dealing with regional organizations, was struck out.
- f) Article X was changed in order to introduce all proposed amendments through the Executive Board.
- g) An article was inserted to place the archives of the Association under the immediate care of a curator, who is to be assisted by a board of archives.

These constitutional changes were made primarily with an eye toward greater efficiency and conformity to practice.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

At the same business session Dr. Arthur Andersen, of Chicago, was re-elected President of the Association, Dean J. Jørgen Thompson, of St. Olaf College, was re-elected Secretary and given the additional function of serving as financial secretary; and Dr. Birger Osland, of Chicago, was re-elected Treasurer of the organization. Dr. L. W. Boe, president of St. Olaf College, was elected Vice-president to succeed the late Reverend D. G. Ristad.

At a special meeting of the Executive Board, all regional vice-presidents were re-elected. Dr. Theodore C. Blegen was re-elected Managing Editor; and Dr. Martin Ruud, professor of English at the University of Minnesota, and Dr. Kenneth Björk, assistant professor of history at St. Olaf College, were added to the Board of Editors. Dr. Karen Larsen, Dr. Agnes Larson, both of the department of history at St. Olaf College, and Mr. Jacob Hodnefield, director of the historical records survey in Minnesota, were chosen to constitute a board of archives to assist the curator in building up the historical collection in Northfield.

REPORTS

Some very significant observations were made in the reports of the officers at the general business session. In his introductory remarks President Andersen spoke of the need of interesting the younger generation of Norwegian-Americans in the work of the Association, and added that if the history of the Norwegians in America is to be written accurately, it must be done in the next twenty-five years. He also emphasized the need of a broad, democratic interest by the membership of the Association.

Secretary Thompson stressed the growth of interest in

the work of the organization as demonstrated by financial contributions, gifts to the archives, publicity given by the Norwegian press in America, and recognition given by leaders in Norway.

Treasurer Osland gave an account of his financial stewardship. At the close of 1938, he said, the Association's assets easily totalled \$18,800. Notable gifts, totalling \$4,409.65 in 1938, included \$3,309.65 from President Andersen, \$1,000 from Mr. O. M. Olesen of Fort Dodge, Iowa, and \$100 from Professor Olaf Halvorsen of Huntington, California. The sale of books brought in \$512.30, and membership fees accounted for \$1,002.46.

Professor David T. Nelson, Financial Secretary in 1938, reported that the membership to date was 641, including 36 life members, 54 sustaining and 551 associate members.

Dr. Theodore C. Blegen, Managing Editor, informed the gathering that four publications were under consideration for the near future. These include the late Professor Laurence M. Larson's autobiographical work, *The Log Book of a Young Immigrant*, a translation of the *Diary of Sören Bakke*, volume XI of *Studies and Records*, and an index of volumes I-X of *Studies and Records*.

DINNER GATHERING

At the conclusion of the business session and the special meeting of the Executive Board, a dinner was served in the Leamington for members and guests. Treasurer Osland acted as toastmaster. President Andersen explained his interest in the work of the Association under five headings printed elsewhere in this *News Letter*.

Dr. Blegen paid tribute to Professor Laurence M. Larson, Reverend D. G. Ristad, Dr. Knut Gjerset, Dr. Marcus Hansen, Professor O. E. Rølvaag, and Mr. Magnus Swensen—deceased leaders in the Association.

After a speech by Dr. L. W. Boe, the newly-elected Vice-president, various members were called upon for remarks. The comments as a whole reflected a remarkable enthusiasm and loyalty that promise well for the future of the Association.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

One of the archives' strongest collections is Mr. A. A. Rowberg's genealogical files. This collection now numbers in the neighborhood of 60,000 newspaper items, of which about eighty per cent are obituaries of prominent Norwegian-Americans. By far the greater number of items are from Norwegian newspapers in America, although there are also many from the English press in the Northwest.

Mr. Rowberg, editor of the *Northfield Independent*, began his genealogical work in 1913. Since that time he has laboriously accumulated items of invaluable assistance to the research student. The shorter clippings are pasted on 3"x5" cards which are kept in wooden drawers. The longer items are pasted in notebooks but are also listed in the card catalog.

In the spring of 1938 the Executive Board decided to investigate the feasibility of adding a genealogical department to the Association. A committee of three, composed of Mr. Rowberg, Professor C. Martin Alsager, of Chicago, and Secretary J. Jørgen Thompson, was chosen to study the genealogical problem and its relationship to historical research.