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THE NORWAY BUILDING OF THE 1893 CHICAGO WORLD'S FAIR



A Building's Journey from Norway to America
An Architectural Legacy

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THE NORWAY BUILDING OF THE 1893 CHICAGO WORLD'S FAIR

*A Building's Journey
From Norway to America:
An Architectural Legacy*

*Thanks Mt. Horeb.
Jock B. Whinn
Takk Skul du ha!*

*Brian J. Bigler
Lynn Martinson Mudrey
Preface—Rolf Erickson*

THE NORWAY BUILDING
OF THE
1893 CHICAGO
WORLD'S FAIR

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PREFACE

LITTLE NORWAY AND THE NORWAY PAVILION

Little Norway has always been a part of my consciousness, it seems. My parents took me there when I was a boy and the impression I came away with was that it was an enchanted place. I can recall so many details from that first visit, the secluded valley, the cozy cottages, the bed in which Ole Bull slept, the meandering stream, the cold water of the spring, and, of course, the Norway Building with all its treasure boxes and carved faces of the Norwegian kings. Dad took slides of the visit, which no doubt reinforced my memory, and I was permitted to buy a souvenir in the gift shop which thereafter stood on our knickknack shelf at home.

Now after some forty years and many visits later, Little Norway still captures my imagination and I marvel at the beauty of Nissedahle (Little Norway) and the lovely Norway pavilion in its perfect setting. I wonder at the elegance of the concept which created this magical kingdom.

As an adult I have learned to appreciate more fully the buildings with their furnishings as part of the material culture of the Norwegian-Americans and am impressed, naturally, at its being the largest Norwegian-American collection in private hands. The lovely objects clearly were gathered with appreciation for their history and intrinsic beauty. What fun Isak Dahle must have had in recognizing the worth of these things and buying them for his dream home. What pleasure he must have felt when he acquired the Norway Pavilion as the jewel of Nissedahle.

Several years ago the Chicago History Committee of the Norwegian-American Historical Association was formed to collect material about the Norwegian Colony in Chicago. Through my work as chairman I quickly learned that the members of the Chicago Colony took pride in Little Norway and especially the Norway Building from the 1893 Columbian Exposition. They were immensely satisfied that the "Norwegian stave church" from the Chicago Fair was being preserved at Mt. Horeb. Soon I found that Little Norway's founder, Isak Dahle, had been a member of the Chicago Norske Klub, and he had used his contacts in Chicago to enrich the collections at Little Norway. For example, the work of some of Chicago's best-known Norwegian artists, Christian Abrahamsen, Emil Bjørn, and Ben Blessum, found their way into his collection. Abrahamsen was commissioned to do a portrait of Isak's mother Anne; a set of charming watercolors of elves (*nisse*) by Bjørn came to hang in the Norway

THE GRAND WORLD'S

Building and a painting of a Norwegian peasant by Blessum was hung in the entrance building. Another well-known Chicagoan, Ida Sannes, an artist with needle and thread who was best known in the Colony for creating the first costumes of the dance group Leikarringen "Heimhug," designed curtains for many of the buildings.

On trips to Little Norway in these later years, I have had the good fortune to become acquainted with Thea and Asher Hobson, Marcie Winner and now Scott Winner, curators of Little Norway for more than half of its existence, and I am more impressed at the dedication they have had to Isak Dahle's vision of sharing his beautiful things with the public. In quite a remarkable way they have given of their time and resources to ensure the objects in the collection were well cared for.

The most recent evidence of the loving care they have given is the 1992 restoration of the Norwegian pavilion's exterior. Its warm, light brown finish must be very close to how it looked when it was a new building in Chicago's Jackson Park in 1893. Its charm is undeniable and one can well understand why visitors to the Fair frequented it often and used it as a meeting place. Although we are told it was popular with Americans of all ethnic backgrounds, one can easily imagine proud Norwegian parents bringing their American born children there to see a building something like the stave churches they remembered from their youths in Norway.

Over four decades ago my visit to Little Norway one summer Sunday afternoon awakened my imagination and deepened my appreciation for my own background. I know my own experience must be multiplied by thousands and thousands who have visited since the opening in the 1930s. Today Little Norway continues to have a teaching mission, not only for Norwegian-Americans but for all Americans.

This carefully researched and well-written volume on the history of the Norway Pavilion and Little Norway should do much to continue Isak Dahle's dream.

Rolf Erickson

April 27, 1992



Panorama of the Columbian Exposition grounds.

From a stereograph view by B.W. Kilburn, 1893. Mount Horeb Area Historical Society Collection.

THE GRAND WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION

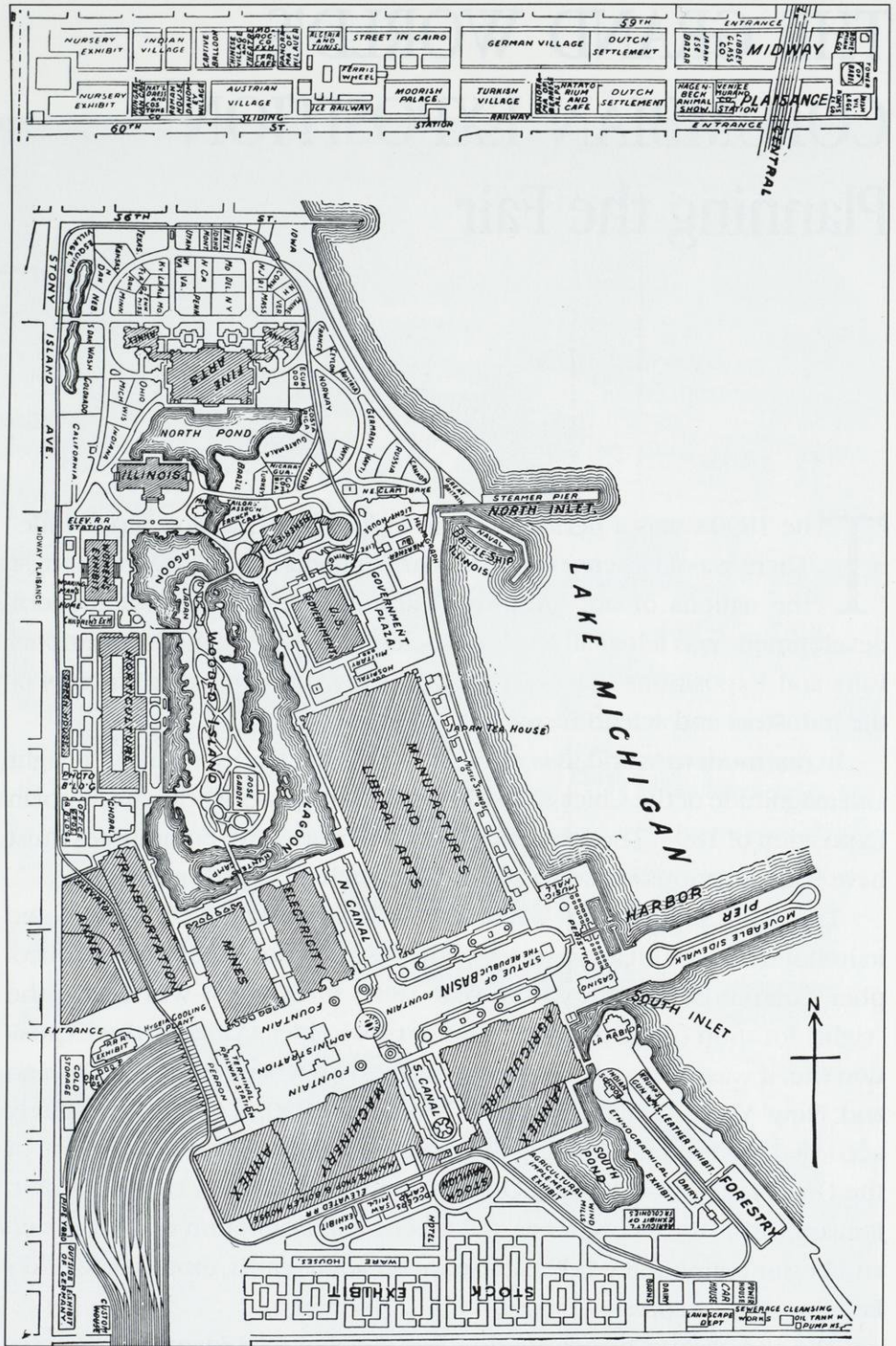
Planning the Fair

The 1890's was a period of rapid industrial expansion worldwide. There was an intense desire for participation in this growth amongst the nations of our western civilization. Enthusiasm for modern development was felt at all levels of society, fostered by the International Fairs and Expositions that were held to showcase the achievements of the industrial and scientific age.

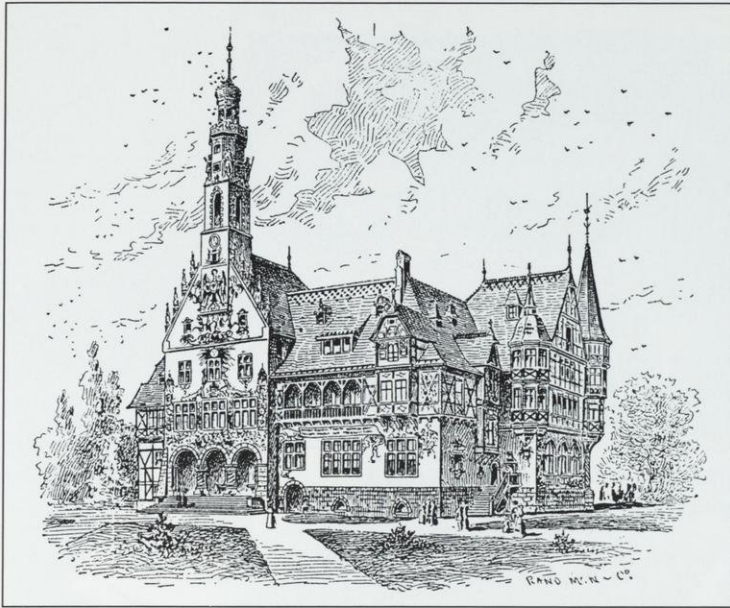
In our modern world, it is difficult to imagine the ingenuity, foresight and magnitude of the Chicago World's Fair—the grand World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. The Fair officials and the respective committees must have had enormous vision to accomplish such an extravaganza.

The World's Fair, or the "White City," as it was often called, was erected in honor of the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus. As early as the year 1889, the contest was on for the "right" location of the fair itself. Out of those cities vying for the Exposition site, it was ultimately narrowed down to a decision between Chicago and New York. "On the 24th of February, 1890, Congress definitely accorded the honor of inviting the world as guest to the 'Phoenix City of the Great Lakes'"¹—Chicago. On July 2, 1890, a site was chosen, and in January, 1891, the Department of Publicity and Promotion was organized and began telling the whole newspaper-reading earth about the World's Fair that was to come.

The site of the Chicago World's Fair covered 1,037 landscaped acres stretching 2 1/2 miles from the point nearest the city to the southern extremity of Jackson Park. Along one side of its border stretched beautiful Lake Michigan. On this location, an assemblage of wondrous archi-



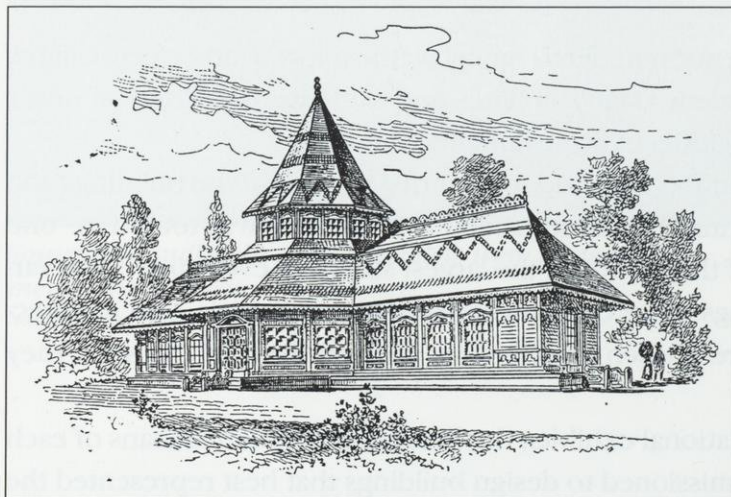
Ground Plan of the World's Fair. Notice the site of the Norway Building to the East of the Fine Arts Building, and the moveable sidewalk on the harbor pier
 From Shepp's World's Fair Photographed, Chicago, 1893.



The German Government Building.

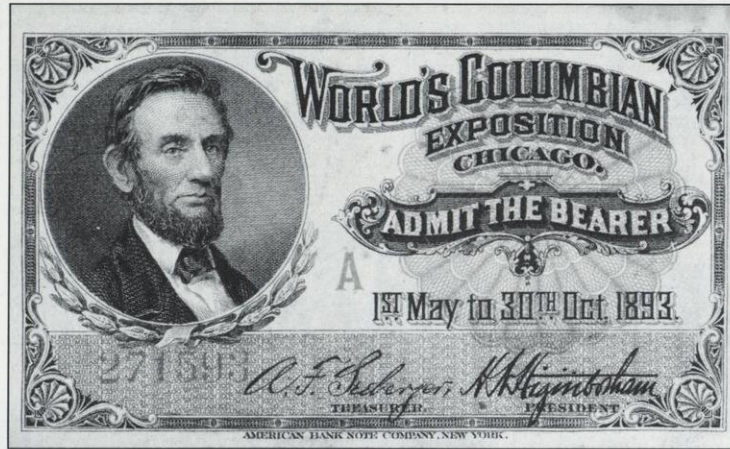


The Norwegian Government Building.
From Rand McNally & Co.'s *Handbook of the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893.*



Ceylon Court.

tectural gems was constructed by the peoples of the United States and the world. Great exhibition halls were built to display the arts, trade goods, natural and man-made sciences, and the industrial ingenuity of the nations, colonies and principalities represented. The park itself surely was a wonderland to the thousands who visited during the duration of the Fair. The most modern conveniences of the day were incorporated into the grand plan. There were, among other innovations, a moving sidewalk on the



Columbian Exposition Admission ticket—1893.
Mount Horeb Area Historical Society Collection.

lakefront pier, an enormous ferris wheel on the midway, and electric lights illuminating the scene. Man's abilities and skills were exerted as never before on the magnificent achievements of the Fair.

Extensive attention was paid to the artistic effect of the buildings and grounds. The Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building was touted as "one of the wonders of the world . . . the largest structure ever built."² The various state buildings were constructed of native materials, and architectural designs were chosen which were characteristic of the state they represented.

For the international exhibits, the best architects and artisans of each nation were commissioned to design buildings that best represented the skills or traditions of their native countries. For example, the German building was designed by one of Germany's premier architects. The Ceylon building was built on the order of a Buddhist temple, and based on ancient ruins found throughout the island. Norway chose the design of a 12th century Christian church as its entry.

