

NEWS LETTER

Norwegian-
Historical
Northfield



American
Association
Minnesota

NUMBER FIVE

MAY, 1937

Dr. Bjorlee Restores Pioneer Church

The Norwegian-American Historical Association is interested in everything that tends to perpetuate the historic picture of our pioneer period. When we have come so far that we can begin to commemorate 70th and 75th anniversaries, we feel as though we have about arrived at our maturity. We have even seen a few centennials celebrated which have a considerable significance for this part of the country.

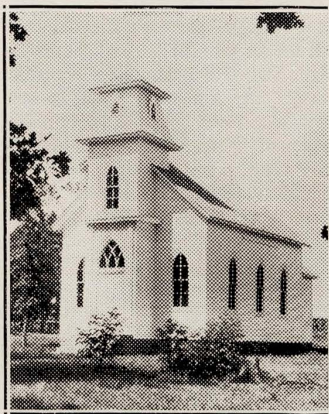
Near Glenville, Iowa, right near the Minnesota line, and only a few miles south of Albert Lea, stands a modest little church around which clusters a lot of memories and a wonderful exhibition of love and reverence on the part of the son of one of the pioneer builders who constructed the church.

Dr. Ignatius Bjorlee, President of the School for the Deaf, at Frederick, Maryland, has set us an example of what love and loyalty can do when they spend themselves along the right channels. The old church built by Elias Bjorlee and a group of pioneers back in 1878, proved too small to house the congregation, resulting from a later union of two congregations served by the Rev. L. N. Tosdal. When a larger church was provided, it became a question what should be done with the old one. Our people have a warm spot in their hearts for the old churches. So here the former members were loath to see it destroyed, even by the tooth of time; but the upkeep of two churches proved pretty expensive.

Dr. Bjorlee saw an opportunity here to honor his father and all the pioneers of the early 70's. So he bought the old church and forthwith had it moved to the original Bjorlee homestead, which he now owns and where he spends a part of each year's vacation. The purchase was made in 1934; the church was thoroughly repaired and restored as nearly as possible to the

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Bjorlie Memorial



Photograph shows church, built by Elias Bjorlie and pioneers in 1878 near Glenville, Iowa, which Dr. Ignatius Bjorlee has moved to the ancestral homestead and restored to its original condition.

72 New Members

The following new members have joined since the publication of the last NEWS LETTER:

Philip M. C. Anderson, Minneapolis, Minn.
Miss Olava Bakken, Northfield, Minn.
Mrs. Lilla Berg, Chicago, Ill.
Andrew B. Bjornson, Minneapolis, Minn.
P. J. Beegen, Webster, S. D.
Mrs. Chas. E. Brady, Manitowoc, Wis.
F. Melius Christiansen, Northfield, Minn.
Julius Christianson, Watford, Wis.
Oscar Christianson, Madison, Wis.
Hon. Theodore Christianson, Minneapolis, Minn.
J. B. Christopherson, Glasgow, Mont.
Miss Dagny Dietrichson, Minneapolis, Minn.
Mrs. R. C. Douglas, Manitowoc, Wis.
B. R. Eggan, Minneapolis, Minn.
Bjarne Ergvin, Flint, Michigan
Iver Gjelstad, Verendrye, N. D.
Rasmus J. Gierde, Minneapolis, Minn.
Rev. H. J. Glenn, Sioux Falls, S. D.
Miss Eleonor Hain, Minneapolis, Minn.
Eilif Halmrast, Minneapolis, Minn.
Lester O. Hauge, Minneapolis, Minn.
Morris J. Hauge, Savanna, Ill.
J. K. Hawkins, Minneapolis, Minn.
Oluf Hellie, Albert Lea, Minn.
Miss Selma Hogenson, Sioux Falls, S. D.
Dr. R. M. Holtant, Minneapolis, Minn.
Charles Ingebretsen, Minneapolis, Minn.
Adrian Johnson, Northfield, Minn.
M. A. Kjeseth, Maunton, Wis.

