

THE NEWS LETTER

The Norwegian-American Historical Association

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West of the Great Divide

Some time before June 17, the book, *West of the Great Divide*, representing years of painstaking work for the author, Dr. Kenneth D. Bjork, and an investment of approximately \$15,000.00 for the NAHA, will make its debut into the annals of American history.

Dr. Bjork is already well known for his monumental and scholarly *Saga in Steel and Concrete: Norwegian Engineers in America*. He is Professor of history and chairman of the department of political science at St. Olaf College, Northfield, a member of the Board of Editors of the NAHA, secretary of the Upper Midwest History Conference, and chairman of the Governor's Committee for Refugee Relief in Minnesota.

The book, 636 pages of text, will come out in an edition of 1800 copies at a price of \$7.50. HOWEVER, ANY NEW MEMBERS JOINING THE NAHA BEFORE SEPTEMBER 1, 1958, WILL RECEIVE THIS BOOK UPON PAYMENT OF MEMBERSHIP DUES.

The story told in *West of the Great Divide* is a new and significant interpretation of the history of American immigration and settlement—and one that needed to be told. It deals with the Norwegian immigrants who, from the days of the first Mormon trek to Utah down to the last decade of the nineteenth century, sought fortune and happiness west of the Great Divide.

This is the first book in the field of Norwegian-American life to draw together and interpret in one scholarly narrative the larger saga that reaches out in its full sweep to the western mountain area of America and along the whole length of the Pacific coast.

Ten years of patient and vigorous research in newspapers, manuscripts, and other records (especially immigrant letters) have gone into the making of this volume, and the author has acquainted himself with the western country by means of extensive travels.

After a penetrating interpretation of "migration in microcosm," Dr. Bjork takes up the fabulous story of the lure of gold that drew immigrants across the sea from Norway and across the plains and mountains from the pioneer settlements of the Middle West. The gold rush acquainted the Norwegians in the homeland with the western hemisphere and made the Pacific coast a reality to their kinsmen in the Mississippi Valley.

The scene shifts from "Babylon" to "Zion" as the author next examines the migration and settlement of the Norwegian Mormons, a narrative with lines running to the Old World and also to the frontier communities in Illinois and Wisconsin.

Inevitably the turbulent city of San Francisco be-

came a focal point of immigrant interest, and the author explores "the San Francisco story," reaching far beyond the adventures of the Argonauts into ship-building and other trades, industries, and professions.

Against this background Professor Bjork develops a many-pronged narrative that brings into focus the co-operation and kinship of Norwegians with other Scandinavians in California; later developments in Utah—a "kingdom built with hands"; the heroic adventures of the celebrated ski expert, "Snowshoe" Thompson; the spread of settlement to the Pacific Northwest; and the establishment and growth of immigrant communities and activities in periods of struggle, prosperity, and depression. He also traces the history of Norwegian gold seekers in the Rockies and studies the inter-relations of railroads, land and people.

The author's interests encompass not only such industries as mining, farming, and fishing, but also the church life of the west-coast immigrants, their newspapers, and their cultural and social organizations. Special attention is given to Norwegian skills in ship-building. The panoramic story, concluding with a survey of the larger pattern of Norwegian settlement in the West, is unquestionably a major contribution to immigrant and western history.

Executive Board Meets

The Executive Board of the NAHA held its annual meeting January 11, at the Union League Club in Chicago. Present were K. Bjork, T. Blegen, L. Hustvedt, D. Nelson, B. Osland, M. Strand, J. J. Thompson, L. Thorsness and A. Wigeland. The meeting opened at 10:00 a.m. and adjourned at 4:00 in the afternoon. During the noon hour the board members were Andrew Wigeland's luncheon guests at the Union League Club.

Only a summary of the meeting can be given here. Much attention was given to Bjork's forthcoming book, to the problem of growth—not only in terms of membership but also of interesting younger scholars to write articles and books for the NAHA—and to means of improving the "News Letter" so that the members will be constantly informed about the objectives of the organization.

Andrew Wigeland read the Treasurer's Report: For the past eleven months the total receipts from dues and income from investments totaled \$4,576.71, and total expenditures were \$1,285.78. As of December 31, 1957, the total assets were:

Cash in the bank	\$ 8,038.86
Petty cash fund	500.00
Investments	23,000.00

The late Miss Aagot Raaen, author of *Grass of the Earth*, willed to the Association some of her stock. L. Thorsness and T. Blegen then explained to the Board that the will had been declared invalid because it carried the signature of only one witness, whereas two are needed. The Aagot Raaen estate will therefore go before probate, and it is not likely that the NAHA will receive this stock as first anticipated.

During the course of the meeting, President Thorsness surprised the board by presenting to the Treasurer a check for \$1,000, which a quote from the minutes will explain:

The Executive Board passed a resolution expressing its gratitude and appreciation for a gift in the amount of \$1,000.00 from the estate of Mrs. Gudrun Nomedal, in accordance with the expressed wish of the deceased. The board also recognized Mrs. Nomedal's long interest in Norwegian cultural and charitable causes and called specific attention to the fact that over a period of about fifteen years she prepared all the reports of Mr. Birger Osland, former Treasurer of the Association, and that she was cashier of American Relief for Norway, placing her skills as book-keeper and accountant unselfishly in the service of this humane cause.

