

The Norwegian-American Historical Association

Northfield, Minnesota

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NEWS LETTER

FROM
THE SECRETARY'S OFFICE
TO
THE ASSOCIATION MEMBERS

For some time the Executive Board has been considering the possibility of issuing a news letter which would go out to the members of the Association every three or four months. The purpose of such a letter would be to acquaint the membership with the general work of the Association. It is evident that there are many things of interest transpiring that are of such a nature that they can not very well be published in *Studies and Records*. The Board did not see its way clear to provide the necessary funds for a news letter because of the large material of historical interest ready for publication. When the question was brought up again at the meeting of the Board held in Nissedahle last July Mr. J. A. Holmboe, a member of the Board of Finance, promised a donation of \$50.00 in order that a start might be made. And so the first number of the *letter* goes forth to the members.

This first issue deals largely with the Historical Archives. We have purposely chosen to emphasize this angle of our work because the success of this branch of our activity needs the interest and support of every member of our Association. If we had the funds needed for sending out a fieldman we could secure a large amount of valuable material. But how much more could we not gather if every member would decide to do some work for the Archives in his own neighborhood.

The Secretary has been charged with the responsibility of issuing the *News Letter*. Will you kindly let us know whether you think this undertaking should be continued or not. Will you also give us the benefit of your reactions both as to form and content.

THE PERMANENT FUND

In his financial statement of June 30th our Treasurer, Mr. Birger Osland, reports \$13,500.00, par value, invested in securities.

FROM THE FINANCIAL SECRETARY, MR. HETLE

The membership keeps up remarkably well considering the times. Many of those who cannot pay the dues now assure us that they wish to continue their membership and to pay as soon as possible so as not to miss any of the publications.

Several libraries and individuals have joined during the summer because they have chanced to read our publications and have thought so well of them that they want to be placed permanently on our mailing list.

The work of your Association is beginning to command attention all over the country, and the books is-

The Next General Meeting of the Association
Will Be Held In Minneapolis, Tuesday,
January 7, 1936

sued so far have received the highest commendation everywhere. In fact The Norwegian American Historical Association is on the way to become a model for other national groups and has done much to spur others on to similar efforts.

If the present membership will consider themselves specially appointed to work for the Association there is no reason why we should not do a tremendous piece of work for American history and become a great cultural factor in this country. We have the historians, and we have the material, but we need more members, and the literature of the association should be more generally read within our own group than is yet the case. They would enjoy immensely reading their own history if they knew what the Association has to offer.

THE EDITORIAL BOARD

The editorial board has been augmented by the election to that body of Mr. Carlton C. Qualey of New York. Mr. Qualey is now completing a dissertation on the spread of Norwegian settlement in America. He spent a portion of last summer in Norway.

Considerable progress has been made recently in the translation of the invaluable diary of Søren Bache, 1839-47. A necessary preliminary to this work of translation was a painstaking transcript of the original diary, an undertaking that was successfully completed by Professor Andreas Elviken of Temple University, Philadelphia, who is now at work on the translation.

The preparation by Mr. Blegen of a biography of Johan R. Reiersen for the *Dictionary of American Biography* led to the discovery of a collection of original Reiersen letters and materials in the possession of the grandsons of the noted Texas pioneer colonizer. The collection of papers recently was sent to Mr. Blegen for examination, transcription, and translation by Mr. Charles L. Reiersen of New York. Mr. Jacob Hodnefield of St. Paul assisted in transcribing some of the documents, and translations of some of these are now being made by Mr. Carl O. Paulson, a graduate student in the University of Wisconsin.

STUDIES AND RECORDS, VOLUME EIGHT

The eighth volume of *Norwegian-American Studies and Records* is nearly ready for distribution. It is a substantial publication of about 175 pages and the ten articles and documents which it contains are filled with new contributions that touch many facets of immigrant life and experience, ranging from the immigrant fath-

ers of the thirties to Norwegian-American journalism in the twentieth century.

Professor Laurence M. Larson contributes an essay of unusual interest on the beginnings of Norwegian-American fiction. He rescues from oblivion, in a story of fascinating human interest, the earliest precursor of the author of *Giants in the Earth*. Another contribution that touches literary history is the complete text of Ole Rynning's emigrant song, here published and translated for the first time. This interesting record pictures the scene of a Seventeenth of May celebration in mid-ocean nearly a hundred years ago.

