

NEWS LETTER



The Norwegian-American Historical Association
Northfield, Minnesota

Edited by J. JÖRGEN THOMPSON, Secretary

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THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION MEETS IN CALIFORNIA

The Executive Committee of the Board met at Huntington Park (a suburb of Los Angeles and the home town of President Halvorson) on July 25, 26, and 27, 1949. All members of the committee were present, namely:

Olaf Halvorson, President
Lionel G. Thorsness, First Vice-President
Sören Røinestad, Second Vice-President
Birger Osland, Treasurer
J. Jørgen Thompson, Secretary
Dr. Theodore C. Blegen, Managing Editor

The principal reason why this meeting was held so far away from the usual meeting places in the Middle West was the fact that Dr. Kenneth Bjork, author of *A Saga in Steel and Concrete*, is well on the way in writing a history of the Norwegian settlements on the Pacific Coast from Mexico to and including Alaska.

Dr. Bjork was granted a fellowship from the Norwegian-American Historical Association which enabled him to seek a furlough from St. Olaf College, where he is professor of history, and spend the entire year of 1948 in traveling and research work for material to the history which he is writing.

However, Dr. Bjork feels that the field has turned out to be so rich, the distances so great, and the materials so widespread that it will be necessary to spend another year on continued research in order to enable him to produce an historical work such as both Dr. Bjork and the Association look forward to.

The first meeting of the committee on July 25 was held at the home of President Halvorson.

Informal reports were given by the President, who extended a hearty welcome to the Committee and expressed his pleasure over the fact that this meeting was held on the West Coast. The treasurer, Birger Osland, reported that the aggregate of funds, consisting of securities and the current bank account, now amounted to \$26,200.00.

Dr. Blegen reported that the Editorial Board now has practically ready manuscripts for three books. After a thorough discussion of the editorial plans, Dr. Blegen recommended that the publications be authorized and sent out in the following order:

Gro Swenson letters be sent to the printer as soon as possible.

As No. 2 he recommended the Bache Diary, to be published probably in 1950.

Following this would be a manuscript of memories written by Miss Agot Raaen, Portland, North Dakota, depicting pioneer conditions in North Dakota.

Dr. Blegen did not specify any particular time for the publication of *STUDIES AND RECORDS*, Volume XVI, but stated that he would at the most opportune time sandwich this in between the above mentioned books.

Regarding the Pacific Coast history now being prepared by Dr. Kenneth Bjork, the Managing Editor estimated that by 1952 the manuscript would be ready for publication. Dr. Bjork has already completed writing a part of the manuscript, but naturally there is much detail work to be done before the final and complete copy of the manuscript is ready for publication.

Upon motion by Mr. Osland, seconded by Mr. Thorsness, the recommendations made by Dr. Blegen were unanimously approved and the necessary funds ordered set aside.

Secretary Thompson reported further that on October 6, 1950, the Norwegian-American Historical Association will be twenty-five years old.

It was decided that a celebration marking this twenty-fifth anniversary should be planned. The opinion prevailed in the committee that it would be well if plans were made by a committee outside the Executive Board. The opinion also prevailed that the celebration should be held at St. Olaf College where the Association was organized. The President was authorized to appoint a general chairman. He designated Senator Edward J. Thye as general chairman in charge of the program arrangements, with authority to appoint the committee members the Senator would consider necessary. It was further decided that the Managing Editor, Dr. Blegen, be given charge of having prepared for this occasion an anniversary publication. It was understood that Dr. Blegen would have the authority to appoint the aids he would find necessary.

On Tuesday, July 26, at 8:00 o'clock in the evening a public meeting was held in Los Angeles, where some 100 members and friends gathered to hear the members of the visiting committee present the cause of the Association. President Halvorson presided and introduced the following officers to the audience:

Professor J. Jørgen Thompson
 Vice-President Lionel G. Thorsness
 Vice-President Sören Røinestad
 Managing Editor Theodore C. Blegen
 Birger Osland, Treasurer

Thompson, Osland, and Røinestad presented greetings and expressed their pleasure at meeting so many interested Californians.

Blegen and Thorsness were the speakers of the evening.

