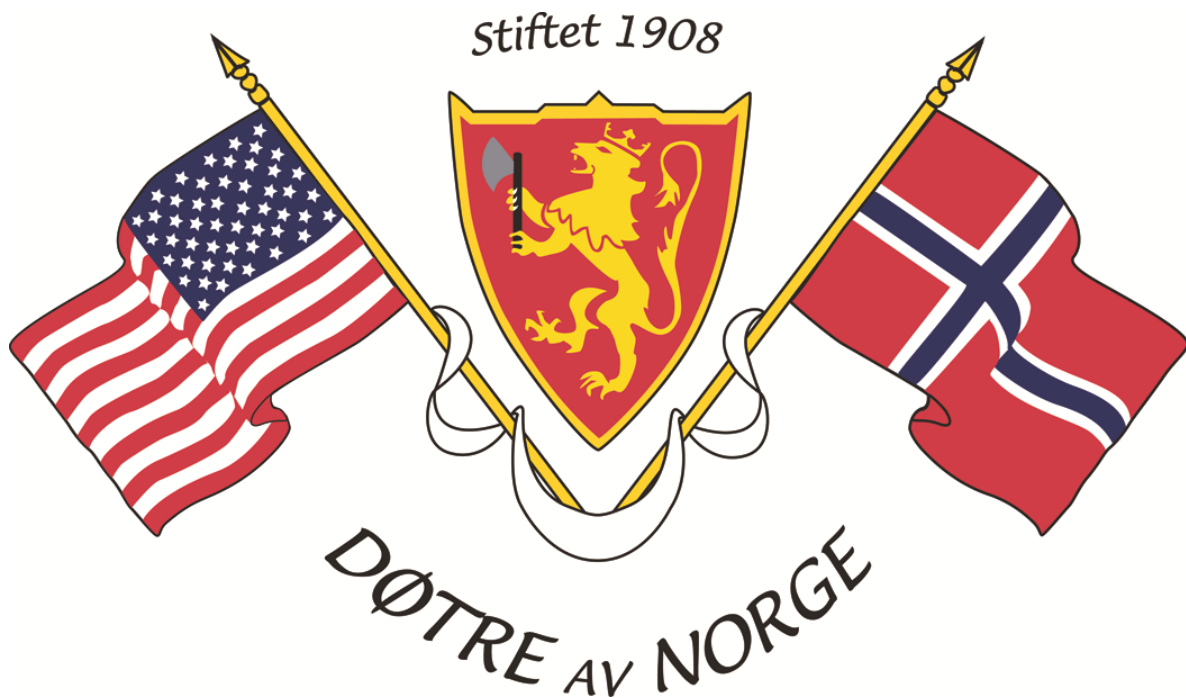


The Daughters of Norway and Their Role in the Immigrant Experience

Julie Willson

Scandinavian Women in the Northwest

May 25, 1979



Foreword

For many years Daughters of Norway has gifted numerous historical papers to the archival department at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Wash. The department organizes the papers, and they are put in conservation boxes to be kept for posterity.

In the fall of 2018, past Grand Lodge Treasurer, Chris Engstrom of Embla Lodge #2 and I visited the archives. In a serendipitous moment, I randomly opened one of the Grand Lodge boxes and happened to pull out this special document from 1979.

With Chris's help a phone number was located for whom we hoped would be the Julie Willson, author of the 1979 paper. I called, left a message, and waited with anticipation.

To my absolute delight she returned my call and explained that she, indeed, had written the paper for a university class. She kindly and generously gave her permission for Daughters of Norway to reformat her original paper and share it as we desire.

Tusen takk to my Grandson, Parker Bingham, a third year university student, for the cover and reformatting the document for 2021 use. We are very excited to offer this interesting historical perspective for your reading enjoyment...a snapshot in time.

Sisterly,

Karen Bartos
Daughters of Norway
Grand Lodge President
Elise Wærenskjold Lodge #48
Roseville, Calif.

July 4, 2021

Valkyrien #1
Seattle,
Washington
Founded 1905

Sonja Henie
#29
Reno, Nevada
Founded 1971

Embla #2
Tacoma,
Washington
Founded 1907

DAUGHTERS of NORWAY

To unite women of Norwegian birth,

descent, or marriage;

To advance the knowledge of Norwegian

history, language, and culture;

To enhance the life of the members

socially, morally, and spiritually.

