

# The Norwegian-American Historical Association

Northfield, Minnesota

Number Twenty

January, 1946

## NEWS LETTER

FROM THE SECRETARY'S OFFICE TO  
THE ASSOCIATION MEMBERS

Edited by J. JÖRGEN THOMPSON, Secretary

KENNETH BJÖRK, NORMAN NORDSTRAND, Co-editors

### Six New Publications

Association members will receive at least six new volumes in the not distant future, as compensation for the necessarily curtailed production of the war period. This information has just come from our Managing Editor, Dean Theodore C. Blegen.

Perhaps first to appear will be Volume XV of *Studies and Records*. Articles already in the hands of the editors include "A Norwegian Pioneer Ballad," by Einar Haugen; "Finnish Emigration from Norway to America," by John I. Kolehmainen; "An Immigrant's Advice on America," some letters written by Sören Bache during a visit to Norway in 1842, by Clarence L. Clausen; "Thorstein Veblen and St. Olaf College," by Kenneth Bjork; "Kristofer Janson," by Georg J. M. Walen; "The Covered Wagon Trek from Muskego to Scandinavia in 1852," by Alfred O. Erickson; "Norwegian Rural Life a Half Century Ago," by Albert O. Barton; "Erik L. Petersen," the story of a Catholic missionary and his work among the immigrants, by Jacob Hodnefield; and the usual bibliographical article, also by Mr. Hodnefield.

Readers of Dr. Blegen's second volume of *Norwegian Migration to America* will be happy to know that the letters of Gro Svendsen, from which the author quoted freely in one chapter, will soon appear in book form. These letters, translated into English by Miss Pauline Farseth and edited by Dr. Blegen, were written in the 1860's and 1870's by a strong-hearted and large-minded woman of the Iowa frontier.

The Association has not as yet published a diary or collection of writings by a pioneer pastor. But nearing completion at the present moment is *A Pioneer Pastor on the Mid-Western Frontier*, containing the letters written from Wisconsin in the 1850's by the Reverend Olaus F. Duus. These letters are being translated by the Verdandi Club of Minneapolis under the direction of Dean Blegen.

Ready for the printers is a comprehensive index to Volume I-X, inclusive, of *Studies and Records*, which has been compiled by Alf Houkom.

November, 1946, has been set as the tentative date of publication for Dr. Kenneth Bjork's *Saga in Steel and Concrete*, the story of the Norwegian engineers and their work in America. This book of some 500 pages deals with the development of machines, bridges, tunnels, metallurgy, skyscrapers, scientific management, architecture and the like. Interrupted by wartime emergencies, the author will put the finishing touches to this volume during the present winter months.

The long-awaited translation of Sören Bache's well-known diary is also nearing completion. The work of translating and editing has been jointly undertaken by Professors Elviken and C. L. Clausen.

### Seventh Triennial Meeting

The seventh triennial meeting of the Norwegian-American Historical Association was held at Hotel Leamington in Minneapolis, on Tuesday, May 15, 1945, at two o'clock in the afternoon. The meeting was authorized by the Office of Defense Transportation with the understanding that the representation would be drawn largely from the membership in the Twin City area. There were thirty-three members present and 188 proxies had been sent in.

Reports by the President, Secretary, Treasurer and Managing Editor were heard and accepted as part of the records of the Association.

The following officers and members of Boards were elected for the current triennium:

#### EXECUTIVE BOARD

Olaf Halvorson, Huntington Park, California, President  
Lionel G. Thorsness, Chicago, Illinois, Vice-President  
Axel Wærenskjold, Piedmont, California, Vice-President  
J. Jørgen Thompson, Northfield, Minnesota, Secretary  
Birger Osland, Chicago, Illinois, Treasurer  
S. J. Arneson, Brooklyn, New York  
Frederic Schaefer, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
A. N. Rygg, Brooklyn, New York  
David T. Nelson, Decorah, Iowa