Among documents of special interest that are published in the volume is a letter written by Johannes Nordboe from the prairies of Illinois in 1837, the original of which was discovered by a Norwegian scholar. Many readers will also be interested in four immigrant letters written from Texas in 1852, including one by the liberal editor, J. R. Reiersen, and one by the gifted Mrs. Wærenskjold.

Several contributions in the volume relate to the role that has been played by the press in Norwegian-American life. One is a study of the attitude taken by *Emigranten* in an early presidential election, and another is an analysis of the editorial policy of a leading Norwegian-American newspaper at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Other materials in the book include a salty narrative of emigrant travel in the fifties, told by a contemporary and based upon his own shrewd observations; a critical study of the introduction of Norwegian immigrants to American frontier politics; and a carefully prepared list of recent writings of Norwegian-American interest.

Contributors to the volume include, in addition to Professor Larson, Dr. Martin B. Ruud, Mr. Arne Odd Johnsen, Mr. Lyder L. Unstad, Dr. Bayrd Still, Mr. Albert O. Barton, Dr. Harold M. Tolo, Miss Agnes M. Larson, Mr. Jacob Hodnefeld, and the Reverend P. J. Reinertsen.

The volume is printed in the same attractive style as volume 7 and closes with a list of the members and officers of the Norwegian-American Historical Association. There is a preface by Mr. Blegen, the managing editor.

Volume 8 of *Studies and Records* is the fourteenth separate publication to be issued by the Association. In addition to the series of *Studies and Records*, there are three volumes in a travel and description series and three special historical works.

From the annual report of the managing editor:

"The publication work of such an institution as the Norwegian-American Historical Association must aim constantly at high standards, lasting values, and contributions to the field that it cultivates. Great bulk is not required; nor is it essential to produce a rapid flow of publications. If the work, however, is carried on steadily and persistently, the passing years will witness the creation of a special library of materials that will rank well in extent as well as from other points of view."

ANOTHER IMPORTANT BOOK

It is expected that the next publication of the Norwegian-American Historical Association will be "The Civil War Letters of Colonel Hans Christian Heg," edited by Mr. Blegen. The original letters have been transcribed, and the managing editor is now engaged in writing an historical introduction for the volume. Its publication is made possible by generous gifts of funds from Mr. Magnus Swenson, Madison, Wis., \$500.00; Mr. Arthur Andersen, Chicago, Ill., \$500.00; Mr. J. A. Holmboe, Oklahoma City, Okla., \$100.00; Mr. Olaf Halvorsen, Huntington Park, Calif., \$100.00; Mr. Gus G. Martin, Pacific Palisades, Calif., \$50.00; total \$1,250.00. Since the estimated cost of publication has been set at \$1,500.00 it is hoped that others will contribute the necessary balance.

OUR TASK

Almost within the period of the present generation the country in which we live has left behind it the frontier day and passed into a "whirl of modernism" in which we find ourselves almost hopelessly confused. The rapidity and vigor with which the United States has developed is probably unmatched in the whole history of the world. In the shaping of this panorama of American Life every person who has breathed the air of this land has left footprints, be they good or bad.

Once upon a time in history we presumed that the only footprints worthy of study were those of famous military men with their campaigns, noted battles, and conquests; later we added to that list, men active in the business of state. History was past politics we wrote in letters big and bold. Today we have caught a newer vision. No longer do we accredit military generals or statesmen alone in shaping the destiny of our land. At the present time we are attempting to bring about the integration of all the aspects of life in order to better account for this illusive thing which we call American Civilization. Whether we have guided affairs of state or guided the homely plow, whether we have been engineers whose skill has made the "incredible skyscraper" or whether fate has placed us in an "incredible slum" we are one and all makers of American History.

In these many aspects which we study in order to understand the world about us the question of races plays no meager part. From other lands races have brought their heritage to America and attuned it to a very different environment and they must be brought into focus in the analysis of that, which we term American Civilization. And it is in one of these races that this organization, the Norwegian-American Historical Association, has a throbbing interest.

We are eager to trace the environment of our Fathers beyond the confines of this continent in order to learn from what sort of homes they came; we want to know what qualities of heart, of mind and of body they brought with them. We want to know what they have done to America; and we want to know what America had done to them. And it is in order to make it possible to search into such matters as these that the Archives of the Norwegian American Historical Association have been established. These Archives serve as an assembling place where materials are gathered together that will throw light on our people who have settled America.

