

Outlook

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## A CENTURY OF NORWEGIAN IMMIGRATION AND ACHIEVEMENT

by

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A hundred years ago the little Norwegian sloop "Restaurationen" cast anchor in New York harbor. On board were fifty-three persons, passengers and crew, including little Margaret Allen Larson, born at sea. The voyage from Stavanger, Norway, to New York had been long and trying. The sloop left Norway July 4, 1825, and arrived at New York, October 9, via England and the Madeira Islands.

The "sloopers", as these first immigrants to America from Norway are generally called, were not, however, the first Norwegians to land in America. Over eight hundred years earlier, the famous Leif Erickson landed on American shores, calling the unknown land Vinland and its inhabitants "skraellinger." Several voyages were subsequently made to the New World by Norwegians, and settlements founded, but they did not become permanent. Later, after America had been rediscovered, quite a number of Norwegians came to this country in company with other nationals and located in their midst. Thus there were many Norwegians among the early Dutch settlers in New York, among them Anneken Hendricks from Bergen, Norway, who was married to Jan Aertsen van der Bilt, the ancestor of the <sup>a</sup>Vanderbilt family, in New Amsterdam, February 6, 1650. As early as in 1769 there existed in Philadelphia a society by the name of Societas Scandinaviensis,

consisting of Norwegians, Swedes, and Danes. The president of the society was a Norwegian by the name of Abraham Markoe.

While there thus were Norwegians in America prior to the year 1825, they were few and scattered, and made no independent settlements. The coming of the sloop "Restaurationen" in 1825 therefore marks the beginning of an epoch of Norwegian immigration to America. In 1835, one of the "sloopers" by the name of Ole Slogvig returned to Norway, telling his countrymen of the experiences of the Norwegians in America and the wonderful opportunities offered in the New World. The result was that the following year two more ships laden with emigrants from Norway set sail for America. The next year two additional ship loads, aggregating 170 persons, joined their countrymen in the American settlements. From now on the immigration assumed greater and greater proportions, stimulated by letters from America, and, especially, by a guide-book for emigrants from Norway published by Ole Rynning in Christiania (Oslo), Norway, in 1838. In the year 1843 the number of Norwegian immigrants reaching our shores rose to 1,600, and since that year the number has never fallen below 1,000. At the close of the Civil War over 15,000 Norwegian immigrants arrived in one year and the stream of immigration has continued ever since at the rate of from a few thousand to about 30,000 per year. According to the Fourteenth Census there were in this country in 1920 363,862 foreign born Norwegians and 1,023,225 who were either born in Norway or born in America of

immigrant parents. The total number of persons of Norwegian descent in America today is conservatively estimated at about 2,250,000.

The first Norwegian settlement was made in Kendall and New Orleans counties, New York, where arrangements for the purchase of land had been made previous to the arrival of the first colony of immigrants by their advance agents, Kleng Peerson and Knud Olson Eide. These two men had arrived in America in 1821 to make investigations for a small band of Norwegian Quakers in Stavanger, Norway. They remained in New York and vicinity for three years, returning in 1824 to give a report of their findings. Kleng Peerson was a leader and adventurer among the early Norwegians in this country. He led his followers first to New York, then to Illinois, and finally to Texas, where he himself settled down. He died in 1865. A small stone monument erected by his grateful countrymen marks his grave in the Lutheran cemetery at Norse, Bosque county, Texas.

Many of the New York settlers left for the far west in 1834, founding the famous Fox River Settlement in Illinois. Two years later another Illinois settlement was made at Beaver Creek, Iroquois county. This was an ill-fated settlement, two-thirds of the settlers succumbing to the ravages of malaria during the spring and summer following their settling there. The remnant fled to Fox River and settled there among the rest of their countrymen. With the arrival of fresh colonists from

the old country, new settlements were founded. The first settlement in Wisconsin was made in Rock county in 1838, and the second at Muskego, Waukesha and Racine counties, the following year. From these "mother settlements" the colonists spread to the neighboring states, settling in Iowa, Minnesota, and the Dakotas and other states and territories in rapid succession. At the present time Norse-Americans, both foreign and native born, are found in every state of the Union as well as in our various possessions. According to the Fourteenth Census, West Virginia has the smallest number of foreign born Norwegians, the number being only 51, while Minnesota has the largest, there being 90,188 Norwegians of foreign birth in Minnesota.

The Norwegians are an intelligent, hardy, industrious, law-abiding people, with a remarkable power of adaptation, and therefore constitute a highly desirable class of immigrants. They have contributed in a very large measure to the making of America in an industrial, commercial, political, cultural, and religious way, and must be regarded as one of the very best elements in our cosmopolitan population.