The World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 lasted just 6 short months, from May 1st to October 29th. What remains today of this wondrous event are mere souvenirs, newspaper clippings, photos and fragmentary evidence scattered across the land. Few buildings of the Fair have survived. The pavilion erected by the Norwegian government is one of the rare

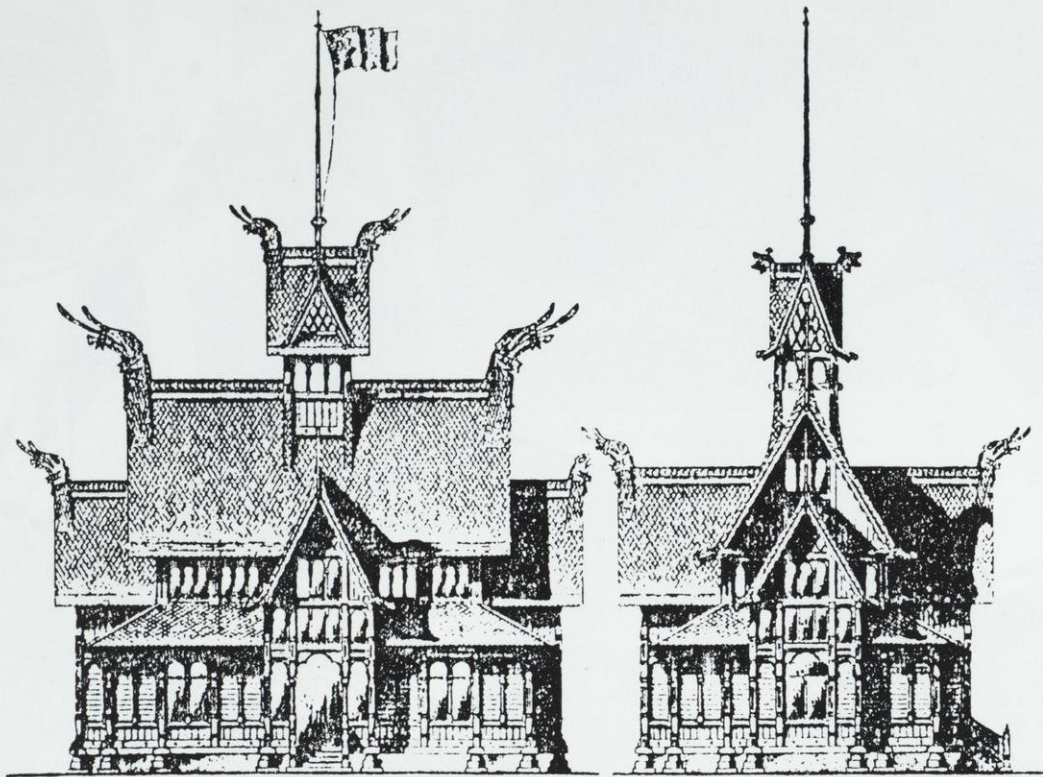


Souvenir handbooks and pamphlets were treasured mementos for visitors to the Fair.

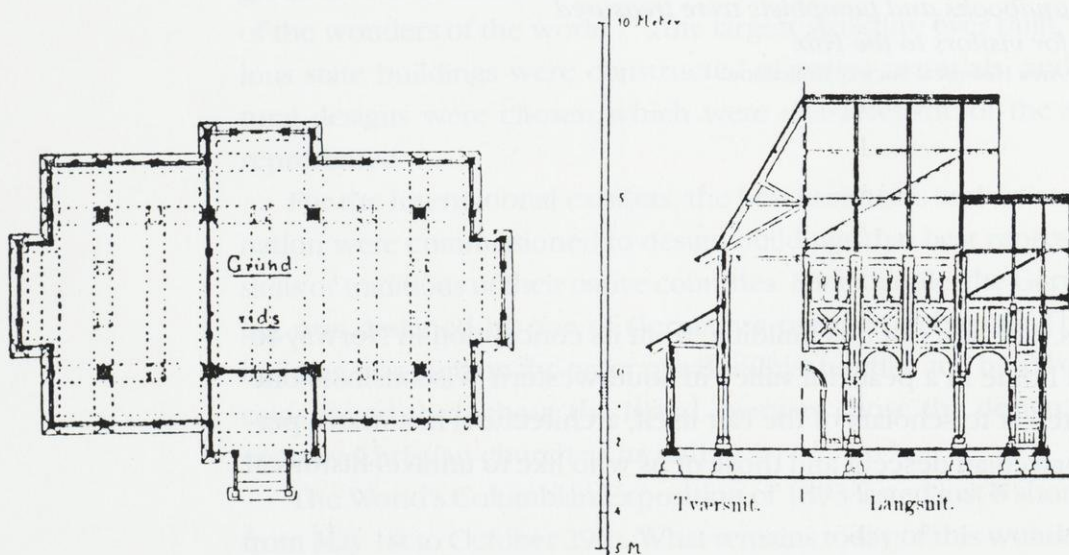
Mount Horeb Area Historical Society Collection.

exceptions. The story of this building, from its conception in Norway to its present home in a peaceful valley in Southwestern Wisconsin, is one of great interest to scholars of the Fair itself, architectural historians, persons of Norwegian descent and those of us who like to unravel historical mysteries.

1. Mrs. Potter Palmer and others, *Rand, McNally & Co.'s Handbook of the World's Columbian Exposition*, Rand, McNally & Co., publishers, Chicago, 1893, p.19.
2. Trumbull White and Wm. Igleheart, *The World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893*, P.W. Ziegler & Co., Philadelphia and St. Louis, 1893, p. 95.



„Det norske hus“ på udstillingen i Chicago i 1893.



Architect's rendering, ground plan and elevation for the Norway Building.
 From "Teknisk Ugeblad" (Technical Weekly), Norway, 1893, p. 167. Little Norway Collection.

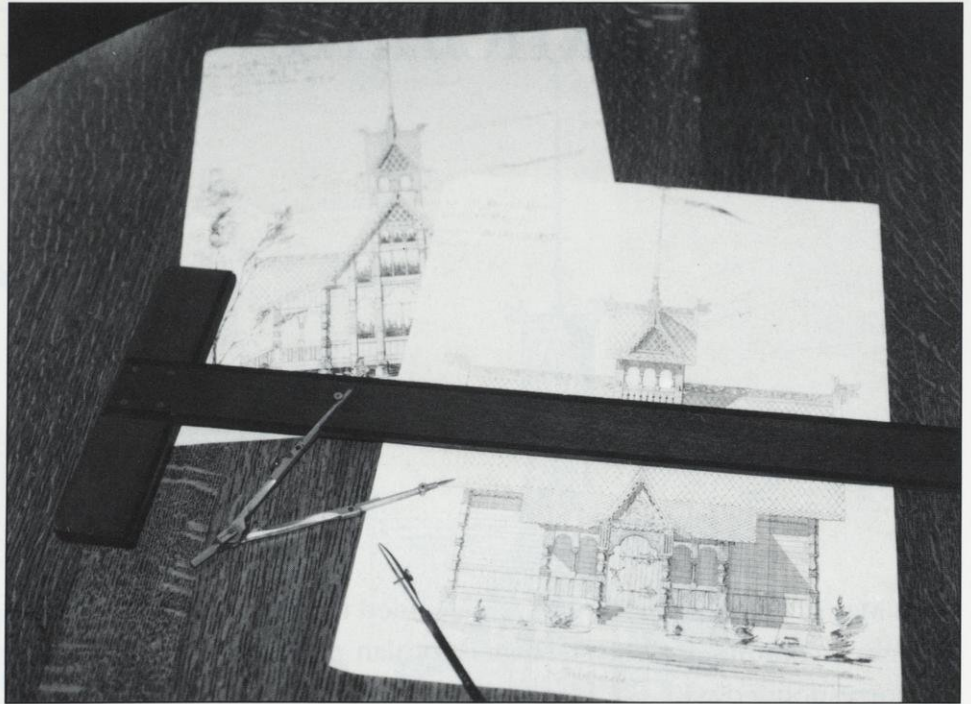
NORWAY PARTICIPATES

In May of 1892, after Norway had decided to take part in the World's Fair, a committee was established to plan representative exhibits. It corresponded with the Fair's governing body at Chicago to work out the details regarding Norway's entries. The Norwegian representatives originally had hoped for a large "Norwegian Building" which would house a number of its exhibits under one roof. After considerable negotiations, however, this plan was scrapped. Time was running short, and Fair officials in Chicago did not allot enough space at the Exposition site for such a sizable structure. According to an 1895 committee report:

The Norwegian commission opted instead to permit the erection of a meeting hall in the style of a stave church, which at the same time could serve as the office for Norway. Applications were sent to firms who exported prefabricated frame houses, inviting them to submit bids for the creation of such a building, which then could serve as a sample of their work. A sketch of the building was submitted by architect W. Hansteen, who later also furnished complete drawings with estimates of construction costs. M. Thams and Co. was the firm chosen to execute the work according to the drawings. Negotiations were closed by contract in November 1892, whereby the Thams company promised to complete the building in Chicago in February 1893, for a price of 6,000 Kroner—freight from Norway and setting up in Chicago at the committee's expense.¹

Christian Thams (right) with his wife, Maren, Gustav and John Hansteen (seated) at the Exposition grounds of Paris 1889. Thams with Gustav and John Hansteen at the Exposition of New York 1893.

Illustration of the building in Chicago, 1893. Originally it served as the office and meeting place for the Norwegian commission.



Architect's drawings by M. Thams & Co., of the proposed pavilion building for the Stockholm Exposition, 1897.

Photo by Randy Winner. Little Norway Collection. Drafting tools courtesy of the Mount Horeb Area Historical Society.

ARCHITECT AND BUILDER

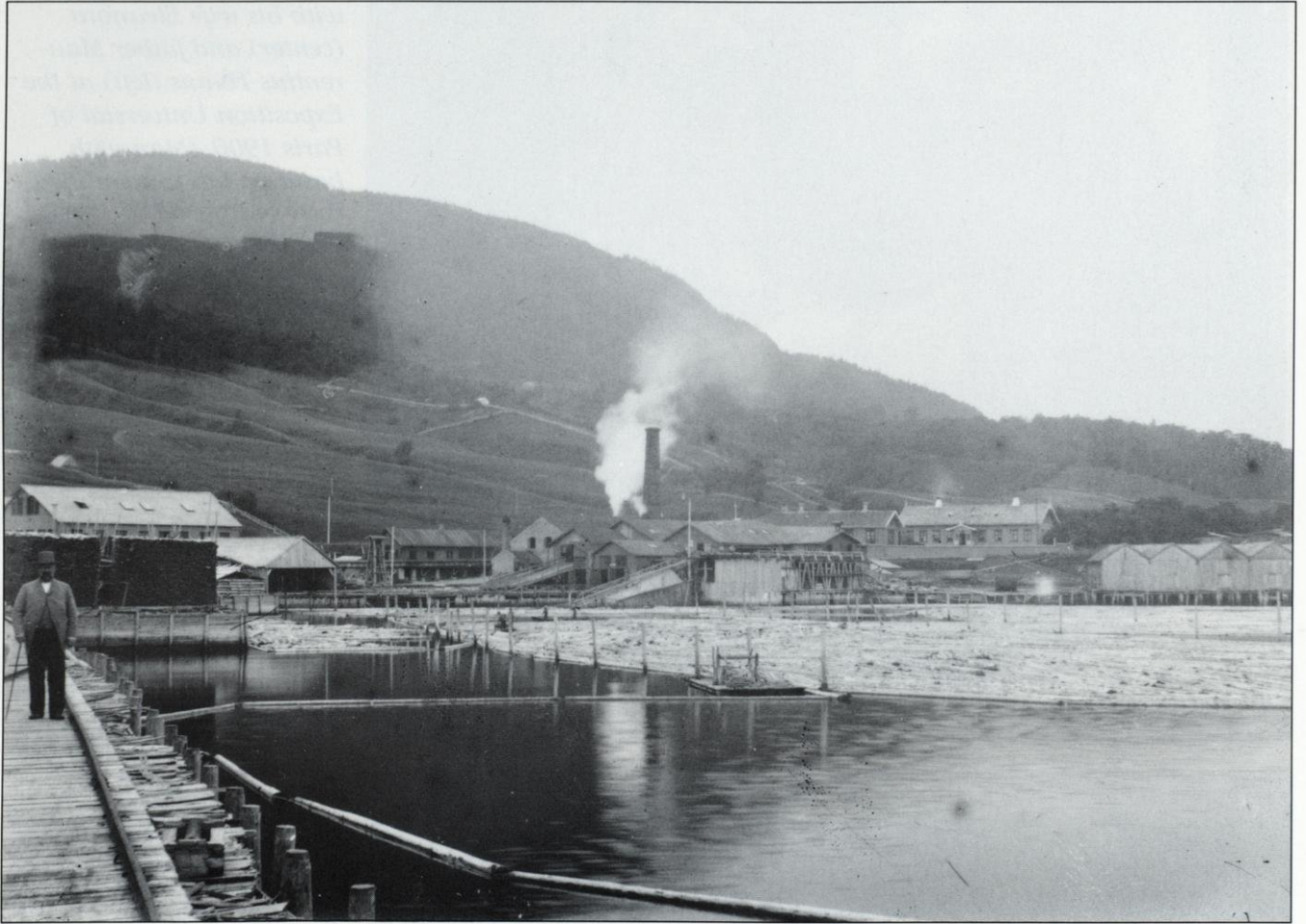
The firm of M. Thams & Co. was located at Strandheim Bruk in Orkanger, near Trondheim, Norway. It was established in 1867 by Wilhelm A. Thams. Mr. Thams was an industrious, ambitious fellow, anxious to compete with Norway's already well-established sawmills. In 1869 he added the first planing mill and crate factory in the northern part of the country. The crate business exceeded all expectations, and the company soon expanded. When a fire destroyed the firm in 1872, Thams, who was then 60 years old, took this opportunity to create the kind of mill he had always envisioned. After rebuilding, Thams turned the mill and its operations over to his son, Maurentius Thams, who became the principal shareholder. Maurentius started production of crates on a large scale, used not only for the transport of salmon, but also for shipping tomatoes from the Canary Islands to Europe.



Christian Thams (right), with his wife Eleanora (center) and father Maurentius Thams (left) at the Exposition Universal of Paris 1900. (Man with hand on hat unidentified.)
Photo courtesy of Rene Philipp, Oslo, Norway.

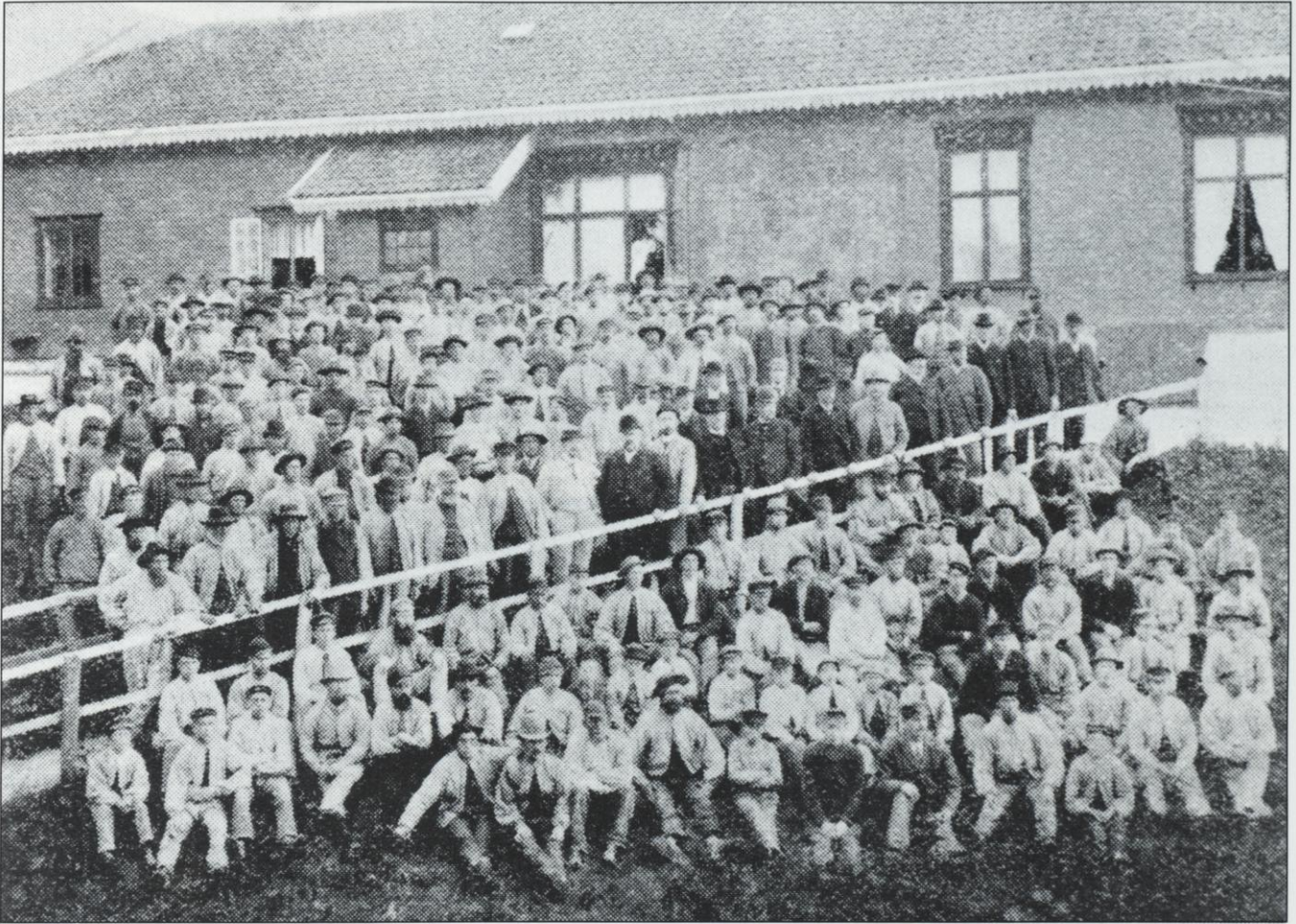


Trondheim, Norway c.1910. Orkanger is located a few miles southwest along the Trondheim Fjord.
Little Norway Collection.