Thorsness is a prominent attorney in Chicago and served for many years as Master in Chancery of the Superior Court of Cook County, Illinois. He is a Past Commander of the Second District of the American Legion and represented that organization at the International F.I.D.A.C. Congress in Prague, Czechoslovakia in 1931. He is a graduate in law of Northwestern University and continued his studies in Scotland and England. Mr. Thorsness said in part:

"Why should I, a third generation American who has not had occasion to keep alive his knowledge of the Norwegian language and who is a lawyer and not a historian, why should I be an officer of the Norwegian-American Historical Association and take an active part in its work?"

"Jørgen Thompson, who solicited my active cooperation, gave me several reasons: First he said that historians had concluded that if a history were written of the immigrations to the U.S.A. of the Norwegian people, the Germans, the Swedes, the Irish, the Poles, the Italians, the English, the French, and Scots, etc., etc., and if those histories were wrapped together, we would have a history of the U.S.A."

"I asked Mr. Thompson about the general plan of operation of the Norwegian-American Historical Association, and I thought that at this time Mr. Thompson might offer me the privilege of making a substantial contribution to the Association for the honor of serving it—but he didn't; nor did he foreclose me from doing so."

"The general plan of operation was to obtain from membership dues and by gift the funds required to do this work."

"I asked this question: 'Has the work of the Association been recognized? How have the books been received by historians, universities, libraries, research students?'"

"Thompson quoted the American Historical Review which has referred to the Norwegian-American Historical Association as 'the most active Historical Society among the immigrant groups in the United States.'"

"Thompson further stated there are 35 universities in the United States and Europe, plus the Congressional Library in Washington, D. C., that have standing orders for books published and to be published by the Norwegian-American Historical Association."

"At the end of my talk with Jørgen Thompson, I told him if he still thought I could in my humble way be of service to the Association, I would feel honored to serve."

"Now you have the story of why a third generation Norwegian-American lawyer is going to try to help these

great writers record the history and accomplishments of our Norwegian-American forebears."

"In closing may I say that after observing the works of the Norwegian-American Historical Association, this impression has come to me, that the editors, particularly the Managing Editor, Dean Blegen, have seen to it that this Association has not been used to glorify any individual or group of individuals, making a mockery of the word 'historical.' I have come to love this work with these men."

The next speaker was Dean Theodore C. Blegen, Managing Editor of the Association.

"How did I become interested in the work of the Association?" said Blegen. "I came to see that our national story is much more than national politics, great crises, wars, administrations, great leaders. It is the national life itself—the forces at the grass roots of our living that come to a focus in great events, but too often are not understood."

"The good doctor studies symptoms which to him are clues to causes. In interpreting American life, I believe we should not be satisfied with symptoms alone and make their description our end purpose. We should find out, if we can, what are the forces behind the surface events and the symptoms. What explains our character as a people? Our customs and ideas of living; our ways of meeting both good times and bad. Our beliefs and faiths not only in politics but in religion, in education; an understanding of our way of life which we accept as a heritage. It is a big story with many strands, and we cannot pull it together until we know all its parts—not in a spirit of boasting and vainglory, but truthfully, honestly, in understandable terms."

"It is in this spirit that this Association, starting with nothing but ideas and a purpose, has carried forward its work."

"A big job—a slow job—one taking patience and funds. A people's story, an American story, a great story whatever its shadows, a story we can be proud of as a totality, and one we can pass on as a source of strength to posterity."

"It is because this is my faith—it is because these are my purposes—that I have worked, along with my colleagues, for nearly twenty-five years in this Association. For these reasons I am here in California."

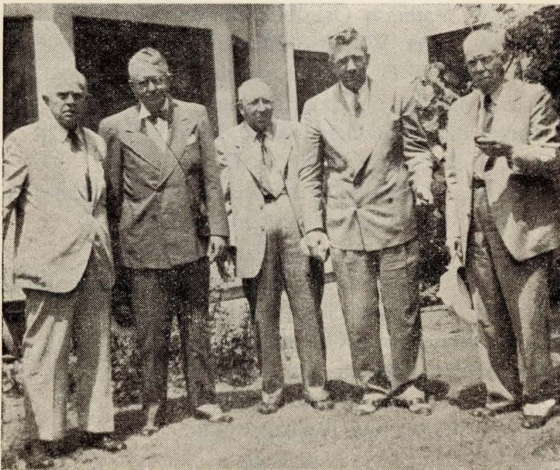
"Much has been accomplished—but we are looking ahead, and one of the things we are looking ahead to is a great book telling the story of the Norwegian-Americans on the Pacific Coast from gold-rush days to the 20th century, from California to Alaska. We want to fill out the picture not only to challenge the interest of you who live in this blessed part of America, but because we believe this is a great part of the story—as great as the story Rølvaag told in *Giants in the Earth*, a saga that should be told and remembered and preserved."