#### BOARD OF FINANCE

T. Stabo, Decorah, Iowa  
Theodore Wold, Minneapolis, Minnesota  
Thorsten Y. Olsen, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

#### BOARD OF EDITORS

Theodore C. Blegen, St. Paul, Minnesota, Managing Editor  
Kenneth Bjork, Northfield, Minnesota  
Einar Haugen, Madison, Wisconsin  
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Agnes M. Larson, Northfield, Minnesota  
Karen Larsen, Northfield, Minnesota  
O. M. Norlie, Northfield, Minnesota  
John Frohlin, Bayonne, New Jersey

#### LOCAL VICE-PRESIDENTS

C. Martin Alsager, Chicago, Illinois  
Helmer Blegen, Sioux Falls, South Dakota  
Magnus Björndal, Weehawken, New Jersey  
J. N. Brown, Moorhead, Minnesota  
G. M. Bruce, St. Paul, Minnesota  
Kristine Haugen, Seattle, Washington  
O. I. Hertsgaard, Minneapolis, Minnesota  
Frida Bue-Homnes, Crosby, North Dakota  
J. M. Johnson, Chicago, Illinois  
Peter Myrvold, San Francisco, California



Carl Söyland, Brooklyn, New York  
 B. L. Wick, Cedar Rapids, Iowa  
 Arne E. Williamson, Chicago, Illinois

The following report of the Committee on Resolutions, read by Mr. Carl G. O. Hansen, was accepted:

"As members attending the Triennial meeting of the Norwegian-American Historical Association, we herewith express our sincere appreciation of the services rendered the Association during the past triennium by its officers and editorial committee, thanking them for their faithfulness and diligence in performance of the duties devolving upon them in their various capacities. We feel that their work has been valuable and effective in making a reality out of the ideas proposed and the plans evolved to make Norwegian-American contributions to civilization and culture an integral part of American history.

"We wish to express to Dr. Theodore C. Blegen our deep appreciation of his accomplishments, so ably assisted by numerous writers, in bringing out such an imposing array of publications, the number of volumes now being twenty-seven.

"The Association is deeply grateful to Olaf Halvorson, Arthur Andersen, Magnus Björndal, Ole Gullickson, The Churchill Cabinet Co., and Mrs. A. J. Hoiness for their liberal gifts, making possible the realization of Association projects. We are also happy to know that a bequest from Ola Johan and Martha Særvold has enabled the Association to further pursue its objectives.

"The Association is sincerely appreciative to St. Olaf College for arranging it so that J. Jörgen Thompson and his personal secretary, Miss Opsal, can perform the secretarial work of the Association as part of their regular college duties.

"Likewise our appreciation goes to Luther College for having given the use of a complete building as a museum for the Association and for the services of Professor S. S. Reque as curator.

"As the Association now approaches its Twentieth Anniversary, the members feel that the success attained in a large measure is due to efforts and sacrifices made by its pioneers who no longer are with us. In that group we especially wish to call to mind the work of the one last departed, Dr. L. W. Boe, who at the time of his death was the Vice-President of the Association, and from its very inception an ardent worker in our cause.

"Among the pioneers which we still have within our ranks is Editor Kristian Prestgard, one of the most enthusiastic among our founders. Ill health prevents him from attending our meeting, and we herewith convey to him our heartiest greetings and best wishes.

"The Association considers it a pleasure and an honor to have the Honorable Edward C. Thye, Governor of Minnesota, present at the Association banquet, and offers its thanks for his inspiring address.

"The Association feels honored by the presence at our meeting of Norwegian Consul Reidar Solum and offers its thanks for his words of encouragement.

"All members present respectfully ask Consul Solum to convey to King Håkon and the Norwegian Government their congratulations on Norway's liberation. We rejoice at the thought that Norway again is free, and we feel that the manner in which the true Norwegians valiantly have struggled in order that liberty and justice again

might prevail in the land of our fathers will lend strength and encouragement to us in our work as members of the Norwegian-American Historical Association."