Crown Princess
Martha #28
San Leandro,
California
Founded 1956

Stjernen #7
Astoria, Oregon
Founded 1910

The Order had its beginning in 1908 in Seattle, Washington, when existing independent lodges united to form a Grand Lodge, Daughters of Norway, and incorporated under the laws of the State of Washington. Presently there are 10 lodges in five western states.

Thelma #26
Everett,
Washington
Founded 1908
Affiliated 1931

In addition to promoting the aims and purposes of the Order, the lodges take part in community affairs. In times of national emergencies the members have given financial aid and service to both their native and adoptive countries. The Order also sponsors a scholarship program for advanced studies.

Breidablik #10
Ballard,
Washington
Founded 1910

Membership is open to interested persons who have reached the age of 13 years; also to women of other Scandinavian extractions who are interested in the aims and purposes of the Order.

Camilla Collett
#25
Silvana,
Washington
Founded 1923

Alice M. Ericksen

Gjøa #18
Oakland,
California
Founded 1913

Solheim #20
Butte, Montana
Founded 1913

The Daughters of Norway

In the late 1800's and early 1900's "joining" had become a popular American habit and the variety of societies formed was astonishing, ranging from secret societies based on elaborate ritual to literary and other cultural groups. The Norwegian immigrants for several reasons emulated the Americans, forming many different societies of their own, from Knights Templar lodges to bygdelags, to literary clubs, partly because they were a strongly nationalistic group and partly because they were strangers in a foreign land and wanted the companionship of fellow countrymen. One such society, the Sons of Norway, founded its first lodge in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1895 with eighteen men who "leagued themselves together for mutual aid." (Blegen, 1940) It is in this group that the history of the Daughters of Norway is rooted, for those men set up the first Daughters lodge in 1897. The ideas for both groups spread first west and then east of Minneapolis, and on the Pacific Coast a Sons lodge was organized in 1903 (Leif Erikson, Seattle) and a Daughters lodge (Valkyrien, also Seattle) in 1905. Neither group was considered in league with the original Midwestern lodges because the distance between Minneapolis and Seattle was too great at that time, and the insurance program offered by the Minneapolis Sons they felt would not be effective in Washington state (Norse to the New Northwest, 1975). In 1910 though, east and west finally merged into a national organization and then later became international when lodges were founded in Canada. The eastern and western Daughters, however, never merged and remain today two separate organizations.

Not much has been written, at least in major historical works dealing with Norwegian immigrant life, about these two societies, but where a paragraph or two can be found on the Sons, the Daughters are usually referred to in one line as "auxiliary" to the Sons as if their greatest cultural contribution lay in serving coffee and refreshments at Sons meetings. Actually, on the Pacific Coast at least, they were much more active than that, especially

under the leadership of such influential, strong-minded women as Mrs. Inga Frodesen. She served as the first president of Valkyrien and worked enthusiastically to preserve Norwegian culture (Ericksen, 1979). Both she and her husband Frode were awarded the Saint Olav medal by the King of Norway, as was just recently (October 1978) their daughter Anna Marie Frodesen Steiner, also a Daughter, for "outstanding contributions to the Norwegian American cause." (Døtre av Norge, 1978) Unfortunately, most records of Valkyrien in the early days were lost in a fire at the old Norway Hall.

From 1905 on, the Daughters, like the Sons, grew and expanded until just before the Depression there were 29 lodges in existence from Alaska to California, each with several hundred members. Embla in Tacoma was the second lodge, founded in 1907 with the assistance of Valkyrien and upon the insistence of wives whose husbands had joined Norden No. 2, the new Tacoma men's lodge. It appears, however, that at least, in Embla and Valkyrien, the two organizations did nearly everything together anyway, so the need of a separate group in order to enjoy exclusively female activities was not the issue. Valkyrien and Leif Erikson, in fact, even met on the same night in the same room with only a curtain for a partition between the two; the coffee hour after the business meeting was always shared.

