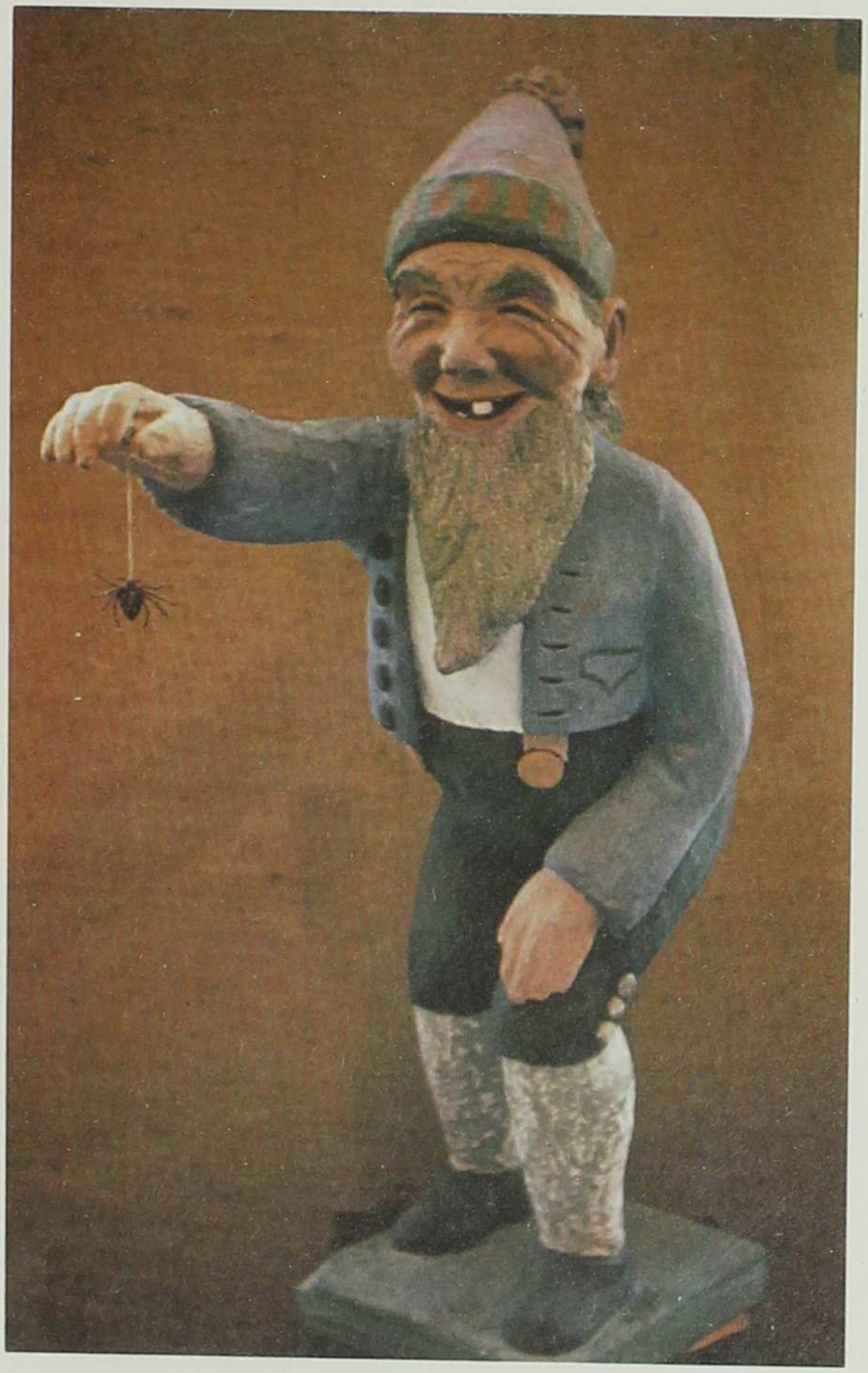
The Palimpsest

VOLUME 56 NUMBER 5 SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 1975



Norwegian-Americans in Northeastern Iowa

IOWA STATE HISTORICAL DEPARTMENT
DIVISION OF THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Palimpsest Wins Graphics Award!