"Something binds together people and land and institutions—that something, that binding agent, is History—a

history that is not far away either in time or place. It comes up to this fleeting, ever-moving line of the present—it is here and in the Middle West, the South, and the East. Through its reading and study we can enrich ourselves. Through our encouragement we can the more readily pass on to our children understanding of what we regard as a priceless heritage. Through all our effort, perhaps, we can even contribute something to our management of ourselves. It was a very great American, none other than Lincoln, who said, 'If we could first know where we are and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do and how to do it.'

"Where are we? Whither are we tending? Where better can we find clues to the answers than by coming to a better understanding of the road we have traveled and are traveling in this the Promised Land, to which our ancestors came in search of opportunity and happiness, not alone for themselves but for their children and children's children? Shall we let their devotion and sacrifice, their work and faith, be forgotten? Or shall we rally around this Association, dedicated to their memory and pledged to the cause of their history, which merges into and is a part of the history of our great country from coast to coast?"

Blegen's speech raised our sights and warmed our hearts. A question period followed, during which many of his listeners showed their understanding and interest by their questions. A good many of the audience lingered after the program was finished and turned the meeting into a friendly social gathering. New members were signed up.



Borghild, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Olaf Halvorson, found this group of men difficult to manage as she was trying to get a snapshot of them. They are all looking at the table laden with goodies for the evening meal which Mrs. Halvorson had prepared to serve in the garden. The two to the right seem especially eager to get going. From left to right, Birger Osland, Lionel Thorsness, Olaf Halvorson, Theodore Blegen, Jörgen Thompson.

On Wednesday, July 27, the committee motored to Santa Barbara where one of our members, Dr. A. Ousdal, had arranged for a luncheon with other interested persons in that beautiful city founded centuries ago by the Spaniards and rich in memories and memorials from the days of the Caballeros.

A FIG DROPPED

Birger Osland and Professor Thompson are the two veterans on the Executive Committee of the Board of our Association. They have served since the beginning.

Sitting under a fig tree in the garden of President Halvorson after the executive meeting in Huntington Park, Thompson remarked: "You look gloomy, Birger, what is up?"

"Well, Jörgen, do you realize that, at this meeting, we have authorized publications and research work which is likely to cost us every dollar we now have in the treasury?"

"What bothers me is, that I feel I am getting too old for my job. Formerly, I could go to my friends for a lift when we needed it, to Magnus Swenson in Madison; to O. M. Oleson in Fort Dodge or to Arthur Andersen in Chicago. They understood, they could do it, and they were willing. They have all passed away.

"At my age of eighty one does not readily acquire new friends. That is what bothers me. I am too old for the job of treasurer."

A fig dropped from the tree in Osland's lap. Thompson grabbed it and held it up.

"Birger," said he, "that is the way it may happen."

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(Editor's Note) Our Treasurer, Mr. Birger Osland, prepared the above report of the California meeting for the Norwegian-American Press. This report created such a favorable reaction that it was thought desirable to have it printed in our News Letter. We feel under further obligation to Mr. Osland for his kindness in rendering this message from Norwegian to English thus making it available for this issue of the Letter.

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BOOKS AS CHRISTMAS GIFTS

Orders for books published by our Association have already come in. We would suggest that you check over your gift list for this coming Christmas and see who you think would like to get a book.

The STUDIES and RECORDS series seem to gain in popularity. For tables of contents of the various number we would refer you to page 227 in Studies and Records Vol. 15.

Books intended as gifts will be mailed out the day the order is received. Remember to send your greeting card with your order.

Members of the Association are entitled to a discount of 25 percent from the list price. For your convenience the books are listed below.