The reason for separateness became clearer in later years, when beginning with the Depression membership began to decline. The Sons needed more members to support their insurance program, and so "invited" the Daughters to merge with them. Although there were many women who saw advantages to merging and in fact left the Daughters in order to participate in the Sons' program, the staunch members refused on the grounds that their identity as Daughters would be lost. This fear was realized when the Daughters of the Midwest did merge, first of all because they could no longer support their own benefit program, and secondly because they were under the impression that the name of the organization would be changed to the "Sons and Daughters of Norway" which in fact never

happened. (Ericksen, 1979) All other reasons given are just variations of the identity theme, from fear of doing all the work and getting none of the credit to not being allowed the chance to hold office to feeling that "women needed the opportunity to strengthen their ability to survive in the community." (Buck, 1979) They wanted to be known as Daughters; they were proud to be women and did not want, to be swallowed up into the men's organization. (Apalseth, 1979)

This pride is reflected in the way each lodge is run. Although it is considered an honor to be an officer it is above all a lot of work, but the line is set up so as to share duties and provide for reinforcement. The president who of course leads the lodge is, for example, advised when necessary by the judge, who is always a past president. The vice-president, besides being an assistant to the president is also there to help anyone who needs her. The secretary is in charge of correspondence and of notifying members of meetings and other events. A financial secretary handles the dues while the treasurer is responsible for the books and the bills. Other officers' duties are in relation to the certain amount of ritual involved, notably the marshal and her assistant who are in charge of the "floorwork" and assist in the initiation of new members. The chaplain reads the prayers and as an extra responsibility provides for entertainment. Two more officers are more for formality's sake than actual function, and they are the inner and the outer guards. The outer guard receives the password which is required of members before they can enter the meeting. There are also three trustees who serve terms of one to three years, and they take care of such matters as auditing the treasurer's books, okaying bills, and keeping track of the lodge's inventory. Finally, every lodge has a musician. Elections are held every year, and although the president is limited to two successive terms, there are no such restrictions on the other officers, and if a particularly good secretary is elected one year, she may stay for eighteen, as was the case in Embla. Various other positions are also important but not elected, one of which is the scribe who is responsible for submitting an account, of her lodge's activities to

Døtre av Norge, the bi-monthly newspaper of the organization, published in Seattle. Usually someone acts as historian for the lodge, also.

For overseeing the affairs of the organization as a whole there is the Grand Lodge which consists of members from the other lodges. The officers' positions and duties parallel the individual lodges fairly closely. They include president, vice-president, judge, secretary, treasurer, chaplain, marshal, and three trustees. The chaplain and marshal perform their duties primarily at functions that include more than one lodge such as conventions, and occasionally the chaplain will offer some words of inspiration through the newspaper.

As has been mentioned, lodge meetings include a degree of ritual that is not open to the public, although not much, for in the words of Arlow Andersen, "Norwegians (feel) more at ease with a minimum of fanfare and ceremony." (Andersen, 1975) But according to Ida Apalseth, a 59-year member of Embla, "Women like to parade around", and anyway, ritual is important for preserving the identity of the group because it "gives insight to the beginning of the lodge." (Apalseth, 1979) Not everyone feels this way, however, and several lodges have done away with such things as the password. The Sons of Norway have for the most part eliminated ritual and opted for more casual meetings; the Daughters place more importance on formality.

In addition to official positions, each lodge has several circles, committees, and/or interest groups, originally patterned after similar women's groups in the church. Most lodges have a Sunshine committee whose members visit shut-ins and the sick and report these visits at each meeting. Embla, the largest lodge, has two sewing circles, a Leikarring, a Hardanger group, and offers well-attended cooking classes. Smaller lodges of course do not have this much involvement, but they nevertheless are kept busy with whatever interests they do have. Each lodge also has a flag team which performs on such occasions as the initiation of new members and in competition between lodges. Most also have small

drill teams that perform in parades, but they are struggling because the original members are now too old to march, and there have not been enough new members to fill the spaces.

Naturally, any organization is bound to change in 70-odd years, and trends in membership and activities of the Daughters can be viewed in terms of three stages of development. Magne Smedvig, General Manager at the Sons of Norway Headquarters in 1973, stated it well in reference to the same trend discernible in the Sons:

First, the organization or protection phase; people of limited means banding together for protection and mutual support. The second, as the Sons of Norway grew, was the social and recreational phase; fraternities within the Norwegian American community. Third, In the last ten years, Sons of Norway clearly has been entering the heritage phase, probably its final and most lasting objective since it will last as long as interest in ancestry endures. (Friis, 1976)