Signed,

O. I. HERTSGAARD  
 O. J. H. PREUS  
 CARL G. O. HANSEN

The program in connection with the dinner session in the evening was planned as a testimonial to Mr. Birger Osland. In this issue of the News Letter we print the talk given by Dr. Theodore C. Blegen, and also the remarks by Mr. Osland at the close of the session.

—J. JÖRGEN THOMPSON, Secretary

### "It Will Be Done and It is Being Done"

An Impromptu Talk

By

THEODORE C. BLEGEN

We had little to work with at the outset. We had no funds. We were few in number. But we had some ideas. We had a purpose. We mustered a certain amount of energy. We looked to things of value that we might one day accomplish. And we had some big men, men unafraid, devoted, hard-working, forward-looking.

One was O. E. Rølvaag. His enthusiasm, force, and faith that we could do something worth doing were contagious and had much to do with the early success of the Association. He still lives on in the spirit of this Association.

Another was Knut Gjerset. He was stubborn, indomitable. Once he got his teeth into this project, he wouldn't let go. He had a bull-dog grip. He was the central figure in the launching of the Association. He knew history and historical records. He understood what this Association might become, if only we had energy, vision and tenacity.

There were others, and one of them was Birger Osland, treasurer these many years, unflagging both in leadership and in support.

I had not worked long with him before I discovered that he had a sense of history—a sense both of the importance of history and of the importance of collecting, preserving, and using the records of history.

He took that torch from the pioneers and kept its flame alive. One of the earliest of our pioneer newspaper editors, nearly a century ago, had that sense of history—and I sometimes wonder if it is not a marked trait among Norwegians. That editor sent out what, in these sophisticated days, we should call a questionnaire. He wanted to know the story of the settlements, why people left their native land, their objectives in seeking the New World, their experiences in crossing the Atlantic, their search for land, their pioneer experiences. And in the 1860's another frontier editor tramped about the Middle West interviewing pioneer settlers and taking down their stories from their own lips, with a sharp sense of the authenticity of the first-hand account.

It is that kind of feeling for the actuality and importance of history that I noted in Birger Osland. It was coupled with an urgency to gather up and interpret records not alone for the Norwegian-Americans, but for American



historians and for the American people. He understood that our findings must be presented in English—not alone for our children and grandchildren but for the American public.

Another thing that marked Birger Osland was his firmness in standing for permanent values. Many forces sought to pull us away from our main purposes. We were asked to do this and that. Some people said we were on the wrong track. Get out a popular magazine, they said. Make your appeal to a big public. Go in for popular appeal. We said "No." We said we shall stand for long-term values, for genuine contributions to knowledge, for the highest standards of historical scholarship. We shall stand against filiofetism—we shall tell the truth without bias. In supporting this stand Mr. Osland was a bulwark of the Association. He never let us down. I could always count upon him to support high standards and long-term values in our editorial work. Quality first—no play for immediate applause—that was his concept of the job. It was, and is, a sound concept.

And there was another thing. This man was never frightened by big concepts. Three years ago many had begun to think that we had done a very good job. There was a hint of complacency in the air. We remembered Knut Gjerset's dream. "I look out into the future," he used to say. "I see a whole shelf of books setting forth the saga of the Norwegian immigrant in America." Some thought the dream extravagant—but here we were, long after his day, with more than twenty volumes on our shelf, all published by the Association. The dream had come true. So I tried to puncture that complacency—and scare Birger Osland. I prepared a report called "Planning for the Future", and sketched a program calling for the preparation and publication of some seventy-five additional volumes.

I thought that that plan would get him down—but this man doesn't scare. I might just as well have said 175 volumes. He was ready to support a ten-year, a twenty-year, program. That is the kind of support he has given me as editor of our publications.