The M. Thams & Co. factory, c. 1890, Strandheim Bruk. Maurentius Thams is on the bridge on the left, and his living quarters are in the background.
Photo courtesy of Meldal Bygdemuseum, Norway.

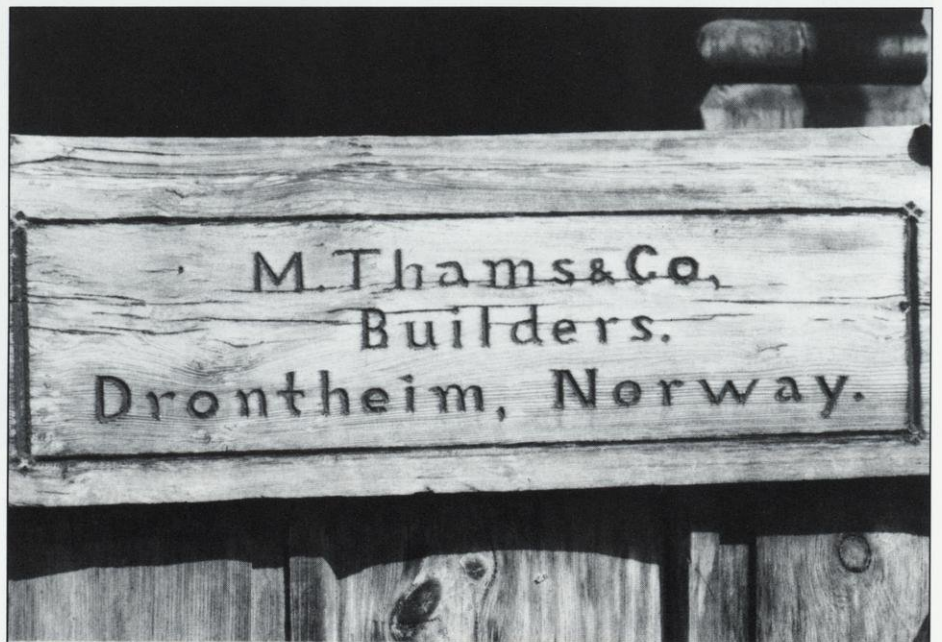
Christian Thams, one of the
millworkers who was educated in
own office at Nice in France. After
1880, he conceived the idea to



A shift of Thams & Co. millworkers, 1893.
From *Orkanger Boka* (the Orkanger Book), State Archives, Trondheim, Norway.



*Detail of the Norway Building's left porch railing, bearing the architect's credit.
Little Norway Collection.*



*Detail of the Norway Building's right porch railing, bearing the builder's credit.
Little Norway Collection.*

Christian Thams, one of the two sons of Maurentius Thams, was an architect who was educated in Zurich, Switzerland. He established his own office at Nice in France. After an earthquake at Nice and Menton in 1888, he conceived the idea to construct earthquake-resistant houses at his father's factory at Orkanger. Following the traditions of his family, the business was a major success, and by 1900 employed over 300 highly qualified draftsmen. The firm utilized a high degree of electrification and mechanization. Houses were exported to Europe, Africa, India, South America and the United States. In ensuing years the firm became well-known throughout the world.

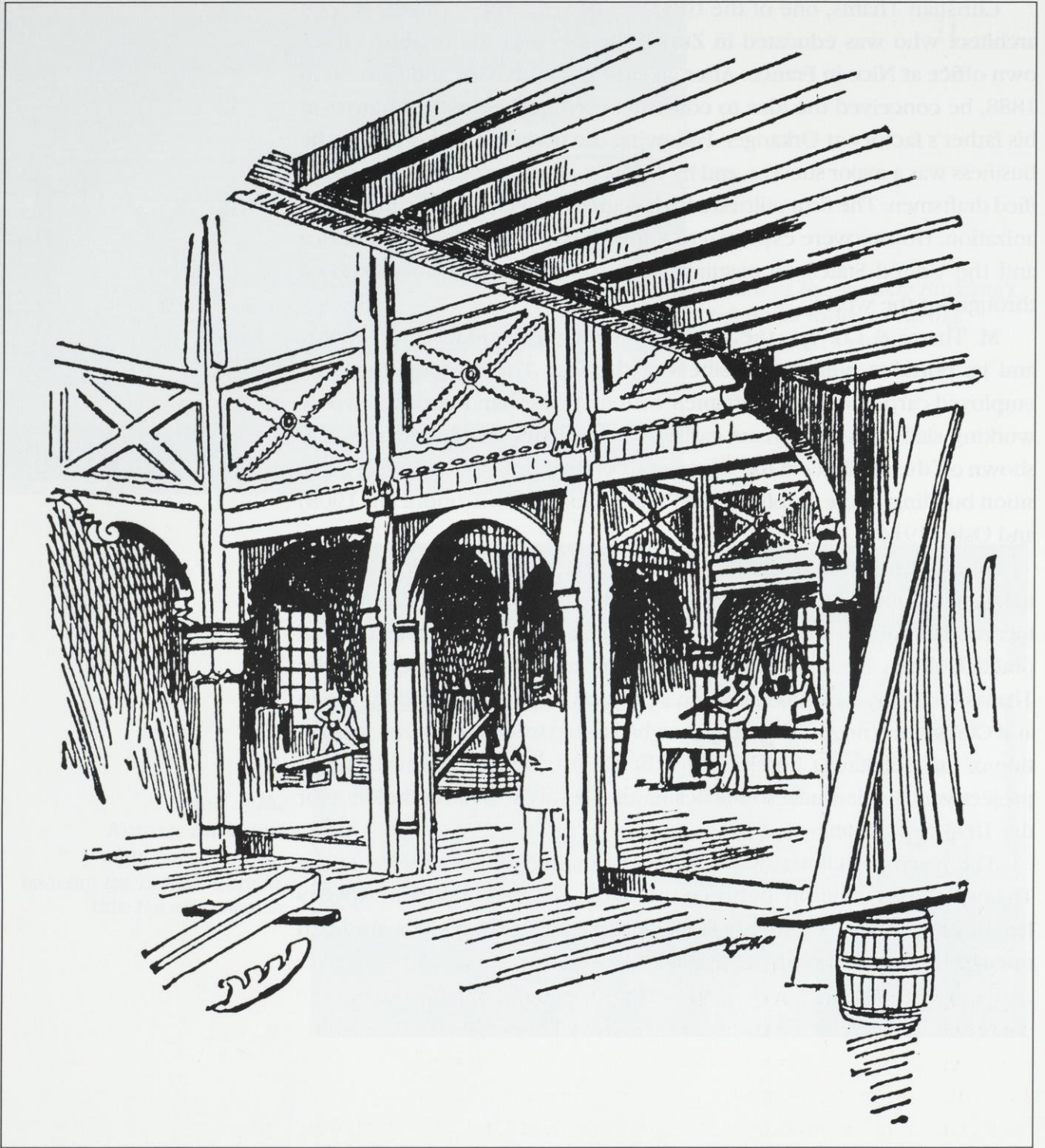
M. Thams & Co. was the ideal choice for representation of Norway and its portable buildings business at the Fair. The bustling company employed carpenters and craftsmen with first-class handwork and wood-working skills. Just four years earlier, the company's talented crew had shown off their abilities at the World's Fair of Paris in 1889. Other big exposition buildings were to follow—in Stockholm (1897), Trondheim (1908) and Oslo (1914).

Albert *Waldemar* Hansteen², the architect who submitted the original drawings for the Norway Building, was the head teacher at the evening technical school at Skien, Norway, and had an established architectural practice there. He also worked simultaneously as an architect for the Thams company. Most of Hansteen's projects were constructed in Skien and Christiania (now Oslo). Hansteen had also participated in the restoration of the Gol Stave Church during the 1880's. We can assume that this project was inspirational to his design of Norway's Pavilion Building for the 1893 exposition.

The Norway Building was completely crafted and assembled at the Thams company mill site between the signing of the contract in November of 1892, and early in 1893, when the building was dedicated and opened for inspection by the public.

1. "Beretning om Norges Deltipelse i Verdensutstillingen i Chicago 1893" (Report of Norway's Participation in the World's Fair in Chicago 1893), Kristiania, 1895, p.6. Translator unknown, file copy, State Historical Society of Wisconsin Archives.

2. Hansteen used his second name, Waldemar, as his professional name.



Artist's line drawing: Interior of the Norway Building under construction: Chicago Daily Tribune, Thursday, May 18, 1893. State Historical Society of Wisconsin microfilm archives.

JOURNEY TO AMERICA

After its public review, the Norway Building was meticulously disassembled and all parts crated for its journey across the Atlantic.

The building was loaded, along with the Danish pavilion, on board the *Hekla*, a passenger steamship operated by the Danish Thingvalla Line. On March 15th, 1893, the ship left Christiansand enroute to New York. Already late for the February Fair site construction deadline, the building was to encounter even more delays. On March 24th, the *Hekla's* axle broke. The engine stopped and the ship headed into the wind. Approximately 775 passengers, including crew and servants, were stranded at sea. The *Hekla* finally reached port two weeks behind schedule, at midnight the 8th of April. In New York the crates containing the Norway Building were loaded on a train heading for Chicago. Further delays resulted in the building's materials arriving at the Fair site after the middle of April.

Although acquainted with the cause for delay, the Exposition's Director of Works registered a protest regarding the erection of the pavilion so late. With the Fair scheduled to open on May 1st, he stated "night work must be permitted in order that all possible speed be made with the task of getting the obstruction out of the way."¹ This night work included a 50 percent overtime pay for the workers involved in the building, resulting in higher costs for the erection of the pavilion than previously planned. Nevertheless, the building was well into construction on its site at the north end of the Exposition grounds by May 17th, and fully opened by the middle of June.

The delays in construction also resulted in furnishing the interior of the building with American instead of Norwegian furniture. The office of



Artist's line drawing: Norsemen Marching to Festival Hall.
From *The World's Fair as Seen in 100 Days*, Northrup & Banks, 1893.

the Norwegian Commissioner took up about a third of the building's interior, and was separated by a partition from the public part which stood open for visitors. There were no exhibits in the building, only a large map of Norway, and a few banners and pictures.

NORWAY AT THE FAIR

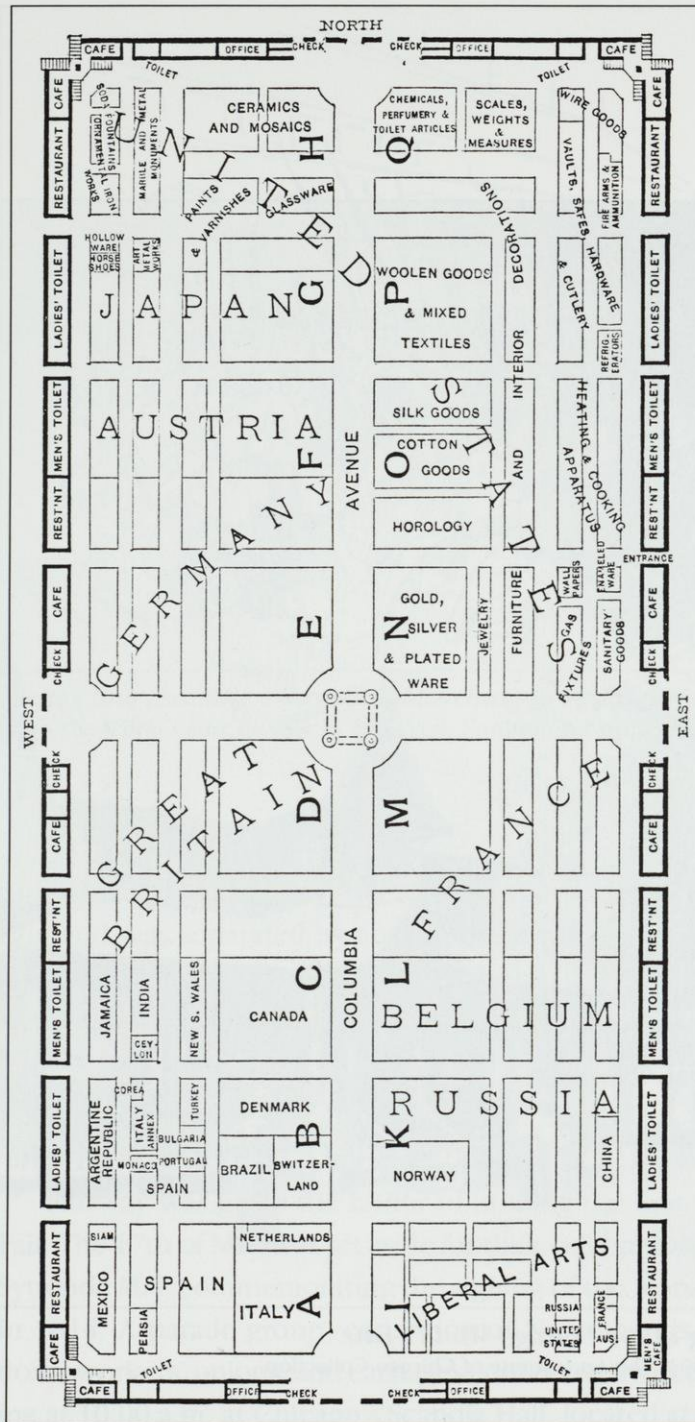
The First National Day

Norway was given the honor of holding the first National Day at the Fair. The 17th of May was set aside for their celebration. This was Norway's Syttende Mai, commemorating the signing of the Norwegian Constitution in 1814. A parade group, consisting of Norse bands, fraternal organizations, workers' unions, and carriages containing invited guests began forming at 10:00 a.m. at Chicago's Scandia Hall, located at Milwaukee Avenue and Ohio Streets. The parade wound its way through Chicago's streets enroute to the Exposition grounds. Thousands of persons of Norwegian descent looked on, while hundreds more were filling Festival Hall, the planned destination of the entourage.



The Norway Building at the Chicago World's Fair.

Photo by C.D. Arnold—1893. The Art Institute of Chicago Collection.



Ground Floor Plan of the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building. Notice Norway's location in the lower right-hand corner. From Rand, McNally & Co.'s Handbook of the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893.