The first phase is obvious because that encompasses the purpose for founding the organization. The reason for joining most often given by the second generation on behalf of the first is that it was "a place for them to come". Few could speak English when they arrived and a once or twice a month meeting with others who could speak the same language must have been a joy and a relief to many women, as was certainly the sense of belonging somewhere in a strange new land, especially to the unmarried women who worked in homes and sometimes had no other friends or family. The sick benefits and other kinds of aid, monetary or otherwise, were also appreciated by these women, who through a cooperative effort took care of their own as best they could, "their own" including, however, the men. One example from Tacoma concerns a member of Norden Lodge whose house burned down, so the Sons and Daughters gave a party to raise some money and then rebuilt his house for him. (Apalseth, 1979)

Another value of this society to the immigrant women was the opportunity it gave to keep up the traditions of the homeland. Singing the familiar songs, folk dancing and

celebrating holidays with traditional foods and in the manner they were accustomed to meant a lot to women who still remembered and loved their country and most likely a lot of the people still living there. Knowing that friends and relatives back home were celebrating the same customs in the same way strengthened the emotional ties and comforted the loneliness as well. These first women were the ones who had the deepest respect for Norway and things Norwegian while at the same time appreciated the new life in America more than did their children and grandchildren. Thus, their activities, whether purely social or for the good of the community, reflected that. A comprehensive report of Embla's expenditures, published in 1926, is a good indication of where their interests lay; (Bergman, 1926)

Help for bathroom at Parkland Children's Home	50.00
Memory Gift to Norway, 1914	50.00
For charitable work in Tacoma	480.00
For sick members	1,843.00
Funeral benefits	550.00
Flowers for sick and burials	418.00
American Red Cross during the war	375.00
Armenian Relief and other donations for sick and needy	10.00

This was also the time, i.e. the teens and twenties of the 1900's, of the last great wave of Norwegian immigrants when in the twenties alone, 86,612 Norwegians crossed the Atlantic. (Lovoll, 1979) This would account for the high interest and membership rates and explain why all the functions were so well-attended. Marie Berglund, for example, remembers Embla's first bazaar, a three-day event in 1922, and held in the not quite finished Normanna Hall. In spite of terribly stormy weather and a building without doors or windows, the bazaar was still a success. (Berglund, 1978) Valkyrien too was famous for its bazaars, for which the women would sew and

bake for months, and for their smorgasbord dinners that drew crowds too big for the building. But the event of the year was always "Syttende Mai" which was celebrated with parades, programs, dinners, and whatever other means were available.

Although the traditional celebrations remained part of every Daughters lodge, as membership grew and included more and more second-generation women, the use of the Norwegian language lessened which increased somewhat the distance between the old country and the new. The American lifestyle was changing too, and after the traumatic thirties and forties, its influence was felt among the Daughters. The hard struggle to survive, so typical of the previous decades was replaced with greater affluence and more time for fun.

In addition to the usual activities, it was popular in Seattle, for example, to hold twenty-fifth wedding anniversary parties in Norway Hall, which were always sponsored by friends of the couple and open to all lodge members and friends of both Sons and Daughters. An admission was charged, but most if not all money went to the couple as a gift. (Ericksen, 1979) Valkyrien was also fond of holding dances and card parties, which bothered some because some drinking was involved, but people went anyway. Visiting other lodges was also popular although often difficult in earlier days. Another favorite was (and is) conventions, which were (and are) held every two years and hosted by a different lodge each time. Although some business was conducted, it is evident from a 1940 program that more time was spent enjoying musical performances, Leikarrings from the various lodges, drill and flag team competition, sight-seeing, and of course banquets and picnics. A similar program was offered at the 1958 convention in Tacoma, with the addition of a bowling tournament. Both these conventions were held in conjunction with the Sons of Norway. The purpose of these affairs is best stated by Adelaine Sather, Grand Lodge President in 1958, and the social concern is obvious: "We shall meet with the purpose of conducting the business of the Grand Lodge, exchange ideas, and make plans for the future... We shall meet old friends and make new ones, returning to our home lodges

with new ideas and a desire to do bigger and better things for the good of the Order.” (Døtre av Norge, 1958)

On a smaller scale, nearly every meeting was considered a social event. Skits, singing, dancing, and various humorous games and competitions are mentioned in all the newspaper accounts, along with Valentine parties and Spring banquets which are hardly Norwegian-culture oriented.