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Rynning Centennial Set for May 15

June 9, 1937 marks the centennial of the arrival in New York of a party of Norwegian emigrants from Bergen, among whom was Ole Rynning from Snaasa. We are indebted to Dr. O. M. Norlie, Luther College, for a statement of the facts about Rynning and this group of emigrants who tried to start a settlement at Beaver Creek, Illinois.

Rynning was born April 4, 1809, at Brusgaard, Ringsaker, Hedemark. His father for many years preached at Snaasa and here most of the years of his youth were spent. He studied at the University of Norway and fell in love with a peasant girl whom his parents did not favor. He sailed for America on April 14, 1837.

From here on Dr. Norlie has found the most varying records of the fortunes of the colony. He refers to Rasmus Anderson, Blegen, Langeland, and Hatlestad, each giving a different version of the story. The writer of a leaflet entitled, "Ole Rynning Memorial," which also contains a poem by P. O. Bugge, states that all but one—Mons Aadland—of the colony died, Rynning among them.

This seems to differ from all other accounts. The rest of the authors seem to agree that a fever broke out and took many lives, but several members of the colony fled to the Fox River settlement. Mons Aadland refused at first to move, but in 1840 he packed his belongings and moved to Wisconsin. At any rate, this was the pitiful ending of the Beaver Creek colony. Ole Rynning's grave never has been located—another tragic event in the story of so brave an undertaking.

The coming and passing of the Beaver Creek settlement might easily have gone into history unnoted had it not been for the 30-year-old university man whose fortunes had directed him to share fate with a group of his countrymen in search of a new home. It seems providential that a man of such qualifications should have found him-

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Historical Matter Is Sought for Archives

Books, Papers, Data May Have Value

In a way the Archives of the Norwegian-American Historical Association are a measure of how seriously the objectives have been proposed and carried out. We already have an enviable accomplishment in the publishing of records and historical volumes. This is sure to grow and keep apace with the interest of our membership. Of course, all these works become a contemporary part of the Archives. But the Archives, to be worthy of the name, should be much more than that.

As Archives of the Norwegian-American Historical Association it is expected that, in due time, we may here have a place where original, authentic information about Norwegian-Americana may be secured. Students bent on research in connection with problems bearing on the past should find here original sources that would satisfy their sense of scientific accuracy.

This object can be achieved only through the active and alert cooperation of all members. There is no doubt but that every time our attics and storerooms are "house-cleaned", valuable material is thrown out and burned on the rubbish heap. We need to arouse our members to the feeling that even if the individual cannot see any value in a book, a letter, a newspaper, he should think of the Archives and take the trouble to investigate whether the material has historical value. Only as this material seeps into the Archives from widely scattered channels, and from year to year, can we hope to build up a collection of data worthy of the name "Archives."

We have met with gratifying responses from many of the "Bygdelags." However, all our files are not complete. During the past year special effort has been made to assemble and prepare for binding a great deal of this material. The binding expense is going to run into money and it would be a fine thing if the individual "lags" could see their way clear to have this binding done for the Archives.

Mrs. O. E. Rolvaag's contribution of 300 volumes from her husband's library has now been given accession numbers and supplied with proper book plates.

Likewise the library of O. S. Johnson, of Spring Grove, is now available on the archive shelves. Mr. Johnson had the historical sense. He has written three volumes of history dealing with emigrant and early pioneer conditions of our people in Southern Minnesota. He

Lasting Rewards

Quotation from a letter from President Arthur Andersen to a local vice-president of our Historical Association:

"In every organization are found only a few men who, although away from the center of operations, catch the spirit of an organization and the result is a deepening of interest and widening of support from their areas. There is little tangible reward for time and effort spent in building up such an organization as our Historical Association, but the intangible rewards which are the more lasting are greater. Your being in the teaching profession makes it unnecessary for me to point out the tremendous satisfaction of practical scholastic accomplishment."

was a very common farmer who wrote because he loved to do it. Practically without education from his youth, he taught himself to write and recorded hundreds, yes thousands of facts, which would now have been forgotten but for his keen interest.