To no other industry have they so generally devoted themselves as to agriculture. They have cleared the wood and brush land by patient and persistent toil, and converted it into fertile fields. The virgin soil of the vast prairies of the Great West has been turned and reduced to a high state of cultivation, and the once "American Desert" has largely by their labor been changed into the "granary of the world." Marshy, useless lowlands

have been tiled and drained at an immense expenditure of money and labor and translated into highly productive fields. The log-hut, sod-house, and board-shanty of pioneer days have long since given place to well-built, and modernly equipped dwellings and farm buildings. Former State Auditor of Minnesota, S. G. Iverson, estimates that the Norwegian farmers of Minnesota own farm property valued at \$1,200,000,000, a wealth which they have produced since the first settlement of Norwegians in Minnesota was made in 1851. A survey made by Alfred Gabrielsen, an agent of the State of North Dakota, in 1913, revealed the fact that out of a total of 32,000,000 acres taxable land in North Dakota that year, 7,867,140 acres or about one-fourth of this land was owned by Norwegians. In all the mid-west states the Norwegian farmers constitute a large portion of the most well-to-do, prosperous, and successful farmers.

Many of the Norwegian immigrants were well-trained artisans, such as carpenters, blacksmiths, metal-workers, brick-layers, tailors, shoemakers, jewelers, etc., and have contributed materially to the success of the various trades of skilled labor. Some were experienced woodsmen, and readily took to lumbering and logging, and many became both wealthy and influential<sup>t</sup> lumbermen. Others entered the field of manufacture, and in almost every manufacturing center in the territory settled by Norsemen will be found both large and small manufacturing establishments owned and operated by Norwegians. Among the more notable Norwegian manufacturing plants may be mentioned the agricultural implement

factories and other machine factories in Madison, Stoughton, and Beloit, Wis.

In the American business world will be found a large number of highly successful Norwegian businessmen, merchants, importers and exporters, bankers, and financiers. Among leading bankers may be mentioned Helge A. Haugan, one of the founders and for many years the leading spirit in the State Bank of Chicago; Arne L. Alness, railroad builder, banker, and financier, for many years president of the Scandinavian-American Bank, St. Paul, and the millionaire banker, Harold Thorson, a St. Paul banker, and the founder of some thirty banks in North Dakota.

Among the Norwegian immigrants, there were many graduates from the technological institutes of Christiania (Oslo), Bergen, and Trondhjem. A number of these have distinguished themselves as architects, construction engineers, chemical engineers, surveyors, and electricians. Among the more prominent of these men may be mentioned Gunvald Aus of New York, a construction engineer of high reputation, noted for his work on the U. S. Custom House, facing Bowling Green, New York, and the steel construction of the famous Woolworth building; his partner, Kort Berle, a distinguished architect, also connected with the building of the Woolworth skyscraper; Olaf Hoff, the builder of submarine tunnels, such as the Harlem river tunnels, New York, and the New York Central tunnel under the Detroit river; his brother, J. H. Hoff, chief engineer of the American Bridge Company, Chicago; Sverre Damm, Berge Furze, and Guttorm Miller, for many years

connected with subway construction in New York; Gustav L. Clausen, sewer construction expert of Chicago, for many years superintendent of sewers in that city and the designer of Pullman and Hyde Park; A. B. Neuman, who designed and built the large plant of the U. S. Steel Corporation at Gary, Ind., and other steel industry plants, and F. W. Cappelen, for many years the city engineer of Minneapolis. Mr. Cappelen was born in Drammen, Norway, and came to this country in the early 80's. For a number of years he was employed by the Northern Pacific Railroad company on railroad construction in Montana. Later he became that company's bridge engineer, and built its bridge over the Mississippi river in Minneapolis. While city engineer of Minneapolis he constructed the city's filtration plant, designed and built the Third Avenue bridge over the Mississippi river, a masterpiece in re-enforced concrete bridge construction. He also designed the Franklin Avenue bridge, but died before its completion. In honor of this great construction engineer, the Franklin bridge, also over the Mississippi river, has been officially called the Cappelen Memorial Bridge.