As further recognition of gratitude, Mrs. Nomedal's

brother, Einar Josephson, who administered the gift, was made an Honorary Life Member of the NAHA.

One other matter of business must be mentioned. The writer, while in Chicago, had his car broken into and lost a suit case with its contents, a top coat and a brief case. Members of the Board raised among themselves \$70.00, which they promptly gave to this unfortunate soul, indicating that they are just as concerned with the present as with the past, and also that they are very kind.

Autograph Party

As a proper send-off for our new book, *West of the Great Divide*, an autograph party will be held on June 17 (Tuesday), from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m., in the Lutheran Brotherhood Building, 701 2nd Avenue South, Minneapolis. This will provide an excellent opportunity personally to meet the author and to have your book autographed. In the event that your copy has not already been sent to you, arrangements will be made for you to pick it up there. We are most grateful to the Lutheran Brotherhood for placing their facilities at our disposal. Their activity director, A. Ethel Magnusson, will be in charge. Coffee will be served, and a few short speeches will be given. All members are cordially invited and urged to bring as many friends as you wish. If possible, similar parties will be arranged in Chicago and the Far West.

Analysis of The Membership Directory

States and Countries

Minnesota	205
Illinois	130
Iowa	53
Wisconsin	53
California	49
New York	36
Norway	32
Washington	30
North Dakota	26
South Dakota	24
New Jersey	13
District of Columbia	12
Michigan	11
Massachusetts, Ohio	6
Oregon, Virginia	5
Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Florida	
Texas, Utah	4
Missouri, Montana, Nebraska,	
New Hampshire	3
Alabama, Connecticut, Indiana,	
Louisiana, Maryland, Tennessee,	
Canada, Germany	2
Idaho, Maine, New Mexico,	
South Carolina, West Virginia,	
Chile, France, Mexico	1

Cities

Minneapolis	75
Chicago (inc. suburbs, app. 100)	72
Northfield, Minn.	41
Decorah, Iowa	30
Los Angeles (inc. suburbs)	18
St. Paul	18
Oslo	16
Seattle	16
New York	14
Sioux Falls, South Dakota	14
Brooklyn	12
Madison, Wis.	12
Washington, D. C.	12
Oak Park, Ill.	8
San Francisco (inc. suburbs)	8
Evanston, Ill.; Duluth, Minn.	5
Detroit; Albert Lea, Minn.; Moorhead,	
Minn.; Salt Lake City; Parkland, Wash.	4
Eau Claire, Wis.; Everett, Wash.;	
Forest City, Iowa; La Crosse, Wis.;	
Mauston, Wis.; Ottawa, Ill.; Racine,	
Wis.; Portland, Oregon; Rochester,	
Minn.; Rochester, New York; Urbana,	
Ill.; Viroqua, Wis.	3
(Two or less not listed)	

The above figures were taken from the membership directory sent out recently to all members. Both satisfactory and disappointing facts are indicated. The total membership is 766, and 39 states are represented, with Minnesota and Illinois carrying nearly one-half of the members. Minneapolis and Chicago are the great strongholds, with Northfield and Decorah ranking third and fourth. Although further expansion might be possible in Minnesota, Illinois and Iowa, they on the whole present a happy picture.

California with its 49 members is gratifying when one considers that its neighboring state, Oregon, has only 5, with 3 at Portland and none at Eugene. DEVELOPMENT IN OREGON IS MOST URGENT.

Wisconsin, the original scene for so much Norwegian immigrant history, should be stronger. Only 3 at La Crosse, 2 in Milwaukee, none at Westby, and none at Stoughton! Neither are the Dakotas very strong.

We must also make ourselves heard on the east coast. While it is true that New York and Brooklyn have the more recent immigrants, who are less interested perhaps in early Norwegian-American history, it should be possible to expand considerably the membership in New York (14) and Brooklyn (12).

We need new members because we want our books to reach as many people as possible, because we need young replacements for those who leave us, because a larger membership guarantees larger editions, thus making it possible to sell each book at a lower price. We are not interested in making money, only to have enough to finance high quality printing and to meet other expenses.

Because we do not send out solicitors or otherwise advertise, we must rely on our members. If when looking through the directory you find missing from the roles acquaintances who might be interested in membership, please take a minute—call them by phone—or make mention of it the next time you meet. Be sure to mention that Dr. Bjork's book, *West of the Great Divide* (7.50), will be given to any member enrolling before September 1, 1958.

Biographical Sketch: Marthinus A. Strand

At my first NAHA meeting in Minneapolis, I noticed a man whom I intuitively thought of as being far more concerned with action than with talk. We were introduced—his name, Marthinus A. Strand from Salt Lake City, Utah. It did not surprise me to learn that he was somehow tied up with electricity; in fact, when you get to know him better and hear what he has accomplished, one is tempted to believe that somewhere during the course of his seventy years of life he has swallowed a dynamo. Should anyone still doubt this after reading below, they need only try to keep up with him on skis through the mountain trails in Utah.