Steps have been taken to protect the Civil War letters and other perishable materials in sealed cellophane wrappers.

There are now 2,847 volumes besides numerous pamphlets, letters, etc., that have been fully labeled and given proper accession numbers.

We solicit your donations of historical matter such as books, pamphlets, letters or pictures.

ENDOWMENT FUND INTACT

To the careful attention and capable judgment of our treasurer, Mr. Birger Osland, may be credited the fact that the Association has gone through the depression with its endowment fund account intact. According to Mr. Osland, the total par value of our investments on December 31, 1936, was \$15,700.

DR. GLASOE NOW CO-EDITOR

By a decision of the Executive Board at its meeting, Dr. P. M. Glasoe, of St. Olaf College, became co-editor, together with the general secretary, of the NEWS LETTER.

Enlist a new member before the next publication is sent out.

A Three-Year Plan for Publications

A "Three-year Plan" for publications and research, involving the expenditure of approximately \$10,000 a year, was the most important matter discussed at the meeting of the Executive Board last February 17. The meeting was held in the office of the president, Mr. Arthur Andersen, in Chicago, Ill.

Mr. Birger Osland, the treasurer, gave the idea of a "Three-year Plan" an effective impetus when he reported that \$3,500 has been given toward the 1937 publication program. The gift was donated with the understanding that it was to apply on the contributions toward the "Three-year Plan." President Arthur Andersen gave \$2,000; Mr. Osland, the treasurer, contributed \$1,000, and Mr. J. H. Holmboe of Oklahoma City, a member of the Executive Board, gave \$500.

To aid members in soliciting new members, a brief survey of the Association's beginnings, its achievements to date and its future plans is to be printed, according to a decision of the Board. The editorial board will prepare this summary.

72 New Members

(Continued from page 1)

Thor Lanne, Pencer, Minn.
A. C. Larson, Madison, Wis.
Richard Larson, Minneapolis, Minn.
N. C. Lerdahl, Madison, Wis.
Senator Ernest Lundeen, Washington, D. C.
Einar Markhus, Minneapolis, Minn.
J. O. Melby, Oklee, Minn.
Mrs. Olga Moore, Sioux Falls, S. D.
Mjølner Lodge No. 34, Sons of Norway, Silvana, Wash.
Miss Henriette C. Naeseth, Minneapolis, Minn.
Oscar T. Nelson, Minneapolis, Minn.
Miss Evelyn Nilsen, Sioux Falls, S. D.
Ludvig L. Norlin, Sioux Falls, S. D.
Norse Club, Augustana College, Sioux Falls, S. D.
Rev. O. C. Odden, Deerfield, Wis.
Henry Olson, Storm Lake, Iowa.
Milford Olson, Minoaka, Ill.
Mrs. M. H. Owen, Detroit, Mich.
Paula L. Paulsen, Chicago, Ill.
Mrs. Finna Pottersen, Chicago, Ill.
G. Prestegaard, Lincoln, Neb.
E. C. Olson, Minneapolis, Minn.
Rev. Elias Rasmussen, Minneapolis, Minn.
R. N. Ristad, Chicago, Ill.
Andrew A. Roberg, Minneapolis, Minn.
Hans Rognley, Hills, Minn.
E. C. Sonnesyn, Minneapolis, Minn.
Senator Henrik Shipstead, Washington, D. C.
Arthur Solum, Northfield, Minn.
Gustave Sandro, New Effington, N. D.
Andreas Stenseth, Albert Lea, Minn.
Miss Ann Strand, Canton, S. D.
Martin Strand, New Richmond, Wis.
Harry S. Swenson, Minneapolis, Minn.
H. Thorikson, Madison, Wis.
Rev. C. S. Thorpe, Minneapolis, Minn.
Dr. Anne Tjomsland, New York City
Prof. A. A. Tollefs, Sioux Falls, S. D.
B. B. Tunold, Minneapolis, Minn.
R. A. Trovatten, St. Paul, Minn.
Miss Ruth Wahl, Fairview, S. D.
Waldemar Westergaard, Los Angeles, Calif.
Christian W. Wirstad, Sioux Falls, S. D.