The parade participants marched past the Norway Building. A *Chicago Daily Tribune* journalist made these remarks about the structure:

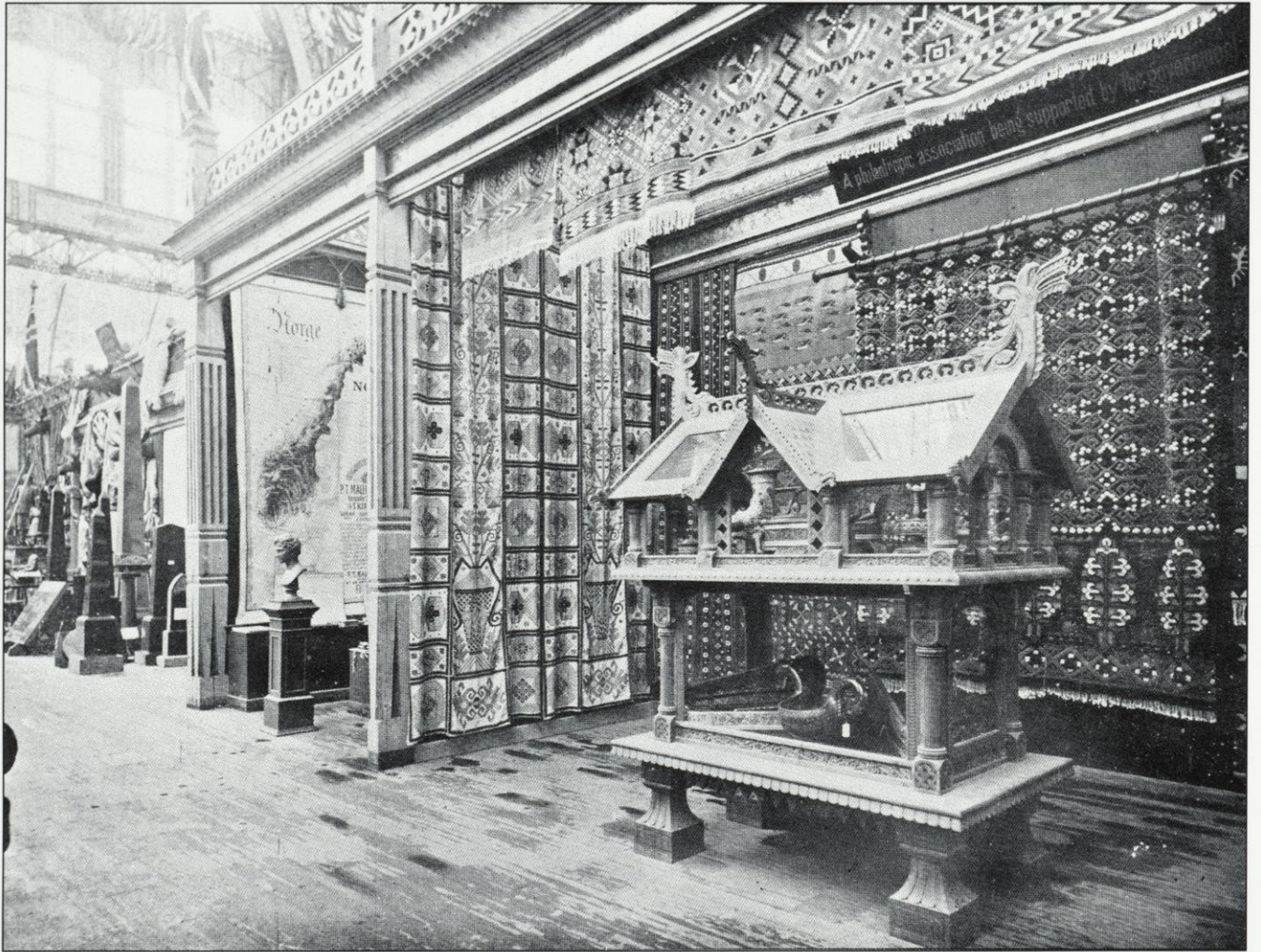
Although the Norway Building has been in process of erection but ten days, it was already in such shape that its appearance when completed could easily be imagined. Built throughout of Norway Pine on the model of an old Norse church, it is already a striking feature on the landscape. From its many gabled roofs curiously carved dragons project, and about its entrances there is a store of old Norse carving.²

When the parade reached its destination, Festival Hall, nearly 7,000 Norse countrymen had assembled there. The speaker's platform was decorated with American and Norwegian flags. Added to these were the many colorful banners carried by the parade participants. Patriotic songs were played and sung. Among the orators for the day were Professors Julius E. Olsen and Rasmus B. Anderson of the University of Wisconsin, the Honorable Nils P. Haugen of Wisconsin, and the Honorable Knute Nelson, Governor of Minnesota.

The day's events were concluded with a speech by Ingolf K. Boyeson, whose subject was "America and the Exposition." As a native Norwegian he spoke to his countrymen of the making of the Exposition and what it symbolized. He complimented Norway upon the "splendid showing it made in every department."³ The Fair grounds were kept open until 11:00 p.m. in honor of Norway's day.

Norway could be proud of its representation at the World's Fair. Its pavilion building, though scaled down from the original plans, won the hearts of many reporters and writers who toured the fairgrounds throughout the duration of the Fair, describing the structure as "quaint," "unique," "conspicuous," "enchanted," and "picturesque."

Norway's additional entries of manufactured and artistic goods were included in the many divisions of the Fair. An industrial display was located in the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building. A writer for *Shepp's World's Fair Photographed* states of Norway's industrial exhibits, "no display is more thoroughly characteristic and enjoyable."⁴ There were exhibits as well in the Women's Building, including colorful examples of native costume. In the Arts Building, forty-five Norwegian artists were represented



A view of Norway's display in the Manufactures and Liberal Arts Building. The partition is also the work of M. Thams & Co. The display case and much of its contents are the work of Magnus Dagestad. From Shepp's World's Fair Photographed, Chicago, 1893.

WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION, 1893



COPELIN
PHOTO

308 DEARBORN ST.
CHICAGO

The ship Viking, an exact copy of a buried vessel found in Gogstad, Norway in 1880, was sailed from Norway to the Fair site by a crew of Norwegian seamen. Today the ship remains in a Chicago Park.

Little Norway Collection.

by one hundred and fifty paintings. Sizable entries in the Fisheries Building were among the other strongly represented areas. The *Viking*, a model of a Viking ship, was sailed from Norway to the Exposition site. Its arrival made a notable impact as well. A total of \$36,000.00 was spent by the Norwegian Government on its exhibits at the Fair.

1. "Report of Norway's Participation..." (ibid.), p. 37-38.
2. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Thursday, May 18, 1893, "First the Norsemen: Exiles from Norway's Fiords Celebrate Their Natal Day."
3. Ibid.
4. James W. Shepp and Daniel B. Shepp, *Shepp's World's Fair Photographed*, Globe Bible Publishing Co., Chicago, 1893, p. 476.

Friday, Nov. 10, at 11 A. M.,

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**JACKSON PARK
THE CEYLON BUILDING,**

Fronting on Lake.

Also, Courts in Woman's and Agricultural Buildings.
W. O. BECKENBAUGH, Salesman.
WILSON, FLEISCHER & CO., Auctioneers.

**WORLD'S FAIR.
AUCTION.**

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Monday, Nov. 6. 10 o'clock a. m.

ONE HUNDRED ROOMS

Elegantly and Completely Furnished.

An A1 KITCHEN OUTFIT.

An A1 DINING-ROOM OUTFIT.

OFFICE FIXTURES, Etc., Etc.

A Grand Offering to the Highest Bidder.
All South Side R. R. Lines run within one
block of the sale.

MARTIN EMERICH & CO.,
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**WORLD'S FAIR
AUCTION**

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FIFTIETH-PLACE, BETWEEN
50TH AND 51ST-STS., HALF
BLOCK WEST OF COTTAGE
GROVE CABLE,

TUESDAY, NOV. 7, 10 O'CLOCK A. M.

54 ROOMS.

THOROUGHLY EQUIPPED FOR
THE AMERICAN PLAN.

The Dining-Room and Kitchen Outfit will
open the sale.

MARTIN EMERICH & CO.,
AUCTIONEERS.

World's Fair AUCTION.

The Entire Contents

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Cor. Oglesby-av. and Sixty-third-st.,

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Auction Notice of Fair Property.
State Historical Society of Wisconsin
microfilm archives.

FROM GRAND EXPOSITION TO PRIVATE ESTATE

As quickly as the curtain opened on the great World's Fair of 1893, the grand finale came all too soon. Official closing of the Fair took place on Sunday, October 29, 1893. An early frost had already tainted the image of the beautiful grounds, by snuffing the attractive floral plantings. Work crews were already dismantling smaller structures and removing banners. In the weeks following the Exposition's closing, a multitude of auction notices appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Times* and other publications offering for sale, among other things, the grand and wonderful buildings of the World's Fair.

Several of the States' buildings found new homes. Two or more returned to the states of their origins; still others were sold as scrap. Of the national buildings, the German Building remained at Jackson Park and become a restaurant, which burned in 1925. The Japanese Phoenix Hall would also remain there; it also burned in 1945. The Ceylon Building was dismantled and moved to private property at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin in 1894. It remained there until it was torn down in 1958, and its structural elements sold. The Norway Building was not sold at open auction as many of its counterparts had been; instead, it seems, closed bids were taken. A small notice which appeared in the November 30, 1893 issue of the *Chicago Tribune* read in part, "The Norwegian Building has been sold to C.K.G. Billings for \$1,500, and will be taken apart and reconstructed on his place at Geneva Lake."¹

Cornelius Kinsland Billings (C.K.G. for short) was president of the People's Gas Light and Coke Company of Chicago, a position passed on to him by his father in 1887, when he was just 25 years old. Amongst

The Maine State Building—one of several state buildings which were returned to their home states. Today this building is located in Poland Spring, Maine, and is owned by the Poland Spring Preservation Society.

From Rand, McNally & Co.'s Handbook of the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893.



other involvements, Billings was elected as a member of the Board of Directors of the World's Columbian Exposition in 1890. He was also of Norwegian descent. In 1892, just one year before the opening of the World's Fair, Billings purchased property on the north shore of Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, an opulent resort area for Chicago's wealthy, located just across the Illinois border. He immediately began expansion and remodeling of the existing home on the property and named his estate "Green Gables."

On his estate, Billings raised horses which broke many records in harness racing. He enjoyed operating his 65-foot-long steam yacht, and is credited with being one of the first Chicagoans on the lake shore to own an automobile.

Early in the winter of 1894, approximately eight train car loads containing the materials of the Norway Building began arriving at Lake Geneva. The building was soon reassembled in its original form. The

Billings family added furnishings in appropriate style and used the building for family recreation. The exterior was landscaped with exotic plantings. The building was very visible from the lake, and made a memorable impression for years to follow with sightseers enjoying excursion boat rides.

Early in 1907, Billings moved to Santa Barbara, California, and William H. Mitchell, who had made his fortune in Chicago's banking business, purchased Green Gables for a summer residence. Mitchell did not enjoy his newly acquired property for long, as he died in March of 1910 at the age of 93.

William Wrigley Jr. became the next owner of Green Gables. He had long established himself in his well-known business of manufacturing chewing gum, and had been actively seeking property on Geneva Lake.

The chewing gum magnate's son, Philip K. Wrigley, wrote in an April 20, 1954 letter to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin:

My family first went to Lake Geneva, Wisconsin when I was about a year old, so it must have been about 1895 or '96, and spent several summers at a camp on the South Side of the lake at the west end, but my first recollection of Lake Geneva was in the early spring of 1910 when we went there to look at the Wm. H. Mitchell place on the North side of the lake, which was for sale because of Mr. Mitchell's death. My father, Wm. Wrigley Jr. purchased the property at that time. But as there was quite a bit of renovating to be done, we did not actually live on the property until the following spring, 1911.

One of the features of the property at that time and for many years afterwards was the Norwegian Building from the Columbian Exposition or Chicago World's Fair of 1893, which was located on a rise of ground just to the East and slightly back of the main house.

At that time it was divided roughly into two rooms, one being slightly smaller than the other which was used as a card room by Mr. C.K.G. Billings. The larger of the two rooms, as I remember it, was pretty well filled with Norwegian furniture, including a large swinging bed hung by chains from the ceiling, and there were innumerable albums of pictures from Norway, which



"Green Gables," the residence of C.K.G. Billings at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, c. 1902. Notice the Norway Building on the right.
From *Beautiful Lake Geneva*, N.W Smails, publisher, Lake Geneva, c. 1902.
Courtesy Lake Geneva Public Library.

I always assumed had been part of the Norwegian Government's display at the Fair.

Not being a card playing family, and as the building was quite a little removed from the main house, the building was never used, and so after a couple of years it was remodelled into a motion picture theater by moving the central partition back to one end to hide the projecting equipment and building a stage and screen at the other end.²

The Norway Building must have made a unique setting for the Wrigley family's home movies. A Lake Geneva newspaper reporter wrote this

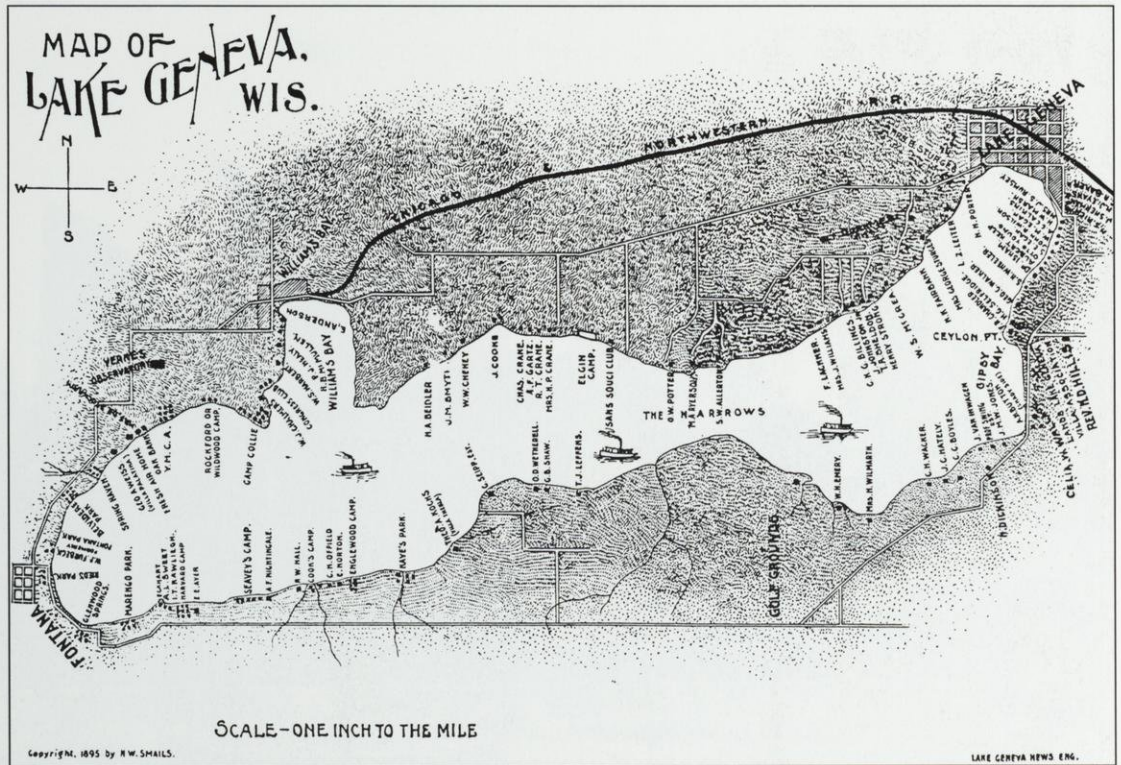


The Norway Building on the C.K.G. Billings property, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, c. 1902.