I might speak of many other things—his wide human interest, his concern about all aspects of history, his devotion to the interests of this Association in a score of ways. But there was one thing he had not done. Some seven or eight years ago I took him to task. I had been thinking about his own life story. In many conversations, discussions, debates, and amiable differences of opinion, I had got bits of that story—but not enough. I said, "Birger, why don't you write your own story. Do that and we'll publish it. The story of a Norwegian immigrant in one of the great urban communities of America! Rølvaag made the rural 'giants in the earth' live in fiction—we need to catch the overtones and undertones of their urban counterparts."

Tonight, with Birger Osland as our guest of honor, we are celebrating the publication of that life story—*A Long Pull from Stavanger*. A long pull from Stavanger to Chicago, to the heart of America! And, for me, a dream come true—a shared dream, for Mr. Osland took up the idea with his characteristic vigor and never ceased, until the pages were locked up for printing, to revise and improve and add to and perfect the narrative of his experiences from the day when he arrived, with six dollars capi-

tal, in the city of "railroads, factories and stockyards, mud, smoke and smells" down to the present.

As one of the founders and leaders of the Association, he reviews the beginnings and the work of this organization, with deep understanding of the significance of interpreting immigrant forces in American life. He is authentically Norwegian-American and he is authentically American. "I have come to pity those immigrants," he writes, "whose body is on this side, but whose soul still seems to linger on the other side of the ocean."

When somebody questioned a great civic enterprise in Chicago, Mr. Osland said, "It will be done and it is being done." There you have a self-portrait of the man drawn in nine words.

So tonight I am glad to join you in doing honor to Birger Osland, Treasurer of the Association, author of our twenty-seventh volume. From what I have said—and I have told only part of the story—you will understand why I do this with sincere and whole-hearted enthusiasm.

This is a man. This is a creative, driving force. Without him we could not have accomplished, on the editorial and scholarly side, what we have done during these twenty years since the Association was born.

#### Response

By

BIRGER OSLAND

Mr. Chairman, Governor Thye, Ladies and Gentlemen:—My advice to you is to believe only half of what you have heard tonight about me. I don't think I am able quite to recognize myself. I only wish my wife were here tonight to get a clearer understanding of her mate.

At the meeting this afternoon we listened to a discussion about good and bad translations from Norwegian to English, and that recalled to my mind a story of a boy in Stavanger who was studying English. He had not studied very long. His father, who was a minister, was very proud of the boy. One time the minister gave a little party at his home and called the boy in—he wanted to show his guests the progress the boy had made already. Opening the Bible he selected at random a sentence and said to the boy, "Let us see if you can translate this sentence into English." This was the sentence: "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak," which in Norwegian reads, "Aanden er villig, men kjødet er skrøbeligt." The boy promptly translated thus: "The ghost is willing, but the meat is poor." That is just the way I feel now because I am not a speaker. Coming from Illinois, I should like to measure up to the other orators, but you know, Mr. Governor, we can't do everything in this world.

I am going to tell you a little something about this book. I started it about eight years ago. I think it was Blegen and Rølvaag who wanted me to write the story of a city-immigrant from Norway. We had many stories about the farmers. We also had books about ministers and professors, but now they wanted someone to write who had come to this country and had taken part in the ordinary city life in our states. I really didn't realize what kind of task I had undertaken, nor the kind of taskmaster I had to deal with in Dr. Blegen. He returned my manuscript with marginal annotations such as these: "What do you mean by this?" "This is not clear." "You said this before." Then I would grab my blue pencil and scratch out the whole



business and rewrite it. But there was one redeeming feature in it—Blegen never got tired.

I felt the only thing to do was to write it in the form of reminiscences, which practically means an autobiography. If I were going to use fictitious characters it would be a novel, and I am no novelist. So I chose the form of autobiography—and if it meets with the interest that is indicated here tonight, that is all the reward that I can expect, and it is a great reward.