The Palimpsest has received an accolade in the Printing Industries of America (PIA) Graphic Awards Program. The May/June 1974 issue which featured a Currier & Ives apple-harvesting scene on the cover was entered in the annual PIA competition by our printer, Tel-Graphics of Dubuque. The issue was selected as one of the winners in the category of color magazines. The competition is sponsored by PIA (a printing trade association), the Harris Corporation (makers of printing presses), and Eastman Kodak. This year there were more than 5000 entries in total from the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

The entries were judged on the basis of excellence of design, art, typography, and general lay-out as well as the quality of technical reproduction. The magazine's frequent use of color spreads (the winning issue featured a pictorial on postcards) paid off during the judging.

The Nekoosa Edwards Paper Company which makes the paper used in printing *The Palimpsest* has purchased 10,000 extra copies of the award-winner to be used as examples of fine quality printing.

Society members may be justly proud of the award which is distinctive among historical publications. We are in very good company—one of last year's winners was *National Geographic* magazine. A big thanks to Tel-Graphics and the awards committee.

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The Palimpsest

VOLUME 56 NUMBER 5 SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 1975

Peter T. Harstad, Director

L. Edward Purcell, Editor

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Cover: *The impish figure adorning our cover is a Norwegian Nisse, an elvish incarnation said to inhabit farm buildings. This particular Nisse is part of the exhibits of Vesterheim, a place about which more is said beginning on p. 131.*

The Meaning of the Palimpsest

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete, and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the record of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

A NOTE ON THIS ISSUE

This is an important year for Norwegians in America. One hundred and fifty years ago, a tiny, single-masted sloop named "Restauration" arrived in New York harbor on October 9, 1825. The small vessel was three months out of Stavanger with a party of ten families and twelve unmarried men aboard. They were the first Norwegian immigrants to settle in America, and the sesquicentennial of their arrival is being celebrated this year by a series of events across the country—ranging from Liv Ullman's appearance on Broadway in a new production of Ibsen's A Doll's House *to the visit of His Majesty Olav V, King of Norway, to the United States. The King is scheduled to visit Decorah, Iowa on October 14.*

Northeastern Iowa—especially the region in and around Decorah—has long been a center of Norwegian culture in America. The many immigrants who settled there have done much to preserve reminders of their European origins. One of the foremost examples of such efforts was Symra, *a literary periodical published in the Norwegian language in Decorah during the decade just before World War I. It is generally acknowledged to have been the best among a considerable number of such periodicals. By 1907, the editorial committee of* Symra *had evolved into a literary society, meeting fortnightly in the homes of members for dinner, cigars, and discussion of scholarly papers. Members were drawn from the editorial staff of the Norwegian-American publishing firm of Anundsen, from the faculty of Luther College, and from the business and professional community of Decorah. The War killed the periodical by cutting off subscribers in Norway, but Symra Society survived and has continued to flourish until the present day. Its membership has been limited by tradition to 25 men, nearly all of whom have descended from Norwegian forebears, and its activities today are much the same as they always have been.*

As the anniversary year approached, the Symra Society made plans to commemorate both the one hundred fiftieth year of Norwegian immigration and the seventieth anniversary of the Symra *periodical. The following issue of* The Palimpsest *is the result of those plans. Professor J. R. Christianson, a member of modern-day Symra and a history teacher at Luther College, has been the unofficial sub-editor and chief contributor for this issue, a project undertaken by the Division of the State Historical Society in cooperation with Symra. Professor Christianson's brief discussion of Vesterheim, the Norwegian-American Museum in Decorah, highlights an institution which has become the focus of much of the immigrant heritage. The story of Luren depicts an important and characteristic part of Norwegian social life, and Andrew Veblen's memoir of his years at Luther College gives a nineteenth-century glimpse of that bulwark of education among Norwegian-Americans.*

VESTERHEIM

by

J. R. Christianson

Pioneers in northeastern Iowa were growing old by the middle years of the 1890s. They were turning reflective, thinking and even writing about the past. In the city of Decorah, there was a colony of Norwegians among these aging pioneers, as there were whole parishes of Norwegian-American farms in the surrounding hills and vales. It was their retrospection, coupled with the energy of younger men, that brought the Norwegian-American Museum into being.

