

## From Markhus to Preus

On September 16, 1902, Professor George Markhus was appointed curator. In 1906 he was succeeded by Professors H. W. Sheel and M. K. Bleken jointly. President C. K. Preus was curator from 1911 until his death in 1921.

In 1903, a 32-page illustrated brochure of the college, which was prepared by Oscar L. Olson (later third president of the college), included views of displays: one showing mounted birds, animals, and fish, and a second showing hand-made, hand-decorated artifacts, mostly of wood, such as Norwegian immigrants had brought with them.

In 1905 the classes of 1898 and 1899 gave the museum a replica of the famous Laokoon group in plaster. The class of 1899 is also credited with the gift of a plaster reproduction of the Greek statue of Athena Giustiniani. A reproduction of the "Borghese Warrior" was donated by the class of 1900. A copy of the statue of "Apollo Belvidere" had earlier been presented by the classes of 1894 through 1897. These and other similar replicas represented the interest of groups interested in classical studies, but over the years this area has become one of minor interest to the museum.

Dr. Carsten Smith of Decorah gave the museum a collection of stuffed specimens of all the birds inhabiting the region about Winneshiek County, together with their eggs. In 1907 an embroidered seal, that had been sewn by Miss Sara Bödker of Chicago as a "design for the seal of the board of Lady Managers" at the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893, was received through Mrs. George A. Torrison as a gift from the Norumbega Society and other friends in Chicago. In 1908 a bust of Henrik Wergeland by Stephan Abel Sinding (1846-1922) was presented by Dr. T. Stabo and unveiled by K. Gjerset.

President Preus, although much preoccupied with other duties, succeeded in securing many valuable additions to the collection. In October 1913, through the initiative of Dr. T. Stabo of Decorah, the Egge log cabin, 14 x 16 feet, was moved to Decorah and set up on the college campus. It had served as the first parsonage of U. V. Koren, when he took up his pastoral duties at Washington Prairie, six miles southeast of Decorah, in 1853. It was furnished with interesting articles from pioneer days. The cabin had been built in 1851, and in 1853 was inhabited by Erik P. Egge, his wife and two children. They were kind enough to share this very modest house with the Korens. It was constructed of logs, beautifully fitted together by a master axman. One authority said it is an outstanding example of the art of dovetailing.

After more than 110 years, despite moving and weathering, it is hard to get a knife-blade between the logs at the corners where they are matched.

In 1914 a miniature replica of the Maihaugen open air museum at Lillehammer, Norway, which was made by Ragnald Enebo for the Christiania (Oslo) Exposition of that year, was presented to the museum by Professor M. K. Bleken. The museum also procured, among other Norwegian articles, a grandfather's clock from Hallingdal, Norway, a *lur* and a *langeleik* (old musical instruments).

A far more important acquisition was the carved wooden altarpiece by Lars Christenson (Kjørnes). Born in 1839, Christenson emigrated from Stedje Parish in Sogndal, Sogn, Norway, in 1864 and in 1866 settled as a farmer in Six Mile Grove, about three miles from Benson, Minnesota. In 1907 he moved to Benson, where he remained until his death in 1910.

His altar has a three-part and tiered composition and a central placement of the Crucifixion, the Last Supper, and the Ascension. The artist left unfinished the three base panels of the predella when he quit work on the altar in 1904. He used oak veneer, maple, and walnut and obtained color and contrast from the woods, using no paint on his creation.

Presumably, Christenson became a member of Our Saviours congregation in Benson, which in

1901 built a new church edifice to replace the earlier one lost by fire. Fortunately, the altar was not placed in the new edifice, for the latter in turn was lost by fire in 1911. In 1904 he exhibited the altar at the Minnesota State Fair. After the fair, it was stored in St. Paul until it was transferred to Luther College in Decorah in 1910 through the efforts of C. K. Preus. At the college it escaped fire a second time when it was transferred to the present museum building before Old Main burned.

Christenson's altar has been recognized as an important work of folk art. In it, says one writer, "he produced a monument that in originality, expressive power, and grandeur has little to rival it in the folk art of America." The Nativity Scene from the altar has been used on a Christmas card by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.

During the later years of his administration, President C. K. Preus became greatly involved in many diverse matters unrelated to the Museum, and the latter suffered. Gradually he turned again, however, to the library-museum building project, which had been dormant for several years, and succeeded in raising the funds needed for it. In this building, named the Koren Library, rooms on the first floor and the third floor were set aside for the museum.