When I came here and was told I was a guest of honor, I had no idea of that. If I had, I probably would have prepared a speech, but I had no chance to do it. I want to thank the Association, all you guests, and particularly the President, Mr. Halvorson, and Dr. Blegen for the fine words they have directed to me, and I assure you that it has touched me deeply. Thank you!

### What the Reviewers Say

About Birger Osland's *A Long Pull from Stavanger*:

"It is the success story of a man whose dreams of America came true and who writes with gratitude about the opportunities this nation provided, without ever betraying the cultural heritage which came to him from the land of his fathers. . . . Accounts like these help one to understand the importance of immigrant forces in American urban life and the robust patriotism and faith in free enterprise which mark men who have succeeded in negotiating the difficult transition from the Old World to the New."

—*Journal of Modern History*

"The volume is an absorbing human story of 'only yesterday'."

—*Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*

"We are happy to be introduced at last to the problems that faced the Norwegian immigrant in a large city, to see how his way of life, treading the asphalt and riding the streetcar, differed from that of his countryman, working the corn rows . . . the book is engagingly and warmly written."

—*Pacific Northwest Quarterly*

About *Studies and Records*, Vol. XIV:

"Students of the American immigration movement have come to look forward expectantly to the appearance of each new volume of the publications of the Norwegian-American Historical Association. They will not be disappointed in this one, for it is another valuable addition to the literature of what Dean Blegen has aptly called the 'American transition.' Like its predecessors in the series, the book is a happy combination of interpretive writing and illuminating documentary materials, selected and edited with high standards of professional competence and discrimination."

—*American Historical Review*

"The rich and varied contents, the competence of the contributors, the superb editorial work, and the attractive format make the task of the reviewer a joy and whet his appetite for more. . . . These well documented articles are not mere episodes . . . they have grown out of acquaintance with significant events in European and American development upon which they shed more light."

—*Journal of Modern History*

## The Norwegian-American Historical Association

BIRGER OSLAND, Treasurer

### REPORT FOR 1945

Balance from last year.....		\$2,807.37
Receipts:		
Life memberships .....	\$ 200.00	
Associate and sustaining membership dues .....	2,480.70	
Book sales .....	801.54	
Interest on investments.....	880.20	
Profit on bonds called.....	1,004.77	
Contributions:		
Mrs. A. J. Hoiness, Calmar, Iowa (In memory of A. J. Hoiness)	74.00	
Churchill Cabinet Co., Chicago....	50.00	
Ole Gullicksen, Chicago.....	50.00	5,541.21
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		\$8,348.58
Disbursements:		
Publications (postage, freight, express included) .....	\$2,262.87	
Stenographic and other assistance..	600.00	
Stationery and office supplies.....	319.14	
General expense (bank's safekeeping fee, \$21.11).....	31.86	
Postage .....	185.15	
Exchange on checks.....	37.47	
Telephone and telegraph.....	9.63	
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Total expenses for year.....		3,446.12
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		\$4,902.46
Amount invested during year:		
Purchased .....	\$17,366.00	
Cost of bonds called.....	14,339.81	3,026.19
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Cash balance in bank Dec. 31, 1945.....		\$1,876.27

## Endowment Fund

### INVESTMENTS

Par Value	
\$ 7,000	U. S. Treasury 2½s, 1967-1972.
3,000	U. S. Certificate of Indebtedness 7/8%, 1946.
2,000	U. S. Savings Bond, Series G, 1956.
100	U. S. Savings Bond, Series F, 1956.
8,000	Laclade Gas Light Co., 3½s, 1965.
4,000	National Gas and Electric Corp. "A" 1st 5s, 1953.
2,000	Saguenay Power Co., Ltd., 1st 4¼s, 1966.
2,000	Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis Ry. Co. 4s, 1978
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\$28,100	par value, at a total cost of \$28,541.00 with an annual interest income of \$896.25, or 3.14% on the invested amount.

Chicago, Illinois  
January 8, 1946