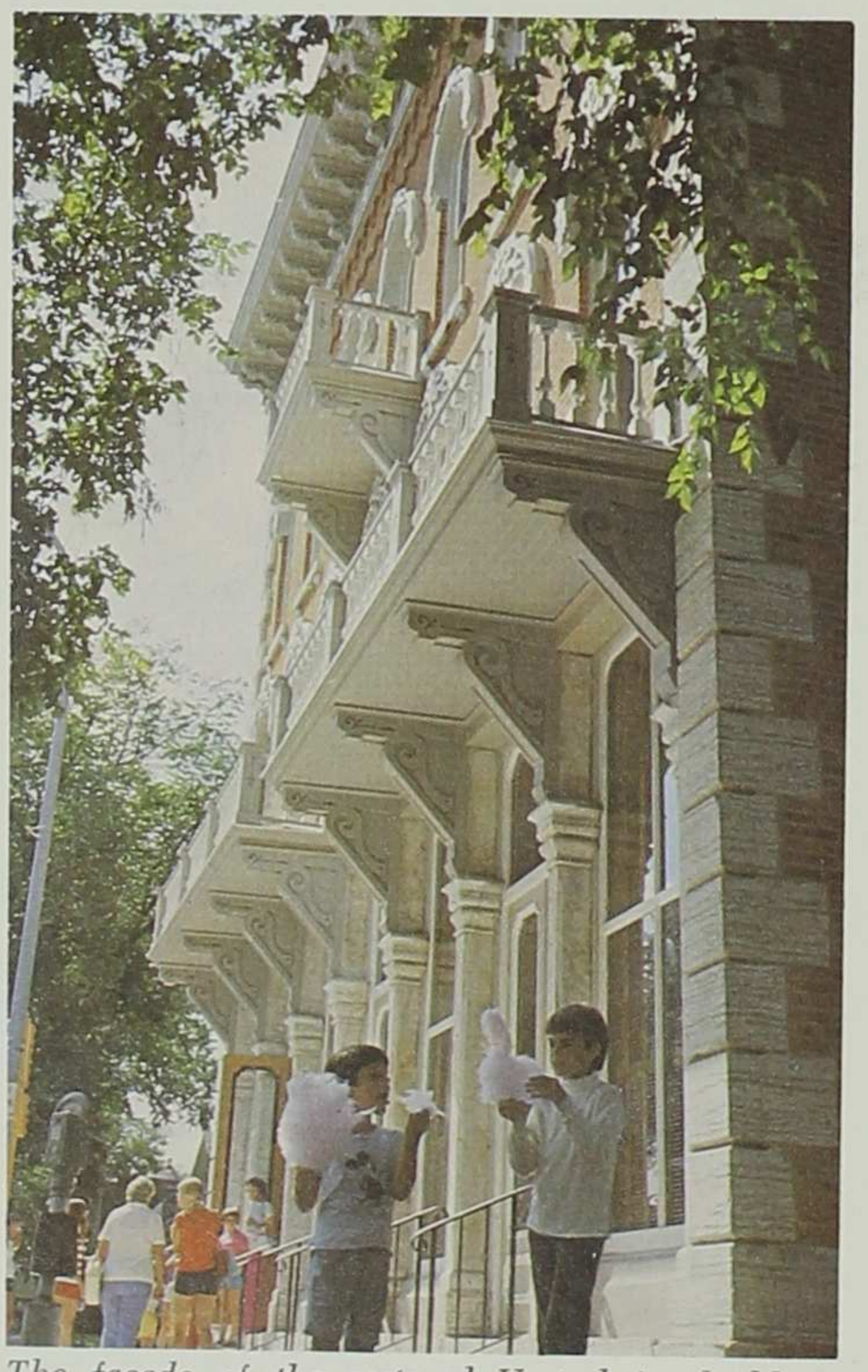
During the past half century, members of the Norwegian colony had founded a world of their own. They read the Norwegian newspaper, *Decorah Posten*, as well as locally published books and periodicals in their own language. They attended their own Norwegian Lutheran churches, sent their sons to Luther College, patronized Norwegian merchants, craftsmen, doctors, and liverymen. They had their own clubs and organizations, and even a theater where Norwegian music, vaudeville and drama were performed.