Already these Archives have much of interest. No part of this arrangement offers more fascination than the manuscript division which has letters, diaries, and such written by men and women whose roots are in the rugged coast of Norway, but who have chosen America as their new homeland.

Quite a few of these letters were written in the forties when Norwegian immigration began with a bit more speed. From that time they continue on to the present day. The reader's heart throbs at the heart-ache in these letters; then again the reader almost leaps with joy at the conquest made by these people in a new land. These letters are intimate sources of life and every day life as it has been lived in America.

In the group of early letters are those of Elise Wærenskjold who came to Texas from Norway in 1847. In her native land she was a pioneer school teacher and her letters reflect the precision and careful training of such a person. Her handwriting is nothing short of the copy book and the content which is usually a theme on Texas, has a charm which weaves a picture so vivid, so attractive, and so enticing of this her adopted land which she so eagerly wishes to share with others. Such material reveals much of the spirit of the time which was Texas before the Civil War.

In this collection the reader finds the story of Halver Solveson who with his three companions, one of whom was Hans Christian Heg, journeyed to California seeking to enhance their fortunes in the great gold rush. Four pairs of oxen took them from old Muskego to Sacramento traveling steadily from March 17, 1849, to August 29 of that year. Their experiences are those of many en route but the color with which it is written and the facts as they are given enable the reader to capture the real spirit of that time. The sturdiness of character and the aggressive spirit of these men pointedly foretell that they will be leaders in the parts to which they go. Surely this was to become so in the case of Hans Christian Heg who is known to every American of Norwegian descent as the Colonel of the 15th Wisconsin who so courageously led his men at the tragic siege of Chickamauga where he gave his life for his chosen country.

Immigrants leaving the homeland had moments of severe struggle when the time for departure drew near. One young man, full of energy and life, eager for what America had for him pens a sad note in a letter to his father written on board the boat. It reads: "og den 15de om formidag saa vi Norges Land for sidste gang; det sidste vi saa af Norge var høie snedækkede Fjælde."

Men of Norwegian descent in America went enthusiastically into the Civil War. They were eager to fight an evil so ignoble as slavery; the right of the individual was a part of the lifeblood of the Norwegian wherever he lived. Many of these men were drawn into the army before they had even had occasion to learn the language of the Americans. Therefore we find letters in this collection filled with heart tearing loneliness for they were strangers in a strange land. One man writes to his family: "Tiden forekommer mig meget lang—her er ingen som jeg kjender. Men meste trøst og moro er Bibelen som stadig er ved min side."

Occasionally the reader finds a letter beaming with spontaneity and joy at accomplishment in the new world. One young Norwegian in New York expresses himself in such a way in a letter to his family in Norway when he had an order for designs "for New Yorks Største Jewelry firma 'The Tiffany Company'."

But more generally the immigrant found the strain in the new world such that it was making inroads in his spirit. "Hvor mange kostbare Aar har jeg ikke mistet her i Amerika i elendig arbeide og ingenting havt for det," writes a man whose letter shows clearly that he was tired of his days. His sister in Norway who felt for him as only a member of one's own family can feel wrote to a friend in which she said: "Ja, han delte vel skjæbne med tusinde andre." A statement altogether too true in the shaping of this panorama which is America. The sacrifices of the heart and soul were great. And the effort was too great for many of those of gentler mold. Some were of different texture. Some had a buoyant philosophy as one writer reveals after having pictured the vicissitudes of the immigrant in America dismisses it with this phrase, "Men some Reven sagde da den blev flaad det er en overgang."

If the reader is to capture the real spirit of the past such sources must be studied. Though the Archives already contain a nice arrangement of such manuscripts, members of the Association must feel the responsibility of gathering into the Archives that which is still on the outside. We are all eager to understand better the part our own people have played in the making of this panorama which is America. More sources will give safer conclusions in regard to that.

AGNES M. LARSON.

NOTES FROM THE ARCHIVES

Little is known about the historical collections of the Association. These miscellaneous notes may serve to show the type of material being added to the Archives.

A notebook with the cover-title "Protocoll for Den norske dramatiske Forening i Chicago, Ill." contains the minutes and accounts of a Norwegian dramatic society, organized in 1868. The title-page appears as follows:

"Den
norske dramatiske
Forening
i
Chicago.
Stiftet den 12te Martz 1868."
Motto: "Ei blot til Lyst."