From *Beautiful Lake Geneva*, N.W. Smails, publisher, Lake Geneva, c. 1902. Courtesy Lake Geneva Public Library.

column on June 14, 1917, under the heading “PHILIP WRIGLEY TAKING MOVING PICTURES”:

Philip Wrigley has a hobby that has found plenty of encouragement with the arrival of movie stars here last week. Mr. Wrigley has adopted the sport of filming. He has one of the best makes of moving picture cameras and produces pictures for the amusement of himself and his guests at Green Gables. Not satisfied with taking movies Mr. Wrigley has become an exhibitor also. On the Wrigley estate there has been fitted up a moving picture theater and home-made films are produced there. Mr.



Map of Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 1895. Notice the C.K.G. Billings property on the north shore, near the east end of the lake.
 From "The Story of Lake Geneva," N.W. Smails, 1895. State Historical Society of Wisconsin pamphlet Collection.

Wrigley takes to the camera man's job like a veteran and gets plenty of excitement and diversion behind the crank.³

William Wrigley Jr. passed away in 1932, and his widow, Mrs. Ada Wrigley, continued to use Green Gables as the family's summer home. The Norway Building, which once was extolled with numerous superlatives by the journalists of the great World's Fair, had by this time fallen into slight disrepair. The Wrigley family offered the Norway Building to several Norwegian societies so that the building could be preserved, but with no success. Because of the Depression, in every case the organizations contacted wanted the building moved and an endowment established to maintain it.

Finally, a Chicago businessman by the name of Isak Dahle contacted the Wrigley family regarding the Norway Building. Mr. Dahle was in the



Norway Building on the William Wrigley Jr. property c. 1933. During its tenure at Lake Geneva a lattice portico was added and the building was given a yellow ochre and brown paint job.

Little Norway Collection.

process of establishing a private family museum dedicated to his Norwegian heritage, and he was willing to share the cost of moving the structure to his museum, Little Norway, near Mount Horeb, Wisconsin.

This relocation would mean a whole new beginning for the Norway Building.

1. Geneva Lake—reference to the lake. Lake Geneva—reference to the lake's surrounding community.
2. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 30, 1893, "Buys the Norwegian Building."
3. *Lake Geneva Herald*, June 14, 1917, "Philip Wrigley Taking Moving Pictures."



Herman B. Dable Family, c. 1893. (Left to Right, Back): Otto (b. 1881), Clara (b. 1879), Eleanor (b. 1877). (Left to Right, front): Agnes (b. 1889), father Herman B. Dable, Marie (b. 1885), Isak (b. 1883), Thea (b. 1891) and mother Anne Marie Kittleson Dable.
Little Norway Collection.

A NEW OWNER

Developing a New Setting

Isak James Dahle's life began much the same as others in rural Wisconsin in the 1880's. He was born February 1, 1883, the grandson of Norwegian immigrant, Onun Bjornson Dahle. Isak's father, Herman, and mother, Anne Marie, were operators of a mercantile business in the small, rural farming community of Mount Vernon, Wisconsin.

When Isak was four years old, he moved with his parents, brother and sisters to Mount Horeb, just a few miles from their former home. Here the family established a prime main street mercantile business. Isak was surrounded with the family's astute business ethics and strong Norwegian traditions. Grandfather Onun wove into the young boy's mind many colorful tales of adventure encountered during his 1849 trip to the California Gold Fields.

From an early age, Isak collected all manner of objects—rocks, stamps, pennants, butterflies, etc. He kept these in cases and organized them systematically, making each collection a research project in itself. His boyhood collecting efforts eventually would take on a much grander scale.

Isak attended the Mount Horeb Lutheran Academy, the Wisconsin Academy of Madison, and graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1904. During Isak's college years, his father was a representative in the United States Congress, directly exposing Isak to the political climate of the time.

Following his college graduation, Isak was associated briefly with a Minneapolis flour company, but he spent the greater part of his life devoted to the life insurance business, first in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and then in Chicago.



*Dable Family Store, Main Street,
Mount Horeb, Wisconsin, c. 1893.*
Mount Horeb Area Historical Society Collection.

Isak possessed a keen intellect and business sense, inherited from his family. He had a magnetic personality, great loyalty to his friends, and a strong determination to succeed in his every endeavor. For these reasons, Isak was very successful in the life insurance business, an occupation which according to his personal diaries was ever present on his mind.

Isak was in business during a unique time in American history, the late nineteenth through the early thirties. He rode through the Great Depression, spent hours entertaining clients and guests, and surrounded himself with the business and entertainment notables of the time. He was involved with numerous societies, business clubs, and charities, including the American Scandinavian Foundation, the Norwegian American Society, the Chicago Norske Klub and the Adventurers Club of Chicago.

Isak had a life-long devotion and fondness for his family, especially his mother, Anne. In January, 1926, he escorted her on a first-class tour of Europe. Norway was an important stop on their itinerary, as it gave them



Isak Dable as a young man beginning his Life Insurance career, c. 1910.
Little Norway Collection.



*Isak Dable with his
mother, Anne, c. 1935.*
Little Norway Collection.



*View of the Austin Olson Hougan farm—
granary/toolshed in foreground.*

Winter, 1927. Isak and his brother, Otto, inspect the Austin Olson Hougan farm, near Mount Horeb, Wisconsin. The buildings include the original springhouse, cattle barn, dugout, horse barn and corn crib. The setting is reminiscent of the farms Isak had seen in Norway, and was soon transformed into "Little Norway."

Little Norway Collection.



The springhouse.



Cattle and sheep barn.

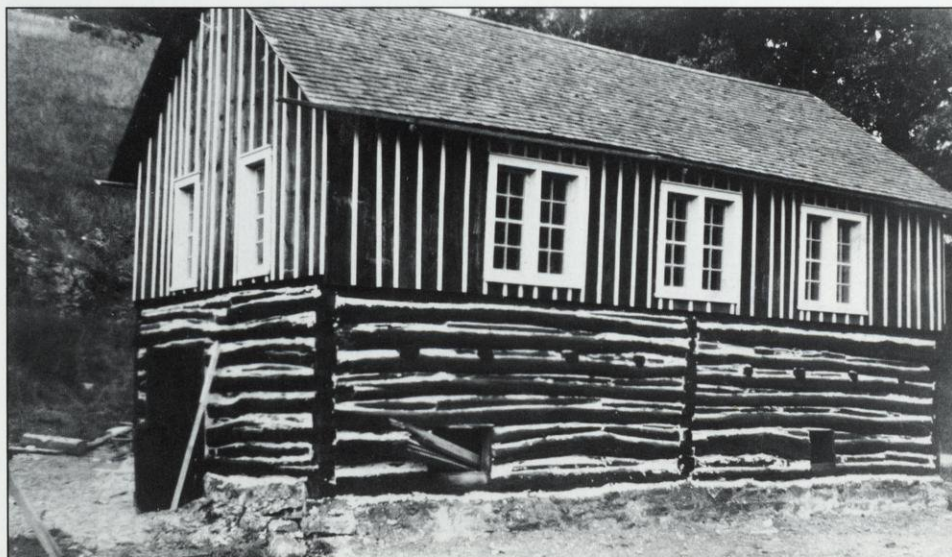


*Corncrib/ horsebarn, foreground.
Cattle and sheep barn, background.*



*The dugout/ root cellar.
On the left, one of the three residences on the property,
originally a weaving room.*

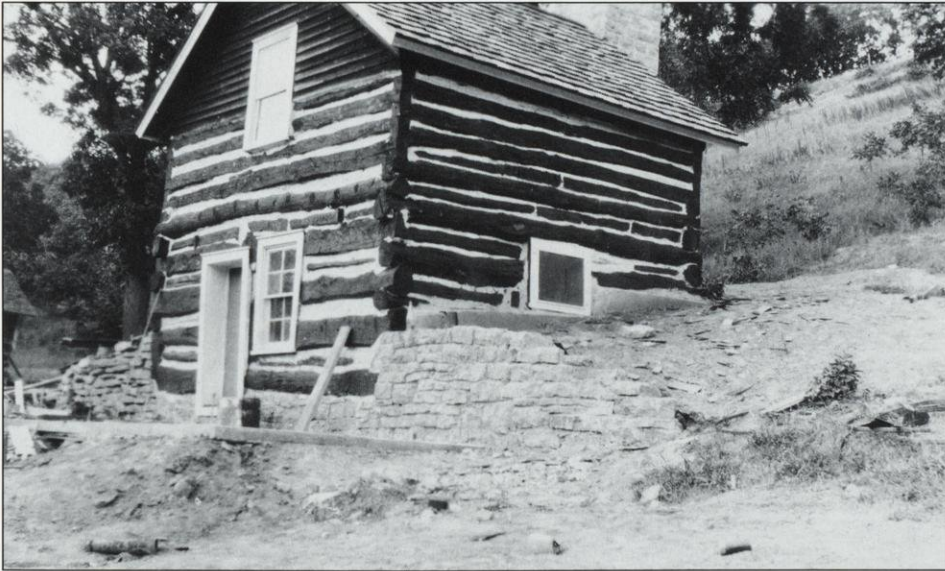
Reconstruction Views of Little Norway Buildings.



The Austin Olson Hougan cattle and sheep barn with new windows installed.



Completed cattle and sheep barn with porch and stone chimney added.



Austin Olson Hougan home under reconstruction.



Isak, his mother, and brother Otto in front of the home's newly completed porch.



*Completed buildings at Little Norway—
left, new springhouse, right, the Austin Olson
Hougan home with additional residence behind.*



Interior of the Cattle barn loft.

both an opportunity to visit their ancestral homeland. The landscape and folk architecture that Isak and his mother experienced in Norway remained a vivid and inspiring memory.

On New Year's Day, 1927, while visiting his family in Mount Horeb, Isak's brother Otto took the Chicago businessman for an auto ride into the country to inspect some property which had recently come up for sale. Located in a picturesque, rugged valley west of Mount Horeb was situated the remains of an early Norwegian immigrant's home—the Østen Olson Hougan¹ farm, where Otto and Isak had fished and hiked as boys. The family had lived on this farm for more than a half century. Here they had built three different residences for family members and numerous out-buildings. These buildings were surrounded by steep hills, dotted with majestic, mature Norway maples, with a bubbling freshwater spring still flowing in the center of the farmstead.

This setting was so strongly reminiscent of what Isak had seen in Norway that he was determined to acquire the place, and to establish a



*Family members gathered at the dining room table, c. 1933.
(Left to Right): Elise Kittleson, Marie Peterson, Joe Green,
Marcelaine Hobson, Anne Dable, Walter Langland, Merk Hobson.
Little Norway Collection.*

memorial to Norwegians in America. It would also serve as a summer home, where his family and friends could gather. Isak purchased the dilapidated farm buildings and eighty acres in 1927, and began appointing family members and friends to supervise his project, which he named Little Norway. Hugo Stikhevitz, a Latvian refugee, was hired to be resident caretaker.

Some of the buildings were torn down and rebuilt, while others remained in their original locations. Norwegian carpenters and painters from the area were employed. Their traditional skills gave the place an authentic Norwegian character.

**HAVE YOU ANY NORSE
ANTIGUES TO SELL?**

If so, bring them to Dahle's Store. Am especially anxious to get old furniture, paintings, dishes, wooden bowls, etc., in fact any Norwegian antiquity that will add to the interest of

"Little Norway"
(as it is being called)

Isak J. Dahle.

FOR SALE

White Shepherd pups. M. C.
Jenson. Mt. Horeb, Wis.

BARN DANCE

There will be a barn dance at the Casper Huber farm, 6 miles east of Blanchardville and 1 mile west of Postville on Saturday night, June 9. A good time assured.

*Advertisement for
Norwegian Antiques.*
Mount Horeb Mail, June 7, 1928.

The original barn was outfitted with a sleeping loft, where traditional Norwegian bunkbeds were built into the corners. The lower level was divided and transformed into a kitchen area and a dining room containing a long table, where Dahle family members could gather when they visited the farm. Seating and sleeping porches were added, and rustic stone fireplaces were built. The exterior trim on all the buildings was painted warm blue. A new springhouse with an enclosed bell tower was placed over the spring on the site of the original.

Isak wrote to family members, requesting heirlooms to furnish the buildings, and placed ads in newspapers seeking to purchase Norwegian immigrant antiques. The family store in Mount Horeb was listed as the place to bring them. Jim Stavrum, an interior decorator from Chicago and friend of Isak's, spent the summer of 1928 in Norway, gathering antique

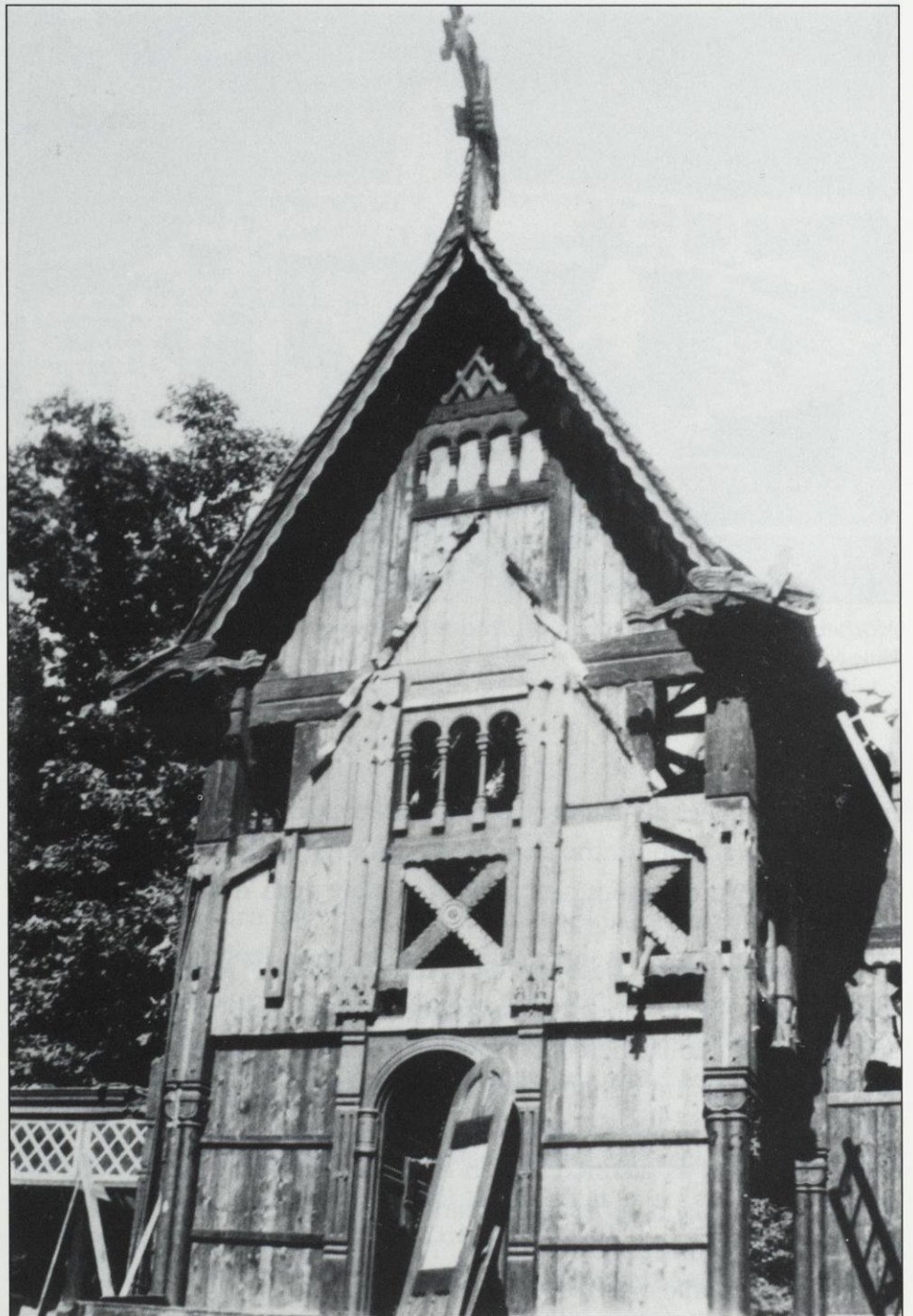


Mother Anne Dable supervising stream bed construction, c. 1933.
Little Norway Collection.

furnishings. Crates containing tables, chairs, a clock, tapestries and copper pieces began arriving at the Dahle family store in January, 1929. They created a stir in the community, and were placed on display in the store window for a time.