As these pioneers grew old within their cozy little society, a new generation grew to maturity, a bicultural generation that had grown up with a knowledge of both Norwegian and English. The older generation were patriarchal figures with flowing white beards. The younger men were clean-shaven, wearing derby hats and starched collars. They had never experienced the rigors of pioneering. To them, the old walking plows, log cabins, and immigrant trunks of the pioneers, or their bundles of documents in Gothic script, were artifacts out of the past. Some of the younger men saw these things as tangible expressions of the Great Migration and the Passing of the Frontier, the very processes by which a new culture, their own polyglot American way of life, had come into existence.

The idea of a Norwegian-American museum in Decorah came out of just such

A drawing of Vesterheim (Norwegian-American Museum) as it will appear after the final stages of restoration and remodeling are complete (courtesy of Vesterheim).

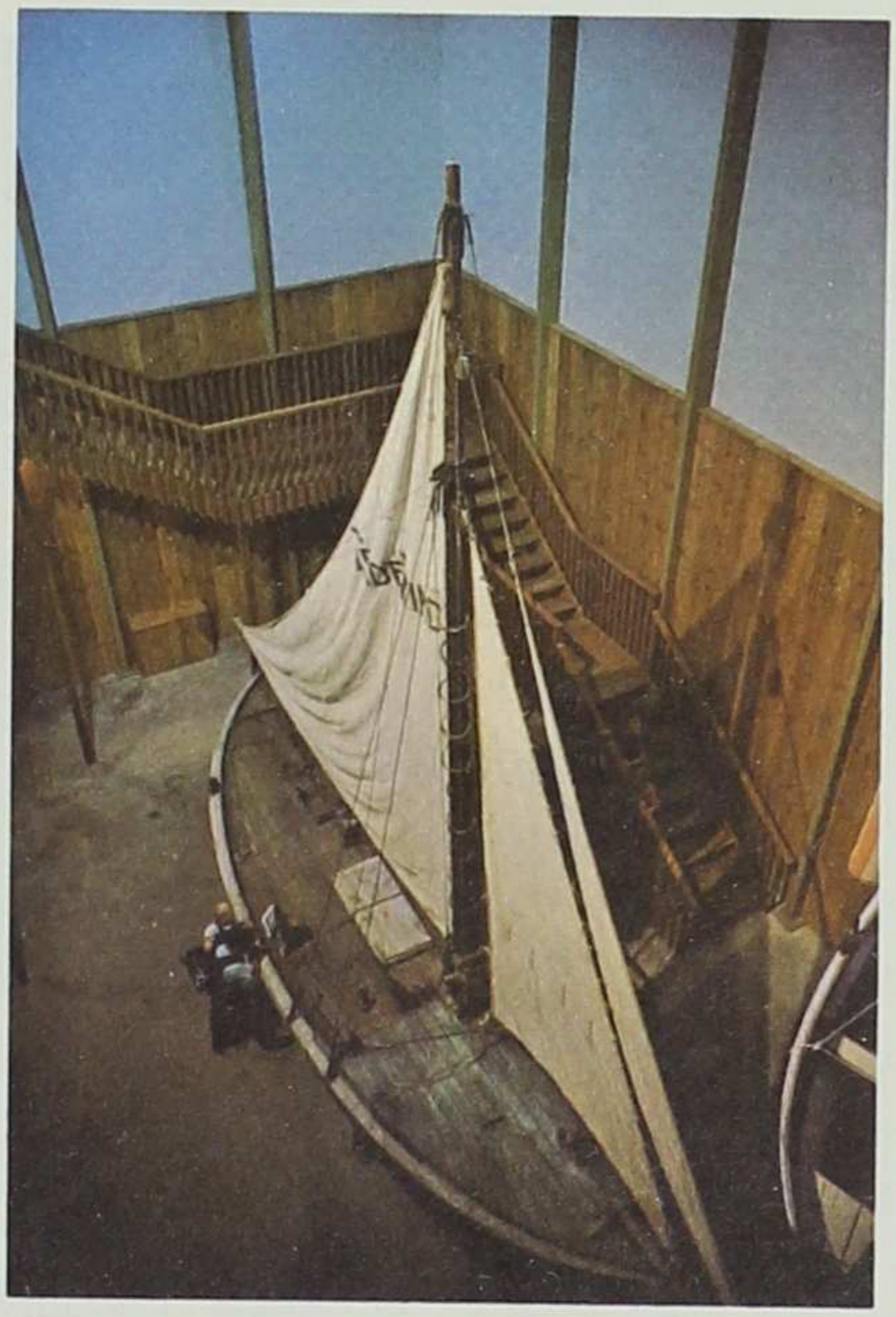
thoughts in this era of transition around the turn of the century. When A. A. Veblen had come to Decorah 20 years earlier in 1877, there had already been a collection of artifacts at Luther College. Since 1890, these artifacts had filled a whole room in the main building at Luther, "the Museum," lined with display cases and cabinets. It was this collection of "objects . . . given by persons to whom a museum was a curiosity shop," that formed the foundation for something quite new: an ethnic museum. At an 1895 meeting of Luther College alumni, there was much discussion of the need to collect Norwegian-American relics, books, and manuscripts. Older, gray-bearded men like President Laur. Larsen listened to smooth-faced younger men like Adolf Bredesen and J. C. M. Hanson, and the idea of a Norwegian-American museum began to take form.