A Plea for Our Old Stone Churches

Many of the old churches in the Mid-West as well as in other parts of the country were built of stone, especially where stone fit for the purpose was found nearby. We know of several such churches here in Minnesota. The old stone churches have passed through a very precarious period in history, the era when the younger generation all of a sudden woke up to the fact that the old stone churches were old fashioned, quite out of date, and so new churches had to arise to take their places.

It was a job to raze such a structure. They were built with walls two-and-a-half to three feet in thickness—built as if they were intended to defy the wear and tear of time. Churches just like our stone churches are still standing and in actual use in Europe with 800 to 1,000 years of history behind them.

The calamity is that any one of our pioneer stone churches should have been torn down. It would be wholesome if we would cultivate more respect for our early traditions. The remaining stone churches among us should be kept up and allowed to stand. They will stand for a thousand years. Let us follow Dr. Bjorlee's example and make memorials of our pioneer structures—the solid stone churches built by our pioneer fathers will serve creditably as such memorials.

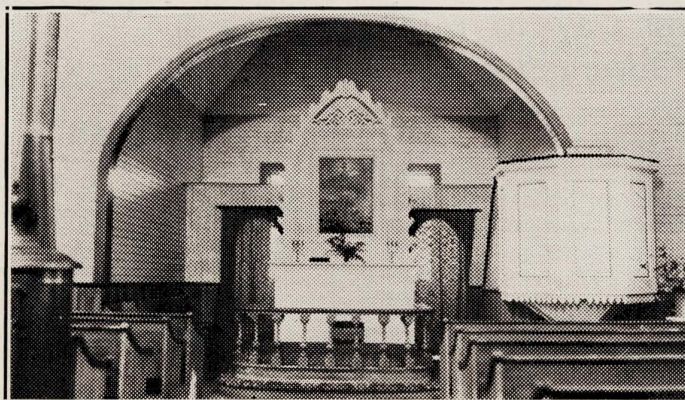
May I be allowed to tell a story here? It is true as far as I know the facts from personal observation. It is about a pioneer stone church at Spring Grove, Minnesota.

The Norwegian emigration into Spring Grove began in the early 50's. The congregation was organized in 1855 and the first church—a stone church, built of local limestone—was erected in 1861 at an estimated cost of \$3,000. Some cracks developed in the stone work and people talked about them and worked up a state of fear as to the safety of the structure. One Sunday morning the wind was driving white fleecy clouds from north to south. A woman attending service in the stone church looked up along the spire. With the moving clouds for a background, the tower seemed to be moving. The woman ran away screaming and shouting that the tower was falling.

Scares like this, together with the knowledge of the cracks, left a feeling of wariness in the minds of the people. To quiet the fears of the congregation, great hewn oak logs had been raised against the church on both north and south

Enlist a new member before the next publication is sent out.

Interior of Restored Bjorlie Church



After 59 years the Bjorlie church, erected by pioneers near Glenville, Iowa, has become a permanent memorial to its founder. Picture shows interior with chancel, altar and pulpit, at right, as they were in original arrangement. Front pews are visible and, at extreme left, is a stove for heating.

sides as if to bolster up the walls. The first remembrance I have of Spring Grove is the old stone church with those log lean-to's. It was in the summer of 1876. I was then a little less than three years old.

Before we came to Spring Grove the congregation had a real scare in addition to the cracks, the clouds, etc. It was confirmation day and the church was crowded to the very doors. In the balcony, boards had been laid between the seats on both sides of the narrow aisle. Right in the midst of the service there was a crash. A board, too heavily loaded, broke in the gallery.