The entire project began to draw the attention of journalists and the curious alike. Newspaper and magazine stories began to appear, locally and nationally. Family members enjoying the tranquil property soon began accommodating the public. Ongoing construction was often hampered by the number of spectators wishing to view Little Norway. However, work continued as planned. Marsh land was drained, acreage acquired, ponds hand-dredged, thousands of pine trees planted, white picket fences and birchwood bridges constructed. The entire place took on a look and beauty comparable only to Old Norway.

1. Like many Norwegian immigrants, Østen Olson Hougan took a new name in America. He chose to Americanize Østen as Austin and used this as his first name, and according to his obituary no longer used Hougan.



*Dismantling of the Norway Building
at Lake Geneva, 1935.*
Little Norway Collection.

A PERMANENT HOME

During the early years of Little Norway's development, Isak's business activities and acquaintances more than likely had brought him in contact with the fashionable summer life-style of Geneva Lake. While enjoying parties and outings at the lake, Isak had recognized the Norway Building on the Wrigley property as an outstanding example of Norwegian architecture.

In July of 1933, Isak visited the office of Philip K. Wrigley, and discussed the prospect of acquiring the Norway Building. In October, he hired Mr. W.E. Stone, a Whitewater, Wisconsin contractor, to estimate the costs of the building's dismantling and removal from the Wrigley property. These bids were presented to Wrigley in July, 1935, when Isak finalized negotiations for the acquisition of the Norway Building. At this time, Philip Wrigley and the trustees of the Wrigley estate agreed to release the Norway Building into Isak's care, and with Mr. Stone's supervision, the building was disassembled and trucked to Little Norway. From its original construction at Trondheim, Norway and grand display at the Chicago World's Fair, to pleasure building at a Lake Geneva estate, the Norway Building now found its fourth and very fitting home as centerpiece of a Norwegian-American museum.

In June, 1936, a detailed plan for the layout of artifacts in the building's interior was drawn up. There was to be space allotted for a collection of effects from the well-known Professor Rasmus B. Anderson. Anderson had been one of the guest speakers at "Norway Day" at the Chicago World's Fair. He was a noted author and the founder of the Scandinavian Studies Department at the University of Wisconsin. The build-



The building's construction elements are very visible in this photo taken during its dismantling at Lake Geneva.
Little Norway Collection.



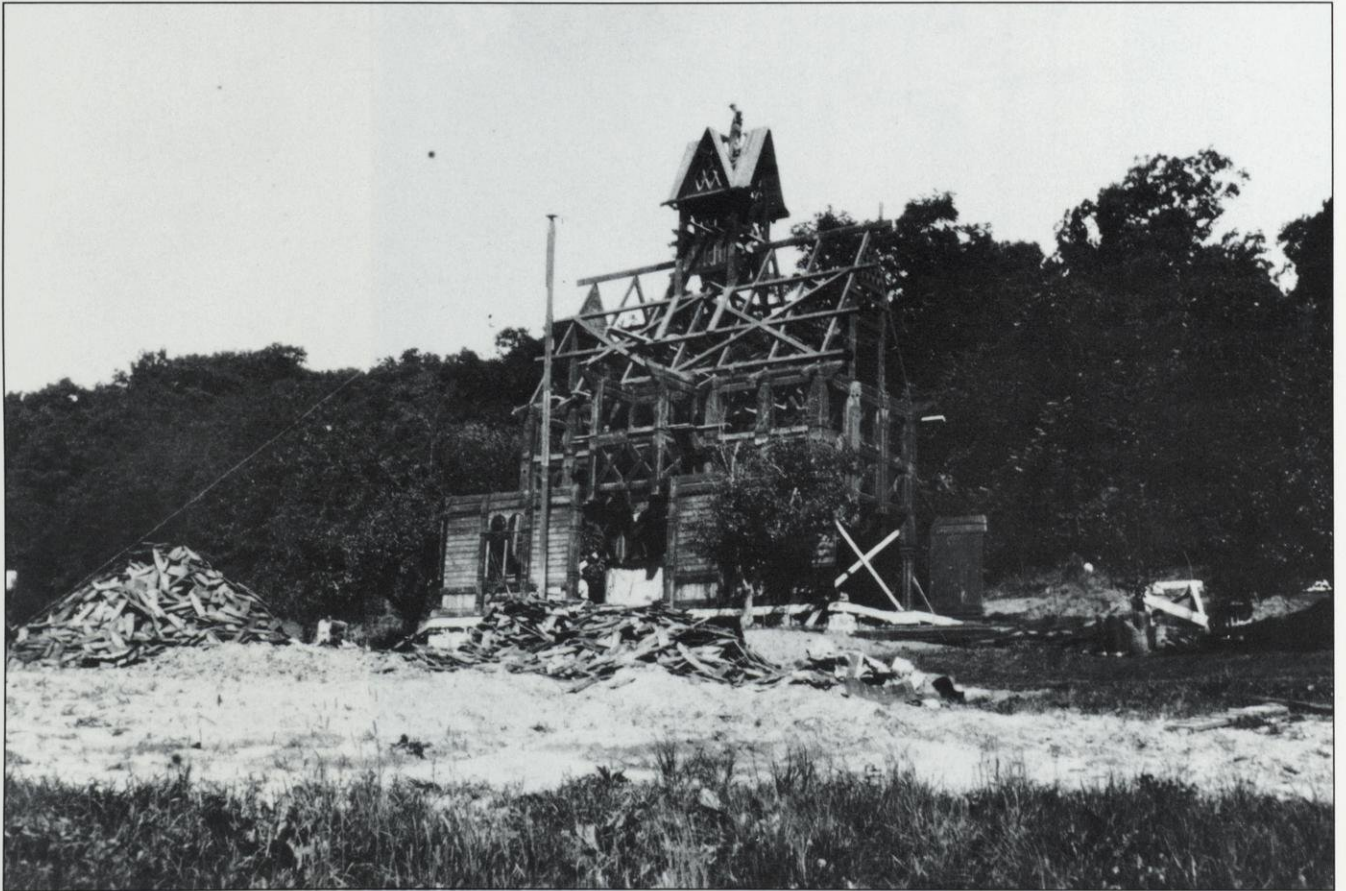
The door, which has been removed from its hinges, served as the entrance to the Commissioner's office during the Fair. Dismantling, Lake Geneva, 1935.

Little Norway Collection.

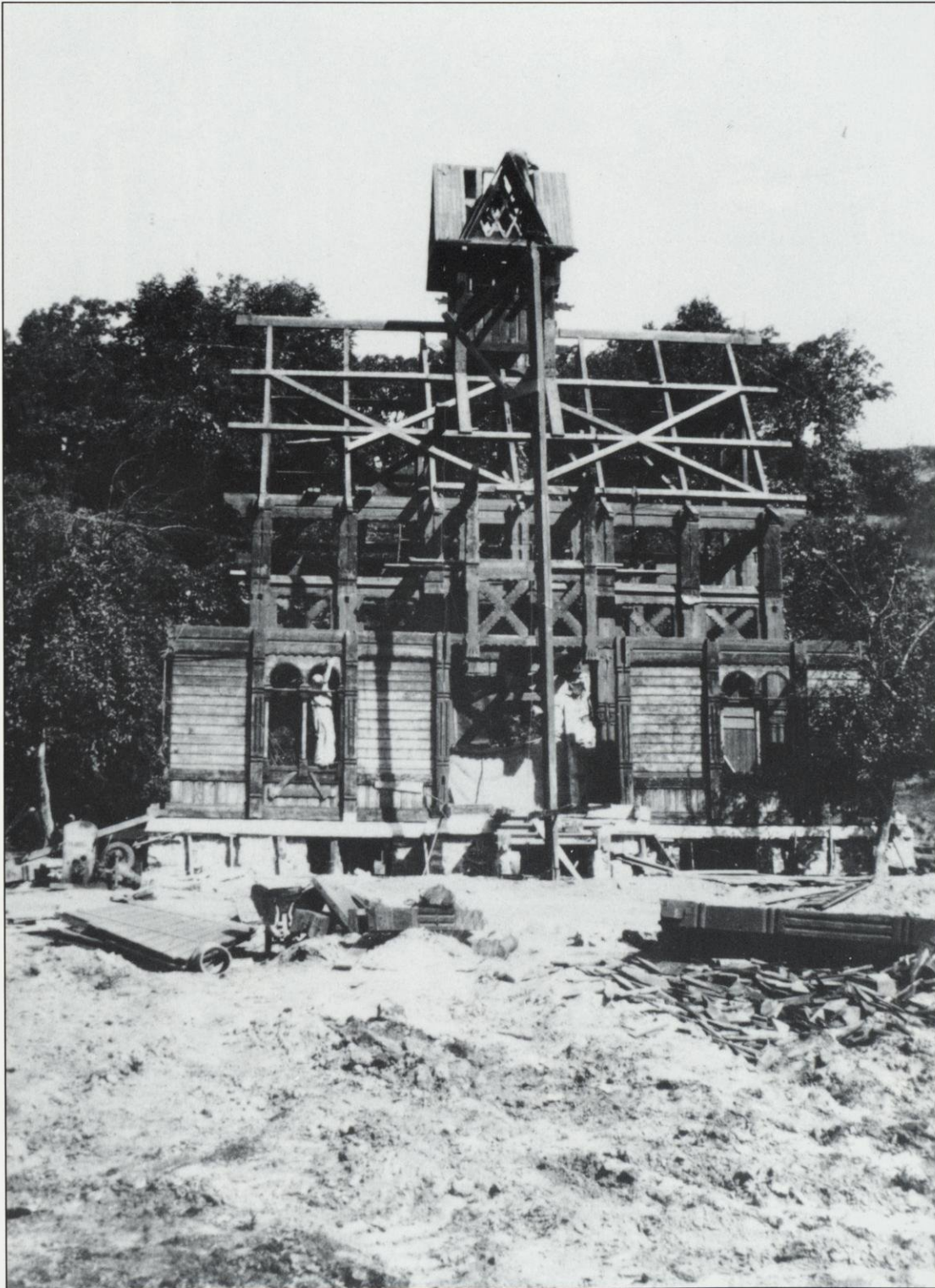
ing would also contain a very important artifact pertaining to the Norwegian composer, Edvard Grieg: his "Humoreske," the only original manuscript of his work outside of Norway. Relics of Ole Bull, famed Norwegian violinist, and paintings of Emil Bjørn, a Norwegian artist from Chicago, were given honored space. Isak's growing collection of tapestries, pictures, woodcarvings, chests, cupboards, spinning wheels, glassware and silver were displayed as space allowed.

Although the family continued to gather at Little Norway, the addition of the Norway Building further increased the public's awareness of Isak's project. On Saturday, August 1, 1936, a formal dedication was held for the Norway Building and Little Norway. After that day, upon payment of 55 cents, Little Norway was open to the public for all to view.

Isak's dream of a place in America to honor his family and his Norwegian cultural heritage had been realized. During supervision of the reconstruction and furnishing of the Norway Building, Isak was steadily growing weaker from cancer. On November 24, 1937, he passed away at a Chicago hospital. He was laid to rest in the Mount Horeb Union cemetery on November 27th.



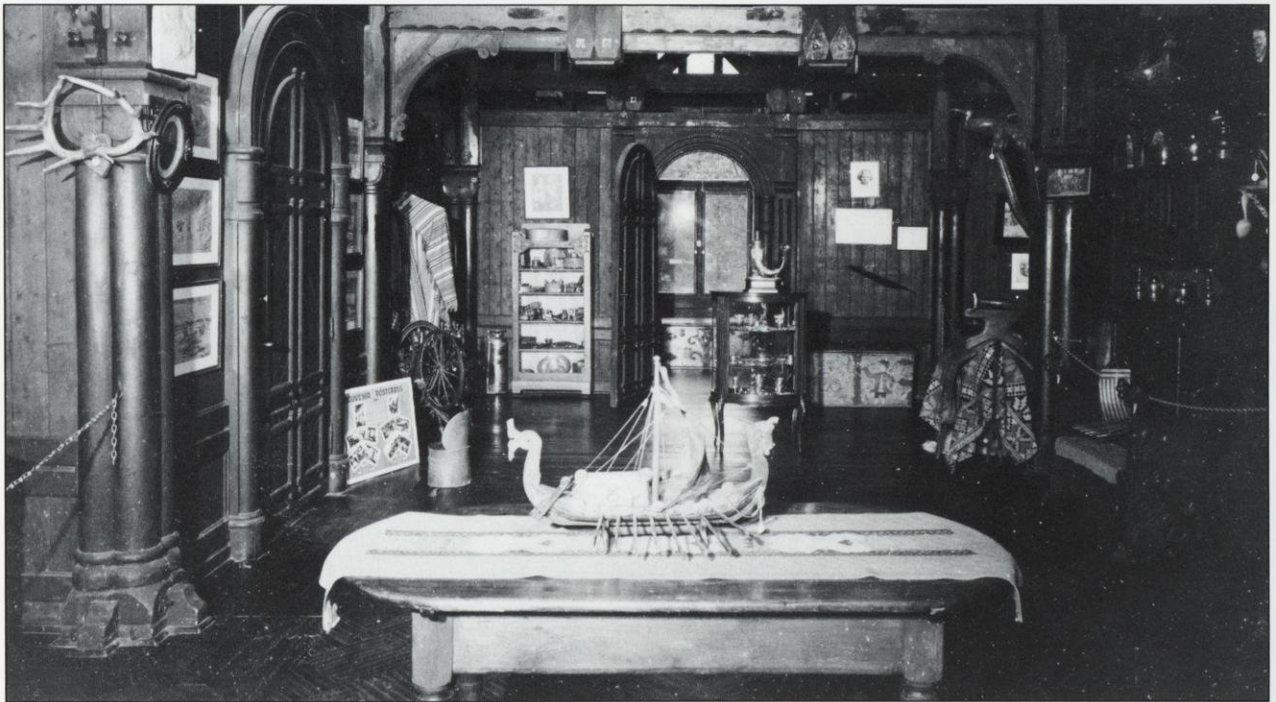
Reconstruction of the Norway Building at Little Norway, 1935.
Little Norway Collection.



Front view, reconstruction.
Little Norway Collection.



Newly reassembled Norway Building at Little Norway, 1935.
Little Norway Collection.

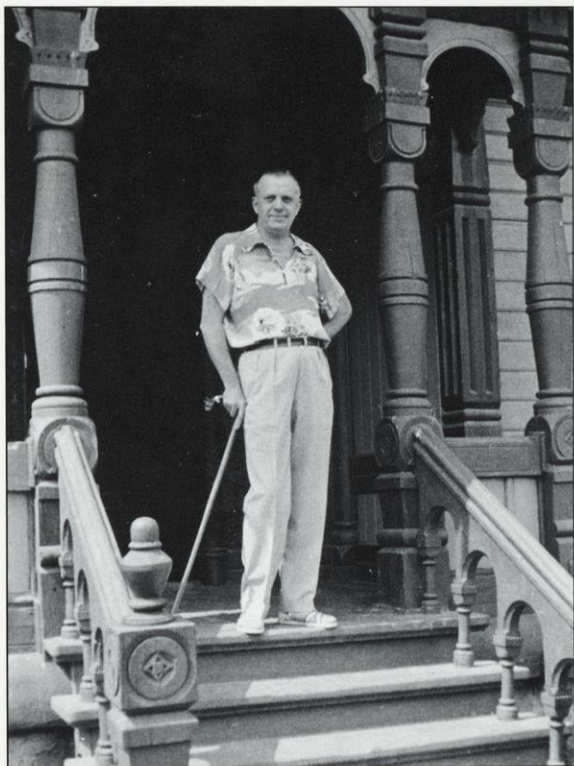


Early views of the interior of the Norway Building. Isak's growing collections were given additional exhibit space in the building's interior, including the table, foreground, which was one of the first items shipped from Norway. Little Norway Collection.