Of course, service projects were never neglected, and one area that has always received special attention is care of the sick and the elderly. To this effect, Seattle founded the Norse Home in 1957; after an unsuccessful attempt several years earlier to establish a hospital. The Home was the brain-child of Valkyrien and Leif Erikson, and continues to be supported by them to a great extent

The newspaper Døtre av Norge is a good source of information on what exactly interested the women of the forties and fifties. Norwegian culture was still taken seriously, but outside interests increased too. A 1946 edition contains a travel description of the Pacific Coast as seen by a female Norwegian journalist and excerpts of letters from Norway, while in 1958, besides a review of authoress Sigrid Undset, there was also one of Vance Packard's Hidden Persuaders. This seems to indicate both an awareness of issues important to general society, and an emphasis on women who have achieved. It is interesting to note, however, that growth during this period was very small, and only one lodge was founded between 1923 and 1956, Crown Princess Martha in San Leandro, California.

The third and present stage has come about due to the interest, in cultural heritage and family "roots". Women are joining now whose grandmothers were immigrants and who themselves have become far removed from feelings of patriotism toward Norway, except those experienced vicariously through the older members. Some of the older women complain, a little

sadly, that there is not so much appreciation of working together as in the old days, but those that are active are very dedicated to the Daughters of Norway, and still enjoy keeping the Scandinavian traditions. Embla, for example, puts on big productions every year not only for Syttende Mai, but on Midsummer's Eve, for Leif Erickson week in October, and of course gives many Christmas programs and parties. There is an especial interest in learning the arts and skills that were once taken for granted; Embla's abler members are teaching the younger and/or ignorant ones to cook and bake Scandinavian foods, do Hardanger embroidery, and folk dance, among other things. Valkyrien gives demonstrations of various folk arts and crafts in Norway Center every September which are also very popular.

Money, as always, is freely given to any organization deemed worthy, although sick benefits for each member are no longer available. The Seattle Symphony and the Seattle Historical Society are two recipients; so is the Tacoma Rescue Mission. Camperships for children and scholarships for students are two more very important expenditures, the latter because many the women did not have the chance to go to school themselves and they want to give others the opportunity.

In spite of all this, there were not really three distinct periods, just general trends. Several factors have prevented complete change, most, notably the 40-50-60 year members whose very presence keeps the character of the lodge intact, even more so if they are vocal about resisting change. That they have been successful is evidenced by the actual complaints of modern immigrants to this country that there is too much emphasis "on an idealized rural culture", and that this is especially true of the Pacific Coast Daughters and Sons. (Lovoll, 1979) This can probably be explained by the fact that so many immigrants from the rural culture in question are still living on the coast, where the immigrant generation has already died out, in the east and Midwest. In any case, it is difficult to break away from that particular tradition because Daughters of Norway owes its shape and its very existence to the women of that era, and

certain characteristics basic to the organization had their beginnings then. Donating time and money for the care of sick and needy people, for example, is directly descended from the first members who had once been in need and thus extended a hand to others who were in similar circumstances. One of their goals was also to become better citizens, an aim that is never outdated. The lodge is still a place to make friends, too, just as it was when women met who had no other place to go to be with other women of their same nationality and interests. They could belong, feel that they were doing something worthwhile, and enjoy the sociability of it all. Furthermore, they began a tradition of family involvement in which the children and the children's' children often have joined the same lodge. It is impossible to know just what kinds of things were discussed outside of official business at those first meetings, but from the signs it seems likely that they were for the most part a caring, supportive network of women, expressed best in the term "sister", which is used by all the Daughters to refer to themselves and to each other.

Culturally, in comparison to the Sons of Norway, even with all this activity the Daughters cannot hope for the same national, even international, impact and recognition that the Sons have achieved, due to the sheer force of numbers. Daughters of Norway, Pacific Coast has today ten lodges and a total membership of 1,600 women. The Sons of Norway boasts of over 300 lodges; and 85,000 members (1973) with new lodges being formed somewhere every month. (Friis, 1976) Naturally they can afford extensive insurance coverage, libraries, films, and chartered tours to Norway, but credit must be given to those women who have persevered in their own way, a way which means more to women because is run by and for women. There is much virtue in the organization's smallness as is evident in every issue of Døtre av Norge, where names and faces are familiar to most people, and it is considered important to mention achievements and concerns of women outside the lodge. These women who are loyal and active obviously enjoy what they do, or at least believe in it, or there would not be so many

twenty-five and fifty-year members, nor would so many people become officers again and again. The society that grew out of the immigrant, experience and later contributed to it has continued to provide for women what they have needed over the years, and if the past is any indication, will continue to do so for many years to come. In Ida Apalseth's words: "We'll always be Daughters, no matter what." (Apalseth, 1979)

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