As one man the whole assembly arose and rushed for the door, no doubt thinking (if mob action can be said to be due to thought) that the church was falling. Women and children fell down and were walked upon. Men climbed up and broke the windows and plunged through them head first. One Mr. Bredesen, who as late as 1901 lived here on St. Olaf Avenue, was one of the young men hurled through a window. His wrist was so badly cut that he was in imminent danger of bleeding to death. There was no doctor in the village and Caledonia was ten miles away. A team of horses hitched to a clumsy lumber wagon was the only ambulance. So far as I know, Mr. Bredesen was the only person seriously hurt. He was gotten to the doctor with enough blood left in his veins to start life over again and live to a ripe old age.

But the church had to go. For one thing, the railroad wanted to come through just where it stood. Then the congregation erected a magnificent brick structure, with a tower 148 feet high in 1876, at a cost of \$16,000.

—P. M. G.

Dr. Bjorlee Restores Pioneer Church

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condition it was in when it was dedicated in 1878. There it stands today as a permanent memorial to the brain and brawn that conquered a wilderness, but did not forget that man does not live by bread alone.

The Bjorlie-Thorstenson family meets in annual reunion on these historic premises. One of the important events of the reunion is the divine service in the old church. The dedication services of Sunday, July 21, 1935, were impressive. President L. W. Boe, of St. Olaf College, preached the dedication sermon; his brother, Rev. Andrew Boe, of Superior, Wisconsin, officiated at the altar. Their father, the late Rev. N. E. Boe, had for twenty years been the pastor of this congregation and had preached many a sermon from the same pulpit. President Boe spoke on the very appropriate text: "Honor thy father and thy mother that it may be well with thee."

Pictures of all the pastors who have served this congregation since its original organization in 1870 hang in the church, each picture inscribed with the dates of the pastor's service.

This association welcomes news of events of a historical nature such as the story just given. We want items about pioneer history, telling of the deeds of men and women that have made us what we are. Documents, old newspapers, letters, things that may seem of little importance to you, may be of great value historically. Send them to us.

Have you secured that new Member?

Rynning Centennial Celebration Set for May 15

Festival Day to Mark Observances

(Continued from Page 1)

self in the situation of Ole Rynning from 1837 to his death in 1838. He knew the reasons that drove his friends from the home country; he saw the abundant areas in America and reasoned that a spell of fever, or other hard luck, could not be charged up against the country which had opened up to welcome them.

In less than a year this intelligent man had gathered enough facts and had interpreted them in such a way that he had formed a definite philosophy about the meaning of America to his countrymen. He wrote down his impressions and after his death the manuscript of "The Truth About America" was found among his belongings. This was sent to Rev. Krogh, of Eidsvold, Norway, who, after some deletion, sponsored its publication. Coming from a man of the qualifications of Ole Rynning, the book fired the imaginations and shaped the convictions of hundreds and thousands of Norwegians. A flood of emigration started, sending individuals, families and large parties to America year after year.

Haaland shows that in 1836, 200 came; in 1837, another 200. The numbers grew until 1843 shows a total of 1,600. There was a slight falling off during the years of the Civil War, of course. Following the war, our countrymen came by the tens of thousands annually. In 1873, the number reached 16,247; in 1882, there were 29,101 who came. This latter number seems never to have been exceeded, though from 1882 to 1893 the number never fell below 12,000 annually. Haaland quotes the census of 1900 as authority for the statement that in that year there were actually living in this country 336,388 people **born in Norway**. His careful calculations lead him to the conclusion that there was a total of 1,200,000 Americans of Norse extraction in the year 1900.

Of course, it is difficult to say how much credit should be given to Ole Rynning's "The Truth About America," for all of this. One thing is certain: Rynning saw with a clear eye. He saw visions of his countrymen fleeing conditions at home, which had become well nigh hopeless, coming to America where land was abundant and cheap and where grit, courage and endurance—the natural endowments of Norwegians as a people—would put them in position to win for themselves and their families, conditions of

ENLIST A NEW
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existence of which they never could have dreamed back home.