The facade of the restored Vesterheim building, shown during the July 1975 Nordic Fest. The museum with its new exhibits was unveiled for the occasion.

College museums were commonplace in those days, and pioneer memorials of various kinds were springing up all over, but the idea of a museum dedicated to the accomplishments of a single ethnic group was unusual at that time. In the case of the Norwegian-American Museum, this idea was a synthesis of American tendencies with a new concept of museum coming out of the Scandinavian countries. This was the idea of a "folk museum," representing the life and material culture of common people, rather than the art and treasures of the gilded rich that filled most American museums. People like Anders Sandvig in Lillehammer, Norway and Hans Aall in Christiania had begun to expand this basic concept into another new type of museum, the "open air" museum. Rather than removing everyday artifacts from their normal context, Sandvig and Aall transported whole cottages and farmyards to the museum site, landscaped appropriately, and furnished the buildings both inside and out with a host of everyday objects. This created a total environment through which the museum visitor could wander for hours on end.

President Laur. Larsen, steeped in Norwegian history since his own student days, found just the right man to make these ideas a reality. In 1895, a young teacher of music, Haldor Hanson, was appointed to take charge of the college museum in addition to other duties. Hanson trans-



One of the major exhibits of Vesterheim is the "Tradewind," a small vessel which was sailed across the Atlantic (without modern equipment) in 1933. Even though this boat was launched in conjunction with the Chicago World's Fair and later given to the Museum, it does give visitors an idea of the conditions many immigrants contended with during the ocean voyage (courtesy of Vesterheim).

formed the miscellaneous college collections into a Norwegian-American museum. He collected printed materials, building up the nucleus of what is still the most extensive collection of Norwegian-American newspapers, in Preus Library at Luther College. He collected all kinds of objects made by Norwegian immigrants or brought by them from Norway. He collected photographs by the hundreds and paintings by Norwegian-American artists. He transferred these and the general collections from a single room to a small, two-story building on campus. By 1900, he had ten wall cases and seventeen show cases full of artifacts. By 1901, he was running out of room. By 1902, the faculty found it necessary to resolve that a fireproof library-museum building was the first need of the college.

Within weeks of that resolution, Hanson's patron and supporter, President Larsen, was forced out of office. Haldor Hanson himself resigned and departed from Decorah.