Before the ski enthusiasts—of which there are many more because of Strand—claim him completely

for themselves, we want to salvage what we can for the NAHA. "M.A." (as they call him) has received the highest honor possible in the skiing world, election to the National Ski Association of America's Hall of Fame. Shortly before (December, '57) he also received the order of St. Olaf Medal from King Olav V; he was cited in particular for work designed to bring about better relations between people in Norway and Utah.

Because we lack both medals and a hall of fame, we can only inform our members that Strand is one of our Vice Presidents, who for a period of years has rendered the NAHA a great service. He has provided a host of new members, has purchased a number of complete sets of our books as gifts to various western libraries, and has been most generous with direct contributions to the NAHA. Needless to say, his active mind and positive thinking have been invaluable in the shaping of policy. His attitude toward the NAHA is best summed up in words I once heard him express: "I can't write books, so I have to do this."

Having lived both in Drammen and Oslo, Strand, together with his wife, Selma (Haugen), emigrated to America in 1910, and moved directly to Salt Lake City. Because Strand's engineering training in Norway had been along mechanical, electrical lines, it was most natural that his first employment should be with the Western Electric Company. In 1912 he transferred to the Mountain States Telephone and Telegraph Company and worked there until the end of 1923, the last four years in the engineering department. He studied for six months in the Bell Laboratories; he also completed by means of correspondence courses in telephone and electrical engineering.

In June, 1924, he organized his own firm, the Strand Electric Company. As the business grew larger and larger, he changed this company from personal ownership to a corporation in 1948, with himself as president. His skill and knowledge have made his contracting firm grow from a small establishment to a widespread enterprise.

Mr. Strand has been and still is active in many club and civic affiliations. Among the Norwegians in Utah, he has been an inspiration in all vital undertakings. What he has done as a promoter is most fantastic. When Strand came to Utah, few if any knew how to use a pair of skis—none for recreational purposes—and that in a region which had some of the finest skiing terrain in the U. S. Strand organized the Utah Ski Club, promoted the building of Ecker Ski Jump (reported to be one of the largest and best built in our country), imported noted skiers, and gave them employment—with the result that Utah now has some of our nation's finest ski resorts. Soccer is another sport introduced by Strand.

He organized the Norge Male Charus and was its president, 1914-16. President of the Norwegian Athletic Club, 1915-16. Was Utah's Ski Club's first president, serving many terms. President of the North American Athletic Association, 1922-25. President of the Utah Soccer League, 1923-27. Manager of the

Viking Soccer club. President of the United States Western American Ski Association for one term. Organized the Intermountain Ski Association. First Vice President of the U. S. National Ski Association, a Director for many years, and now an honorary Director for life. Was appointed by the Secretary of Interior in 1938 to select suitable sites in the national parks and forests for ski areas. He was appointed Director of the State Civilian Ski and Mountain Patrol by the Governor of Utah in 1942. Appointed by the Director of National Ski Patrol system in 1942 to pass on all applications for the U. S. Army Ski Troops in the intermountain area. He has been a registered Ski Judge for the past 35 years. Was a member of the U. S. Winter Olympic Committee, 1936-52.

During World War II he worked hard for Norwegian Relief, being Chairman for Utah until the close of the war. The Governor also appointed him to the state board of the United Fund. Some of the other organizations in which Strand holds office or is a member are: The Norwegian Singers Association of America; Normennes, Chicago; Voice of Norway, Salt Lake City; Nordmanns Forbundet; Norwegian Literary Club, Salt Lake City; Chicago Norske Klub; San Francisco Norske Klub; and Sons of Norway.

His home overlooks the Salt Lake Valley. One journalist called it the "Ski Palace of Utah" and Marthinus Strand as "the 'skikonge' of the West."

News In Brief

—The national television program, "Our Nation's Roots," has based two of its program on works published by the NAHA. One was based solely on the "American Letters" collected by Theodore C. Blegen.

—The NAHA Archives have received the personal papers of Birger Osland, Carl G. O. Hansen, and of the late Professor O. A. Tingelstad. Secretary Thompson estimates that the Tingelstad collection exceeds 20,000 letters.

—The wives of two men very close to the NAHA have passed away during the course of the past months; Mrs. Kenneth (Ellen) Bjork of Northfield, in October; and Mrs. J. A. (Ragnhild) Aasgaard, Cokato, Minnesota, in February.

—Correction. The last "News Letter" carried an article containing excerpts from letters written to President Thorsness by men very prominent in national affairs. The article was so worded that the reader might be led to believe that we gave out memberships to men holding high office. This is not true. In each instance these memberships were purchased by L. Thorsness.

—Correction. In the Membership Directory under BROOKLYN, NEW YORK, one name was misspelled; it should be: Erik J. Friis, 842 56th Street, Brooklyn 20, N. Y.

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