How clearly Rynning saw we know now. Picture to yourself the meagre pittance that fell to the lot of the average "husmand," then drive through large areas of Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, South and North Dakota and see the farmsteads erected by just such people; houses of the dimensions of palaces, barns—not one, but two, three, four—silos, not one but often a quartet of them.

The story of this region sounds like the sheerest fairy tale. Good black soil, the God-given endowment of this Mississippi Valley tract, mixed with emigrant brain and brawn (don't forget the brain, for it has a large share in the wringing of success from a nature which grudgingly yielded foot by foot) that mixture was irresistible. It has been said that you can start from La Crosse and walk to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, without stepping off Norwegian-owned soil.

Rynning came, saw and was conquered just at the opportune time. Ten, twenty, thirty years later would have been that much too late. Our people came just in time to secure possession of the choicest farming areas of the whole United States. We have a real dirt farmer living here in Northfield, William F. Schilling, who served as a member of President Hoover's Farm Board, and who has traveled from coast to coast lecturing to farmers and all sorts of societies and organizations interested in agricultural problems.

In his column contributed weekly to the Northfield News, Mr. Schilling frequently refers to his home state and community as "God's Country." If you want to know why, just follow him on a trip South, East or West and you will return to this area convinced that he is absolutely correct in his conclusion. And this area—God's Country, with all that the name implies of sentiment, gratitude, loyalty, faith and appreciation is **our country**—our people are here almost two million strong. Our schools and churches dot the map of this territory. Our ideals of culture predominate. Our boys and

girls march forward to take their places in making real the visions Ole Rynning saw and which he set down so wonderfully in "The Truth About America."

And now we are going to celebrate the centennial of the initiation of this grand folk-movement that has made us what we are in America. May 15, is set aside as a holiday at St. Olaf College and three fine programs have been arranged. In the morning at 9:30 o'clock the Rynning Centennial will be observed. Addresses will be given by Dr. Theodore C. Blegen, who translated Rynning's book and made it available as a publication of this Society, and by Professor Laurence M. Larson, head of the Department of History of the University of Illinois, and President of the American Historical Society. Dr. Blegen is Professor of History at the University of Minnesota, Secretary of the Minnesota Historical Society and Editor-in-Chief of all publication activities of the Norwegian-American Historical Association. On this program the St. Olaf student body, accompanied by the St. Olaf Band and directed by Dr. F. Melius Christiansen will sing "Landkjenning." The poem is by Bjornsen, the music by Grieg.

In the afternoon, at 3:00 o'clock, a Norwegian patriotic program is to be given in honor of the 123rd anniversary of the Norwegian constitution. The festival address will be delivered by the Rev. D. G. Ristad, D. D., of Manitowoc, Wisconsin, President of the Eastern District of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America. A prologue in honor of Ole Rynning, written by P. O. Bugge, of Bisbee, North Dakota, will be read as a part of this program by the Rev. Fridtjof Eide, of Ostrander, Minnesota. In addition, a replica of the monument to be erected in honor of Ole Rynning, at Snaasa, in Norway, on the 4th of July, 1937, will be presented to St. Olaf College by a representative of Snaasalaget. Music for this program will be furnished by the United Norwegian Male Singers of Minneapolis, 150 strong, directed by Prof. J. M. Wick.

At 7:30 o'clock, the celebration of the Rynning Centennial will be concluded by a concert given by the St. Olaf College Choir. The concert is given as a compliment to the visitors of the day. No admission will be charged.

NEXT PUBLICATION IN MAY

Editorial work is well under way on the Association's next publication, **The Changing West and Other Essays**, by Dr. Laurence M. Larsen. The managing editor, Dr. Theodore Blegen, expects to have the book off the press by May 1 or June 1.

Have you secured that new Member?