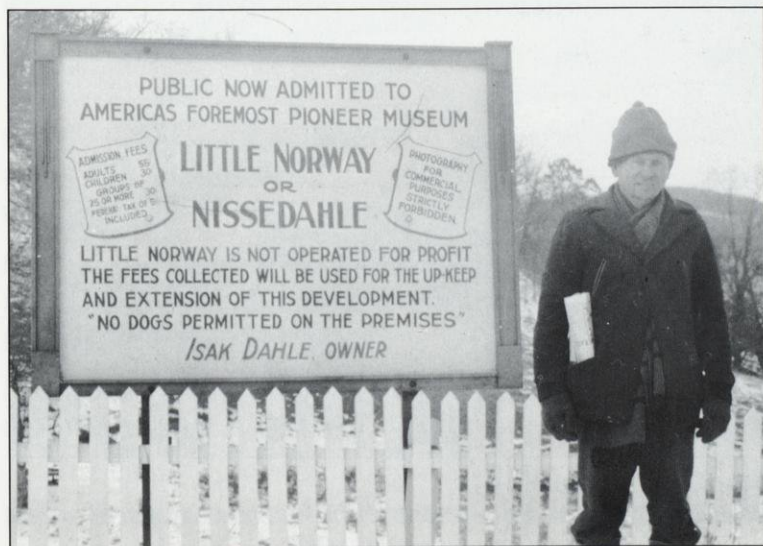




Manuscript, "Humoreske" by Edvard Grieg. Composed, signed and presented to Professor Rasmus B. Anderson, at Grieg's home, Trolldhaugen, Norway, on September 4, 1873. This composition was part of the Anderson collection, acquired by Isak c.1935. Little Norway Collection.



Isak Dable on the porch of the Norway Building, summer, 1936.
Little Norway Collection.



Caretaker Hugo Stikbevtz, poses with entrance sign declaring that the "Public is Now Admitted" to Little Norway for a cost of 55¢, adults, and 30¢, children, c.1936.
Little Norway Collection.



Little Norway Grounds, c. summer 1937.
Little Norway Collection.

A MONUMENT TO NORWEGIANS IN AMERICA

A statement in Isak's will clearly reflects his personal desires for Little Norway. It was his wish that the museum should be "kept alive as a monument to the Dahle family." He named his brother-in-law, Professor Asher Hobson, as one of two trustees to "maintain and operate Little Norway until it is disposed of."¹ Professor Hobson, a University of Wisconsin agricultural economist and husband of Isak's sister Thea, looked for an appropriate institution to take over the museum as Isak had wished, but no such institution was found.

Isak's mother Anne, who had spent her summers at Little Norway, was endowed with a modest trust fund which enabled her to continue as matriarch at the farm. During the summer months, Isak's brother and sisters brought their children to spend their weekends here. Gardens were planted to provide vegetables for canning and summer eating. Family papers and letters contain many references to Anne's cooking skills and hospitality, which extended to a wide circle of family and friends. Little Norway, with Anne at the center, continued to be the family focus during these years, just as Isak had wanted.

The family's growing attachment to the project was nurtured by Professor Hobson's agricultural interest—he devoted many free hours to the gardens and grounds. The women of the family found in Little Norway an opportunity to extend their hospitality to the public.

Isak's mother Anne died in 1951. Professor Hobson retired from his university position in 1953, at which time he took on the full-time management of Little Norway, hiring additional guides and maintenance people to handle the growing attendance. A modern, year-round home



*Anne Dable poses in Norwegian costume, c.1937,
beside the fireplace in the Austin Olson Hougan home.
Little Norway Collection.*



*Family children enjoy a day at Little Norway, c. 1930.
(Left to Right) Thomas Dable, James Green and Gaylord Pitts.
Little Norway Collection.*



(Left to Right) Elise Kittleson, Thea Dable Hobson and her mother, Anne Dable prepare vegetables for canning, 1933.
Little Norway Collection.

was built on the grounds in 1957. The 1950's and 60's was a period when Little Norway benefited from a national trend to travel and explore interesting sites by automobile. The museum's guides from this period recall being overwhelmed by the numbers of visitors and their fascination with Little Norway.

Eventually, Professor and Mrs. Hobson turned the museum operations over to their children and spouses—son Merk and daughter Marcelaine. Marcelaine's son, Scott Winner, began to take over the management role in 1982. The family's love and devotion continues to be the driving force that keeps Little Norway available to the public. It is rare in today's world to encounter such longevity of interest, and dedication to the ideals that were envisioned by Isak when he began Little Norway in 1927.

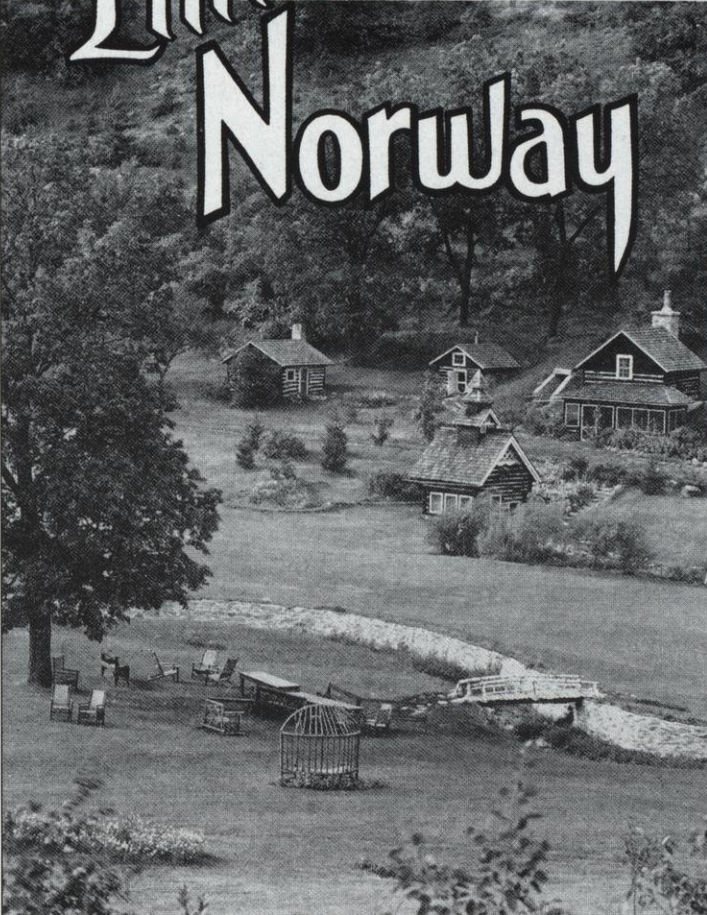
Through the years, hundreds of thousands of people from all over the world have ventured to Isak's Little Norway. The Royal Family of Norway have visited—Crown Prince Olav toured the museum in 1939, followed by his son, Crown Prince Harald in 1965.

Today, the buildings remain much as they were in Isak's day. Individuals have donated treasured family heirlooms, and additional Dahle family artifacts have found their home in the museum. Folk art objects continue



A tour group enters the Norway Building in the Late 1950's. Increased automobile traffic brought the museum's attendance to new record levels.
Photo by R. G. Aulik. Little Norway Collection.

Little Norway



OR

NISSEDAHLE

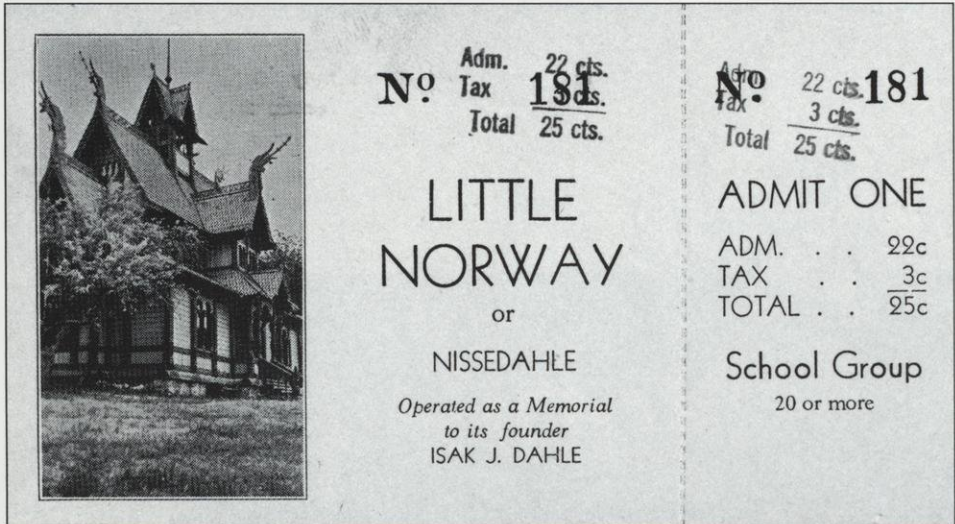
Valley of the Elves

A MUSEUM OF NORSE ANTIQUES IN
A NORWEGIAN PIONEER HOMESTEAD

Located one mile north of Highway 18
25 miles west of Madison, Wisconsin

*This early promotional brochure states:
"Little Norway is operated in memory of
its founder, Isak J. Dable, and is designed
to perpetuate the simple cultural values of
our pioneer age."*

Little Norway Collection.



*A Little Norway school group admission ticket from the 1930's.
Mount Horeb Area Historical Society Collections.*

to be acquired, and ongoing restoration projects are carried out each year. The acquisitions have grown to be the largest privately-owned Norwegian-American collection in the United States.

The Norway Building has been the focal point of the museum since its arrival. Its imposing presence in the valley with its many-gabled roofs, dragon-scale shingles and Norse flavor give visitors a unique chance to truly experience old Norway in America. Architect Hansteen, Thams and the employees of his company, the Norwegian Commission and the 1893 Chicago Fair officials would all be pleased to know that their legacy is still enjoyed by those who discover and love Little Norway today.

1. *Milwaukee Journal*, December 1938, "Isak Dahle's Will Offers Little Norway to Public."



Professor Asher Hobson and Thea Hobson, with their family on the porch of their home overlooking the grounds of Little Norway, c. 1963. (Left to Right, front) Merk Hobson, Gary Winner; Jane Hobson, John Winner; Professor Asher Hobson (standing), Thea (Dable) Hobson, Scott Winner; Marcelaine Hobson Winner. (Left to Right, back) Kent Hobson, J. Randy Winner, K. Alexander Hobson.



Crown Prince Harald of Norway leaves the Norway Building with Professor Hobson during his visit on Sunday, October 3, 1965.
Photo by Cyril Burns. Little Norway Collection.



This chest, dated 1855, was brought from Voss, Norway, by the Ole Vinge family to Primrose Township, Dane County, Wisconsin. Donated to Little Norway in 1989 by family members.

Photo by Randy Winner. Little Norway Collection.



Artifacts from the Little Norway Collection include (left to right): a grautspan (pudding bucket) with elaborate acanthus carving, a kubbestol (log chair), with rosemaling decoration, a decorated ale-bowl with zoomorphic handles, a woven birchbroot basket, and a tine (bentwood box) used for storage purposes.

Photo by Randy Winner. Little Norway Collection.

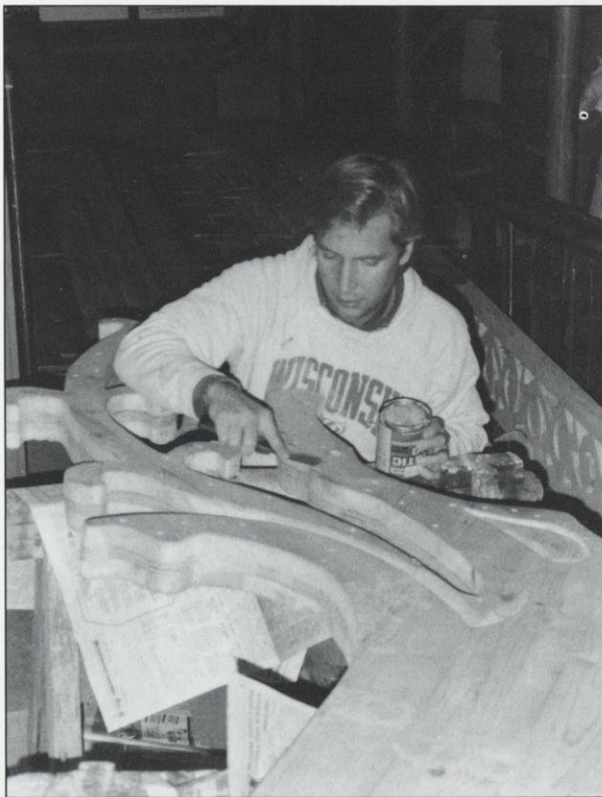


Folk-art trolls, carved from existing trees on the grounds of Little Norway by artist Mike Feeney of Mount Horeb, Wisconsin.

Photo by Randy Winner. Little Norway Collection.



Workers prepare the roof of the Norway Building for custom-made dragon-scale shingles during restoration of the building in the Spring of 1992.
Little Norway Collection.



Scott Winner, manager of Little Norway, puts finishing touches on dragon roof ornaments.
Little Norway Collection.



The restored tower on the Norway Building with dragon heads and scale-like shingles, 1992.
Little Norway Collection.

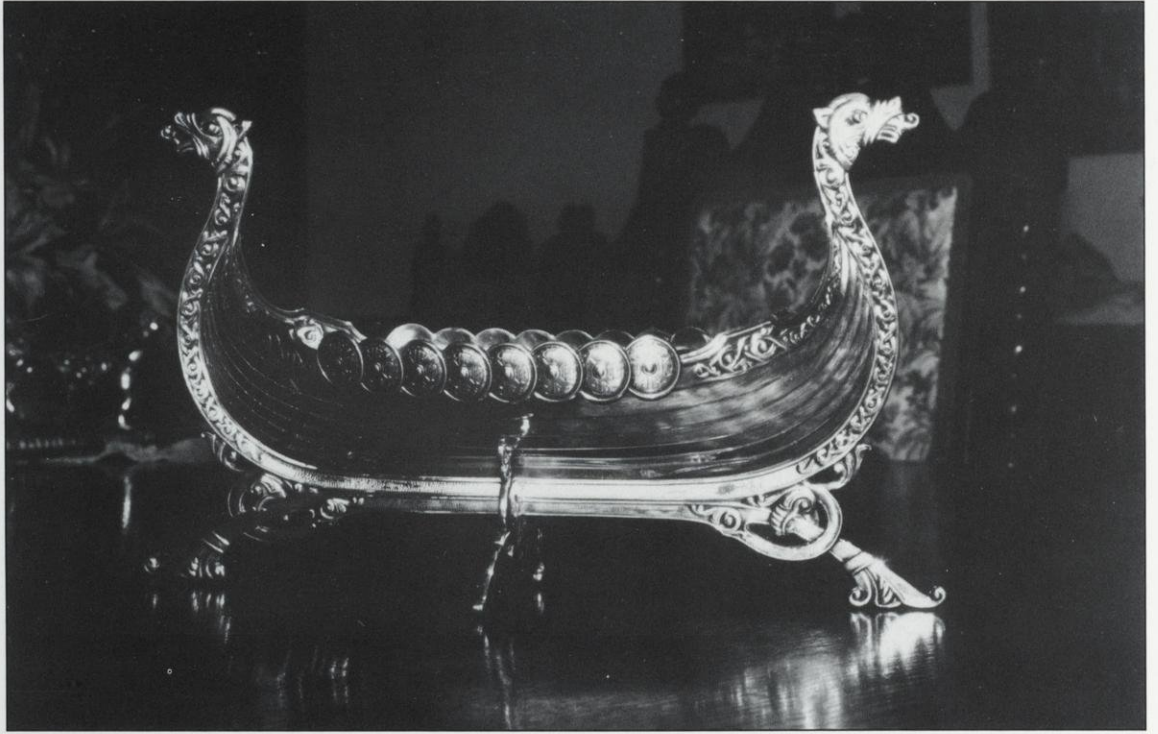


Detail, the Norway Building at Little Norway, c. 1960.
Photo by Merk Hobson. Little Norway Collection.