In the political life of our Nation, the Norse-Americans have from the very first taken an active interest. The early settlers alligned themselves with the Free Soilers in the main, though some became Democrats, but many of these changed their party affiliation, when they realized the attitude of the Democrats on the slavery question. With a very few exceptions, the

Norwegian immigrants were opposed to slavery. It is very significant that the first book written by a Norwegian immigrant on conditions in America, although he had been in this country only eight months at the time he wrote, is very outspoken against the institution of slavery and even prophetic in its vision of the final outcome. After having described the government and political institutions of United States, Ole Rynning, the author of this book, says: "In ugly contrast with the liberty and equality which justly constitute the pride of the Americans, is the disgraceful slave-traffic..... The northern states endeavor at every congress to get the slave-trade abolished in the southern states; but as the latter always make resistance and claim the right to settle the matters pertaining to their states themselves, there will probably soon come either a separation between the northern and southern states or bloody civil conflicts." This was written in 1838. The "bloody civil conflicts" of which Rynning speaks did come two decades later, and many of his own countrymen fought with valor and distinction on the side of right in that bloody conflict.

The first Norwegian immigrant to hold public office was no doubt James D. Reymert. He came to Wisconsin in 1842 and settled at Muskego, where, because of his legal training, he soon came into prominence. He was a member of the Wisconsin constitutional convention, the legislature, superintendent of schools, presidential elector, and, in 1860, candidate for congress on the Democratic ticket, but defeated. Although the



first Norwegian settlement in Dakota territory was made in 1859, three Norwegians were members of the first territorial legislature in 1862, one in the senate and two in the house. Since then men of Norwegian descent have held many positions of public trust in the municipality, county, state, and the Nation. No less than twelve men of Norse descent have held the office of state governor and six have been elevated to the U. S. senatorship. The best known of these is Minnesota's "Grand Old Man", Senator Knute Nelson, who came to this country a poor immigrant boy of five. It is reported of him that while crossing the Atlantic ocean, he one day found his mother at prayer in the cabin, weeping over their destitute condition, and said to her: "Don't cry, mother, we are poor now, but when I grow up, I'll be next to the king!" At the tender age of seventeen he enlisted in the army and served with distinction in many of the fiercest engagements of the Civil War. He was discharged from service in 1864, wounded and broken in health, but his Viking spirit was still unbroken. He finished his law course, and was admitted to the bar in 1867. The following year he became a member of the Wisconsin legislature, and remained in public service from that time till his death in 1923. In 1871 he moved to Alexandria, Minn., where he soon became county attorney. For four years he served in the state senate and for six years as congressman from the fifth district in Minnesota.

From 1882 to 1893 he was a member of the Board of Regents of the state university. In 1892 he was elected governor of Minnesota, and re-elected two years later. In 1895 the legislature elected him U. S. senator, an office which he held continuously till the time of his death. Judge Ell Torrence, former Commander in Chief of the Grand Army of the Republic, well says of him: "For strength of character, honesty of purpose, and honorable achievement, Senator Nelson will occupy a high place among the immortals of the 'North Star State.'"

There were many Norwegian immigrant boys and sons of immigrants, who, like Knute Nelson, enlisted in the Union army and fought through that war or died on its battlefields. It has been estimated that between 7,000 and 8,000 soldiers of Norwegian extraction served in the United States army, many of them fresh from their native land, unable even to speak the language of their adoptive land, yet willing to fight and to die for its cause. The two most outstanding Norwegian soldiers of the Civil War were Col. Hans C. Hegg, commander of the famous "Fifteenth Wisconsin," consisting almost entirely, officers and men, of Norwegians, and Col. Porter C. Oleson, 36th Regiment, Illinois Volunteers. Both were sons of immigrants, Col. Oleson's father being one of the "sloopers". This "slooper" had three sons and all served in the 36th Regiment, Illinois Volunteers. Colonel Oleson was killed in action, while gallantly leading his regiment at the battle of Franklin, Tennessee, November 30, 1864, after having served since 1861, and been in many bloody engagements.

His brother Lieut. Soren Oleson was killed at Stone river, Tennessee, 1862. Colonel Hegg was mortally wounded at the battle of Chickamauga, and died, saying: "I am willing to die; for I have fought for a righteous cause." The Norse-American soldier also won distinction in the Spanish-American War as well as the recent World War. Of the seventy-eight American soldiers who received the Congressional Medal of Honor, four were Norwegian, two of them born in Norway. The most Norwegian-American prominent officers in the United States Army during the World War were Col. Jens Bugge and Brig.-Gen. Alfred W. Bjornstad. Colonel Bugge was retired at the time United States entered the war, but was recalled for service on account of his ability as a strategist and tactician. He served as adviser to the general staff in France. Upon his return to America, he was appointed Commandant at West Point, the first Norwegian to hold this important post. General Bjornstad, a Minnesota boy, has recently been promoted to the rank of major-general.