- Norwegian-American Studies and Records.
Volumes 1 to 15. 1926-1949. \$2.00 each.
- Ole Rynning's True Account of America.
Translated and edited by Theodore C. Blegen. \$1.00.
- Peter Testman's Account of His Experiences in North America. Translated and edited by Theodore C. Blegen. \$1.00.
- America in the Forties: The Letters of Ole Munch Ræder.
Translated and edited by Gunnar J. Malmin. \$2.00.
- Frontier Parsonage: Letters of Olaus Fredrik Duus, a Norwegian minister in Wisconsin, written in the 1850's.
Price \$2.50.
- Norwegian Sailors on the Great Lakes: A Study in the History of American Inland Transportation. By Knut Gjerset. \$2.50.
- Norwegian Migration to America, 1825-1860.
By Theodore C. Blegen. \$3.50.
- Norwegian Sailors in American Waters. A Study in the History of Maritime Activity on the Eastern Seaboard.
By Knut Gjerset. \$2.50.
- The Civil War Letters of Colonel Hans Christian Heg.
Edited by Theodore C. Blegen. \$2.50
- Laur. Larsen: Pioneer College President.
By Karen Larsen. \$3.00.
- The Changing West and Other Essays.
By Laurence M. Larson. \$2.50.
- Norwegian Settlement in the United States.
By Carlton C. Qualey. \$3.00.
- The Log Book of a Young Immigrant.
By Laurence M. Larson. \$3.00.
- Norwegian Migration to America: The American Transition. By Theodore C. Blegen. \$3.50.
- A Long Pull From Stavanger: The Reminiscences of a Norwegian Immigrant. By Birger Osland. \$2.50.
- Saga in Steel and Concrete: A History of Norwegian-American Architects and Engineers. By Kenneth Björk. Price \$4.00.

NEW MEMBERS SINCE MAY 1949

- Dr. John G. Arneberg, Taranza, Calif., changed from ASSOCIATE to LIFE
- Alfred Vaksdal, Corning, New York—Changed from SUSTAINING to LIFE
- Isak H. Faleide, Oak Park, Ill.—Changed from ASSOCIATE to LIFE

John Litell, Queens Village, New York—Changed from ASSOCIATE to LIFE

SUSTAINING

- Reuben E. Aasland, Los Angeles, Calif.
Mrs. Beatrice Kirsten Hofgaard, Los Angeles, Calif.
Elmer L. Clausen, Chicago, Illinois
Mrs. Sigurd Maseng, Chicago, Illinois
Michal Iversen, Detroit, Michigan
Bryn Ostby, Duluth, Minnesota

ASSOCIATE

- Karl Siewers, Chicago, Ill.
Philip Olson, Brooten, Minnesota
Haakon Flottorp, New York City, N. Y.
Dr. phil. Torstein Höverstad, Oslo, Norway
Miss Elise M. Trev, Los Angeles, Calif.
John A. Jorgenson, Los Angeles, Calif.
Capt. Melvin H. Hendriksen, Los Angeles, Calif.
Mrs. Esther H. Almendinger, Sacramento, Calif.
Lt. Com. Eldon S. Hendriksen, Albany, Calif.
Miss Signe Schröder Lassen, Los Angeles, Calif.
Mrs. Rachel Schröder Lassen, Los Angeles, Calif.
Miss Otilia Hansteen, Seattle, Wash.
Severin Klock, Seattle, Wash.
Ludvig M. Rice, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Arthur J. Helland, Minneapolis, Minnesota
E. Wessel Klausen, Los Angeles, Calif.
Fred W. Mathison, Oak Park, Illinois
Mrs. A. Asker, Wilmette, Illinois
Miss Borghild F. Anderson, Appleton, Wisc.
Harald Møyner, St. Louis, Missouri
Torger B. Fadum, Grand Island, New York
Mrs. A. B. Carlson, Canton, S. Dak.
Vice Consul Thorleif B. Jorgensen, Houston, Texas
Attorney Sigurd Anderson, Pierre, S. Dak.
Rev. Gordon J. Hansen, Oakland, Calif.
Dr. Peter A. Munch, St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minn.
Mrs. W. N. Blohm, Elko, Nevada
Miss Olefine Olsen, Chicago, Illinois
Ole Severin Abelseth, San Francisco, Calif.
Conrad J. Wahl, San Francisco, Calif.
Walter Bergan, San Francisco, Calif.
Emil Bie, Brooklyn, New York
Harold K. Sorenson, Evanston, Illinois
Jerome T. Bergeson, Racine, Wisconsin
O. E. Thompson, Duluth, Minnesota