ARCHITECTURAL LEGACY

It is fitting that Norway chose a stave church as its entry to the 1893 Exposition. In many ways, this represents the culmination of Norway's search for a place in the artistic world of the turn of the century. Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, new impulses of Norwegian nationalism caused artists of all disciplines to look for ways to express a rediscovery of their Nordic heritage. There was a flowering of artistic achievement in the fine arts, and the arts and crafts enjoyed a revival stemming from folk traditions. Artists drew upon ancient motifs dating to Viking times to create works that expressed a truly Norwegian character. The artistic theme that came to be most recognized on the international scene was the "Dragon Style," a blend of artistic elements borrowed from Viking ships, the ancient stave churches dotting Norway's landscape, Viking burial finds and folk art sources. "The style was at its height in Norway in the decades following 1880, and found its expression above all in architecture and the crafts of the cabinetmaker and silversmith."¹

Waldemar Hansteen, the architect of the Norway Building, was deeply involved in the artistic climate of his day. Born in Christiania in 1857, Hansteen was educated abroad and returned to Christiania in 1881. In following years, Hansteen became the head teacher at both Skien and Christiania's evening technical schools, he was the architect for many government and institutional buildings, and was the principal architect chosen to carry out the restoration of the Gol stave church when it was moved from Hallingdal to the Royal Estate at Bygdøy in 1884 (now the Norsk Folk Museum).



Crafts of the Norwegian cabinetmaker and silversmith display dragon-style influence. Two examples from the Little Norway collection include a silver Viking ship and a bench with carved ends. Little Norway Collection.





Frogneraeteren (Frogner Chalet), Oslo, Norway, c. 1910. Architectural details in this building show many elements of dragon-style influence.
Little Norway Collection.

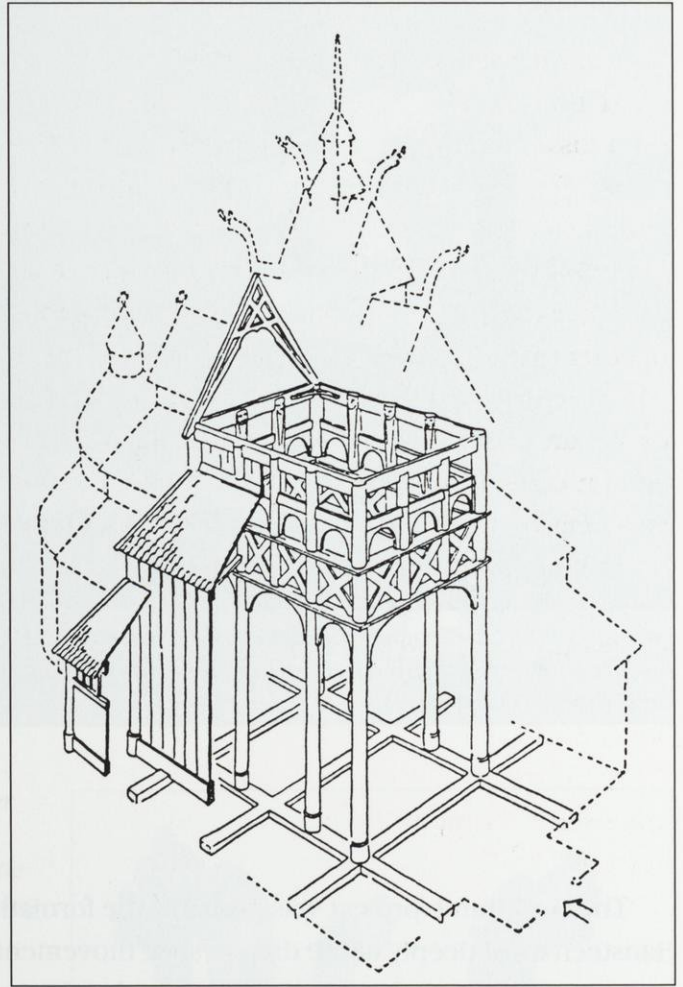
The Gol church project was probably the formative key that immersed Hansteen most deeply in the dragon style movement. Gol required extensive restoration, and the architects involved in the project answered many technical questions by studying other stave churches, including Borgund Church. Many of the elements found in the Norway Building, particularly in the interior details, reveal that Hansteen was intimately familiar with these two stave churches.

The Norway Building is constructed on a framework principle which makes it a classic stave church structure. Paul Anker in *Art of Scandinavia* defines stave churches as having two basic elements: a support framework of intercrossed logs (the *chassis*), and the vertical columns (the *staves*), which create the 3-dimensional framework of the building itself.

The Norwegian word *stav*, which means a pole, applies to the corner posts and columns which are essential for upholding the entire structure, and for joining the fundamental chassis to the upper braces.²



*The Gol Church, postcard view, c. 1913. Hansteen, architect of the Norway Building, was a member of the architectural team responsible for the restoration of this church when it was moved from Hallingdal, Norway, to the Royal Estate at Bygdøy in 1884. The Royal Estate later became the Norsk Folk Museum.
Little Norway Collection.*



*Perspective drawing of the Gol Stave Church shows the support framework (chassis) at ground level. Rising from the chassis are the staves, which support the gridwork and roof bracing, above. It is evident from the drawing that the staves are the interior elements; the exterior walls only enclose the building and do not support the structure.
Drawing courtesy of Stav og Laft i Norge, Norsk Landsforbund, Oslo, Norway, 1969.*

The Norway Building has a chassis made of huge logs set into a stone foundation. Two long beams run the length of the building, and a grid of intercrossed logs join the beams together. At each intersection of the logs a stave rises, and these are tied together in the rafters with a framework of self-supporting scissor beams. The inner-most, highest roof is buttressed by the lower roofs, allowing the central nave to soar 36 feet.

The staves of the Norway Building are constructed of four logs bolted together to make a larger, bundle-like stave. This was a practical solution to the problem of making the building portable, but it created a challenge for the architect. The old stave churches often had carved faces as the column capitals, but the visual effect of the four-part staves meant that pairs of faces needed to be employed instead. These have been interpreted as the kings and queens from the Norse Sagas. The tradition of carving these faces with individual personalities, almost as caricatures, is very much alive. No two faces are alike, and some are humorously ugly. The dragons carved into the interior quadrant brackets are reminiscent of the Gol Church.

The clerestory level is dominated by a row of St. Andrew's crosses, and a series of transom windows admit light from above. Visitors from Norway are often struck with the brightness of the building's interior, in marked contrast to the dim interiors of the old stave churches. Large numbers of windows, both above and below, admit daylight, answering the need for natural lighting in a public exhibition building. An elaborate parquet floor, thoroughly contemporary to the 1890's, gives the Norway Building the richness of multi-colored wood tones. The interior wall surfaces are coated with a creosote finish, as the original stave churches would have been.

Particular attention must be paid to the carvings surrounding the Norway Building's entryway. These carvings are a studious composite of other stave church portals, and were executed by Peder Kvaale of Orkdal, an employee of the Thams company who was originally a farmer. Heads of great beasts emerge from the lower corners of the doorframe, and their tongues become an elaborate, zoomorphic tangle of serpent bodies, birds' necks and floral vines. Biting heads intermingle with grasping claws with impressive Viking intensity. The style is marvelously pagan and vigorous. Acanthus motifs define the doorposts themselves, and a more formal frieze of acanthus leaves makes up the portal base. The church portals of Ål,



The Norway Building's chassis is evident in this photo, taken beneath the building.
Little Norway Collection.



The Norway Building's roof construction includes scissor-bracing (top) and nave posts, connecting the roof to the staves (below).
Photo by Randy Winner. Little Norway Collection.



Seventeen pairs of carved faces, representing the kings and queens from the Norse sagas, peer down from the stave capitals in the Norway Building's interior.

Photo by Randy Winner. Little Norway Collection.



Dragon heads form the ends of the quadrant brackets. This detail is a direct influence of architect Hansteen's involvement with the Gol Stave Church restoration project.

Photo by Randy Winner. Little Norway Collection.



Upper detail of the Norway Building's nave shows the clerestory windows and St. Andrew's crosses.

Photo by Randy Winner. Little Norway Collection.



Detail of parquet floor, contemporary to the 1890's.

Photo by Randy Winner. Little Norway Collection.

Borgund, Hegge and Gol all have these same elements as part of their design. The massive door is ornamented with hand-wrought iron hinges and a ring knocker, and is almost 3 inches thick.

On the exterior of the building, the multi-level rooflines originally were sheathed with heavy, dragon-scale shingles. The unusual texture was further enhanced with multi-colored paint, giving the roof a most distinctive character. Fire-breathing dragons define the roofpeaks and accentuate the verticality of the structure. Other similarities to the old stave churches, such as the latticed gables, dragon-surmounted tower and heavy porch posts, all suggest much careful study.



The Norway Building's portal carvings and door.
Little Norway Collection.



Detail, left door panel. An elaborate tangle of carving emerges as a tongue from the beast's mouth, lower right corner.
Little Norway Collection.



Detail, right panel. Biting heads, acanthus motifs and the doorway's hand-wrought metalwork are visible.

Little Norway Collection.

The Norway Building is neither a church nor a direct copy, but rather an adaptive interpretation of the Stave Church Style. The traditional semi-circular chancel and the enclosed ambulatory were not incorporated as part of the design because they were not essential to the building's use as an exhibition structure. The Norway Building is, however, a representation of Norway's unique contribution to architectural history, a beautiful building, and a valuable artifact from the 1893 Columbian Exposition.

1. *The Art of Norway, 1750-1914*, ed. Louise Lincoln, The Minneapolis Institute of Arts and The Regents of the University of Wisconsin, publishers, 1978, p. 175.

2. Paul Anker, *Art of Scandinavia*, Vol. 1, Paul Hamlyn Publishing Group, LTD., London, 1970, p. 377.



Restorations completed in 1992 returned the Norway Building to its 1893 appearance. For the first time since its tenure at Lake Geneva, dragon ornaments crown the peaks of all three roof levels. Dragon-scale shingles and decorative details were also restored.

Photo by Randy Winner. Little Norway Collection.

CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY

- 1857 *May 28.* Albert Waldemar Hansteen born Christiania, Norway.
- 1867 Wilhelm A. Thams establishes the Thams sawmill near Trondheim, Norway.
- 1867 *September 9.* Christian Marius Thams born, Trondheim, Norway.
- 1869 Thams sawmill expanded to become planing mill and crate factory.
- 1872 Fire destroys Thams sawmill. The company is expanded and ownership transferred to Maurenthius Thams, under the name M. Thams & Co.
- 1883 *February 1.* Isak James Dahle born, Mount Vernon, Wisconsin.
- 1884 Architect Waldemar Hansteen participates in the Gol Stave Church restoration project, Christiania.
- 1888 An earthquake at Nice and Menton inspires Christian Thams to build portable houses at his father's factory.
- 1889 Paris World's Fair. M. Thams & Co. submits a Clock Tower Pavilion.
- 1890 *February 24.* Chicago chosen as site of the 1893 World's Fair.
- 1890 C.K.G. Billings elected to Board of Directors of the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago.
- 1890 *July 2.* Lakeshore site chosen for the World's Fair.
- 1891 *January.* Department of Publicity and Promotion organized to publicize the World's Fair.
- 1892 *May.* Norway establishes a committee to plan exhibits for the Fair.
- 1892 C.K.G. Billings purchases property at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, naming it "Green Gables."
- 1892 *November.* M. Thams & Co. contracts with the Norwegian Committee to build the Norway Building. Construction begins immediately.
- 1893 *March 15.* Norway Building leaves Christiansund, Norway, on board the steamship *Hekla*.
- 1893 *March 24.* *Hekla's* axle breaks, delaying the arrival of the Norway Building in New York.
- 1893 *April 8.* Norway Building arrives in New York.
- 1893 *Late April.* Construction of the Norway Building begins at the Chicago Fair site.
- 1893 *May 1.* World's Columbian Exposition opens.
- 1893 *May 17.* Norway's National Day at the World's Fair.
- 1893 *October 29.* (Sunday) World's Fair closes two days earlier than originally planned. Flags are lowered to half-staff to mourn the assassination of Chicago's mayor, Carter Harrison, the previous evening.
- 1893 *November 30.* *Chicago Tribune* reports that the Norway Building is sold to C.K.G. Billings for \$1,500.
- 1894 *Winter.* Norway Building arrives at Lake Geneva.
- 1897 Stockholm Exposition. M. Thams & Co. submits a pavilion building of similar design to the Norway Building.
- 1904 Isak Dahle graduates from the University of Wisconsin.
- 1907 C.K.G. Billings sells "Green Gables" to William H. Mitchell.

- 1908 Trondheim Exposition. M. Thams & Co. participates.
- 1910 William H. Mitchell dies; "Green Gables" is purchased by William Wrigley Jr.
- 1911 Wrigley family begins renovation of "Green Gables."
- 1914 Oslo Exposition. M. Thams & Co. participates.
- 1917 Philip Wrigley modifies the Norway Building into a motion picture studio.
- 1921 *May 4.* Waldemar Hansteen dies.
- 1926 *January.* Isak Dahle and his mother, Anne, tour Europe and Norway.
- 1927 *January 1.* Isak Dahle and his brother, Otto, inspect the Austin Olson Hougan farm, rural Mount Horeb, Wisconsin. Isak later purchases the property and begins developing Little Norway.
- 1928 Isak Dahle's friend makes a collecting trip to Norway, searching for Norwegian antiques.
- 1929 *January.* Antiques from Norway exhibited in windows of the Dahle family store, Mount Horeb.
- 1932 William Wrigley Jr. dies.
- 1933 *July.* Isak Dahle meets with Philip Wrigley to negotiate the acquisition of the Norway Building.
- 1935 *July.* Norway Building moved to Little Norway.
- 1936 *August 1.* Dedication ceremony opens Little Norway to the public.
- 1937 *November 24.* Isak Dahle dies.
- 1939 Crown Prince Olav of Norway tours Little Norway.
- 1948 *May 22.* Christian Thams dies.
- 1951 Anne Dahle dies.
- 1953 Professor Asher Hobson retires from his university position and becomes full-time manager of Little Norway.
- 1965 *October 3.* Crown Prince Harald of Norway visits Little Norway.
- 1982 Scott Winner, grand-nephew of Isak Dahle, takes on management role of Little Norway.
- 1992 *February 29.* Professor Asher Hobson, age 102, passes away at his home at Little Norway.
- 1992 *Winter.* Norway Building restored to 1893 appearance.
- 1993 Norway Building Centennial.

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From The Little Norway Collection:

Little Norway Archives

Dahle Family Letters

Isak Dahle's Scrapbooks and Diaries

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Norway Government Building

From "Vistas of the Fair in Color,"

Poole Bros. Art Color Series. June 18, 1894.

Part II, Chicago 1894, Plate 4. Little Norway Collection.