The first performance was given March 28, 1868, at which plays by Bøgh and Hostrup were presented. The books show a loss of \$34.01 in this initial attempt. A large number of the programs are pasted in the secretary's record. A list of plays, numbering 156 titles, is found at the end of the book. The society appeared in Madison, Wisconsin, in October, 1869. "Norwegian sufferers" in the fire of 1871 were given \$175.

A letter written to Langeland by Ansten K. Natesta, dated March 25, 1884, is preserved among the papers of Knud Langeland. The writer tells how the "Amer-

ica-fever" struck him as early as 1835, adding something about his journeys.

The number of exchanges continually coming in show that the Publications of the Association are receiving recognition. The following are on the list of exchanges:

American Antiquarian Society. Proceedings.
Det kongelige norske Videnskabers Selskabs Skrifter.
Det norske Videnskabs-Akademi i Oslo. Skrifter.
Historisk Tidskrift (Swedish).
Illinois State Historical Library. Collections.
Indiana Magazine of History
Institute of Historical Research (London). Bulletin.
Universitetets historiske Seminar. (Oslo). Avhandlinger.
University of Michigan. Publications.
Wisconsin Magazine of History.
Washington Historical Quarterly.

From the report of the managing editor:

"If the association is to meet adequately the responsibilities that face it, it must give more thought to the double problem of collecting historical materials and of making its collections available for the use of scholars."

WHAT OTHERS SAY ABOUT US

A reviewer in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, commenting recently on one of the volumes published by the Norwegian-American Historical Association, asserted that this organization is today the "most active historical society among the immigrant groups in the United States."

AN HISTORIAN'S CALL

The Norwegian-American Historical Society has performed a great service in stimulating our interest in pioneer history and in recording the contributions of the people of Norse ancestry to American life. We can not write the history of this country without the knowledge of the contributions made by the recent immigrant races.

We realize now that this work should have been begun long ago while some of the records now extinct were available. But it is not too late. However, the work has only begun, and the task of gathering all the records is a big one. It is a task of such proportions that the officers of the association can not be expected to do it all.

All of us of Norse ancestry are asked to contribute what we are able to this enterprise. All may do something by keeping in mind that the Collections of the society are located at St. Olaf College and should be increased by the addition of every book or publication by or about the Norwegians and their activities in this country.

Will each one of you consider yourself a committee of one to solicit such material so as to make our Col-

lections as complete as possible? All who are in possession of such material will be glad to make a contribution of this kind in order to preserve our history in America.

WM. C. BENSON.

LOOKING AHEAD

The editorial board is planning to prepare a comprehensive index of the *Studies and Records* series, following the completion of volume 10 in 1936.

THE FOLLOWING ARE THE MOST RECENT NEW MEMBERS OF OUR ASSOCIATION:

ASSOCIATE

Trygve Ager, Brooklyn, N. Y.
A. J. Anderson, Minneapolis, Minn.
Ingrid Bergo, Chicago, Ill.
Agnes Erickson, Chicago, Ill.
Aslaug B. Enerson, Chicago, Ill.
J. M. Green, Chicago, Ill.
Carl W. Jones, Minneapolis, Minn.
Louis O. Larsen, Brooklyn, N. Y.
O. M. Malvig, Madagascar.
F. V. Mohn, Eagle Rock, Calif.
J. H. Myrwang, Baltic, S. Dak.
Olaf Otheim, Crosby, N. Dak.
M. Albert Selness, Spring Grove, Minn.
S. O. Simundson, Kenyon, Minn.
A. Sommerfelt, Fergus Falls, Minn.
Edward Storvick, Albert Lea, Minn.
J. C. Thompson, Grand Meadow, Minn.
T. S. Thompson, Mt. Horeb, Wis.
Jane O. Thorpe, Minneapolis, Minn.
M. E. Tronbol, Minneapolis, Minn.
Alfred Tunem, East Stanwood, Wash.
T. H. Ulsaker, Fargo, N. Dak.
Osmund Vinje, Chicago, Ill.
Erling Ylvisaker, Madison, Wis.

SUSTAINING

E. O. Giere, Minneapolis, Minn.
Herbert P. Johnson, Evanston, Ill.
Albert Soiland, Los Angeles, Calif.

SOME 1934 DUES ARE STILL UNPAID