In the field of literature and journalism, the Norwegians in America have also rendered a very meritorious service. From the publication of the first book by a Norwegian-American in 1838, a guide-book to America for the Norwegian immigrant by Ole Rynning, to the latest literary production, a history of the struggles and achievements of the Norsemen in America, a Centennial publication, written by Dr. O. M. Norlie, lies only

a brief span of eighty-seven years, yet during this time the Norwegian immigrants and their descendants have had time to clear the ground, build their homes, establish themselves in a new country, erect churches and schools, and still found leisure to cultivate and produce a distinctively Norwegian-American literature, some of it written in the American and some in the Norwegian language. In whichever language it is written, it reflects the spirit of the Viking and as a rule rings true to the highest and best in American ideals and institutions. This literature consists of prose and poetry, book and periodical, fiction, history, philosophy, science, art, theology, etc. The first journalistic attempt was made in 1847, at Muskego, Wis., with the appearance of the first newspaper, "Nordlyset", (The North Light). Since then, many newspapers have made their appearance, some to die and some to survive and become useful and influential local and national weeklies or dailies. The most widely circulated paper published in America in the Norwegian language is the "Skandinaven," published in Chicago, Ill., as a semi-weekly and daily newspaper. It was founded in 1866. The best known and most widely circulated newspaper in the American language published by a Norwegian is the Chicago Daily News, founded by Victor Lawson (Larson), who with his father, Iver Larson, was at one time associated with John Anderson in the publication of "Skandinaven." The various

Norwegian church bodies have also their Norwegian church organs, and some of them American church organs, issued weekly, the two leading papers being "Lutheraneren" and "The Lutheran Church Herald," both of which are published by the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America.

While the Norwegians in America have distinguished themselves in practically every line of human endeavor in this country, and contributed in a large and important measure to the making and maintenance of American ideals and institutions, it must be said that their crowning achievement during <sup>these</sup> ~~this~~ hundred years under consideration is the church and educational work which they have accomplished. Beginning without organization or pastoral leadership, the church work among the early settlers gradually assumed shape and order. The first two pastors were ordained in 1843, and the first church, a log-church, was erected in the same year and completed and dedicated in 1845. This church was built at Muskego, Wis., and is now located on the grounds of Luther Theological Seminary, St. Paul, Minn. Here, too, the first parsonage was built. Since then some 4,000 ~~or~~ 5,000 Norwegian Lutheran churches have been built, many of them imposing and expensive structures, and quite a number of churches by Norwegians of other religious faiths. As a rule, the Norwegians in America have remained faithful to the Lutheran Church, the church of their fathers. The largest Norwegian Lutheran church organization in America is the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, with its 3,000 congregation, twenty institutions

of higher learning, including a theological seminary, four colleges, and two normal schools, many charitable institutions, such as orphanages, old people's homes, and hospitals, and its extensive foreign mission work in China, Madagascar, Africa, and Alaska. The total value of its church property, including churches, parsonages, colleges, charity and mission institutions aggregates about \$30,000,000, and its annual budget for the past few years has been \$1,300,000. The total value of all the church and educational property belonging to the Norwegian-Americans may safely be placed at over \$50,000,000, showing that the Norwegians have performed a gigantic task in producing and appropriating this vast wealth to their church and educational activities alone, not even counting the large additional sums annually expended on local and general budgets.

In commemoration of these one hundred years of immigration and achievement, the Norwegians of all creeds in this country will this year unite in a great centennial celebration to be staged at the State Fair Grounds, St. Paul, Minn., June 6-8. Among the notables who will be present at this celebration may be mentioned President Calvin Coolidge, Lord Byng of Canada, representatives of the government of Norway, and no less than six state governors of Norwegian descent. This celebration will be under the auspices of a number of Norwegian patriotic organizations. The Norwegian Lutheran Church of America will also hold centennial celebrations, memorial services being arranged for in practically all of her 3,000 congregations.

In addition, arrangements have been made for the publication of a Centennial History, setting forth the story of the Norse-Americans during these hundred years. A special cantata has been written, commemorating the beginning of Norwegian immigration. The music for this cantata has been written by Dr. E. Melius Christiansen, the director of the famous St. Olaf Choir. It will be sung by the large Choral Union of the Church at the June festivities and by local choirs at the congregational memorial services, which will be held on Sunday, July 5. The significant feature about these celebrations will be their distinctive American, not foreign, spirit. While the Norwegian-American loves to cherish the memories and bonds of the land of his fathers, he is first of all a loyal and true American, justly proud of his country and the part he and his countrymen have had in its making.

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