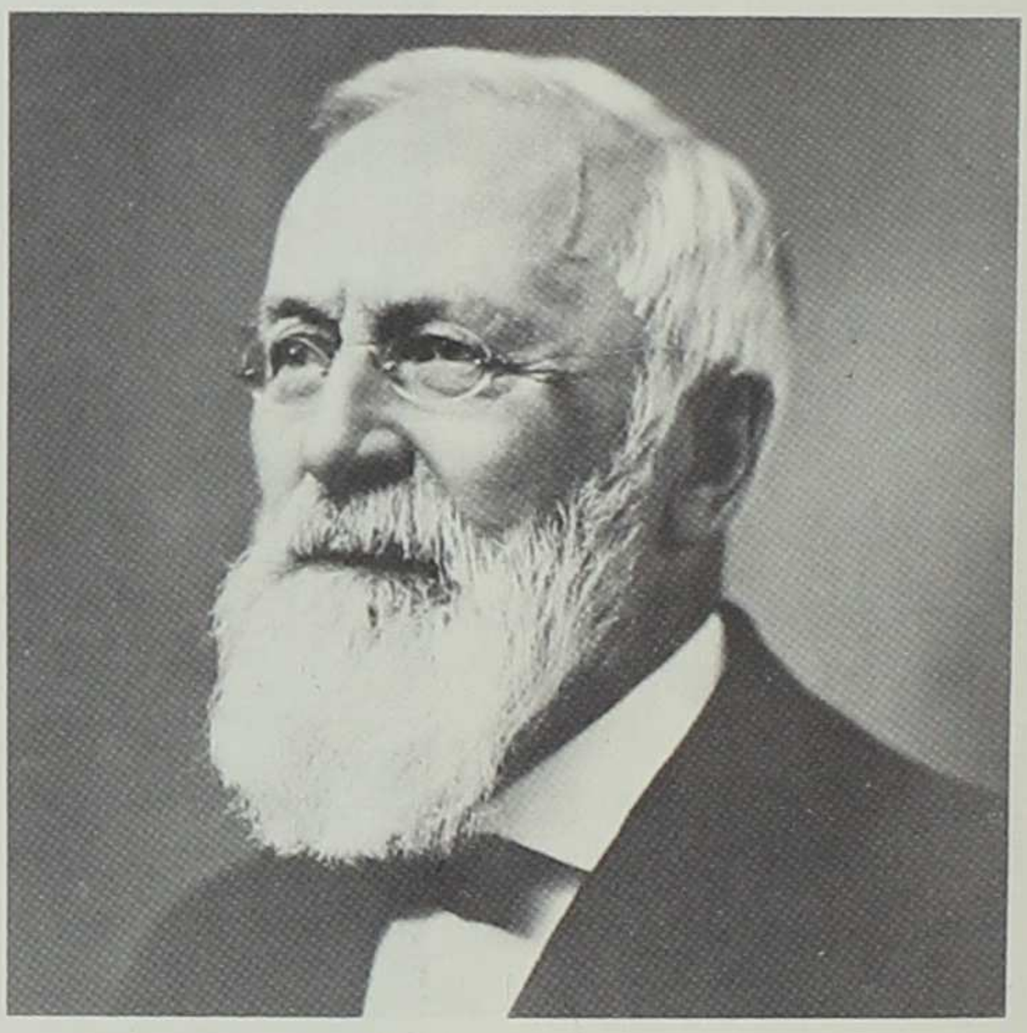
Hanson's work as curator of the museum was carried on by a distinguished line of successors. First came C. K. Preus, who combined the office of curator with the presidency of the college in the years 1911-

1921. Preus added the monumental Lars Christenson Altar and other objects to the museum collections. He strengthened ties with Norwegian museums during a 1914 tour of Norway by the Luther College Concert Band. Preus saw the beginning of an "open air" division of the museum when a pioneer log cabin was moved to campus. Finally, Preus achieved the construction of a modern library-museum, the Koren building, which was nearly finished when he died suddenly in 1921.

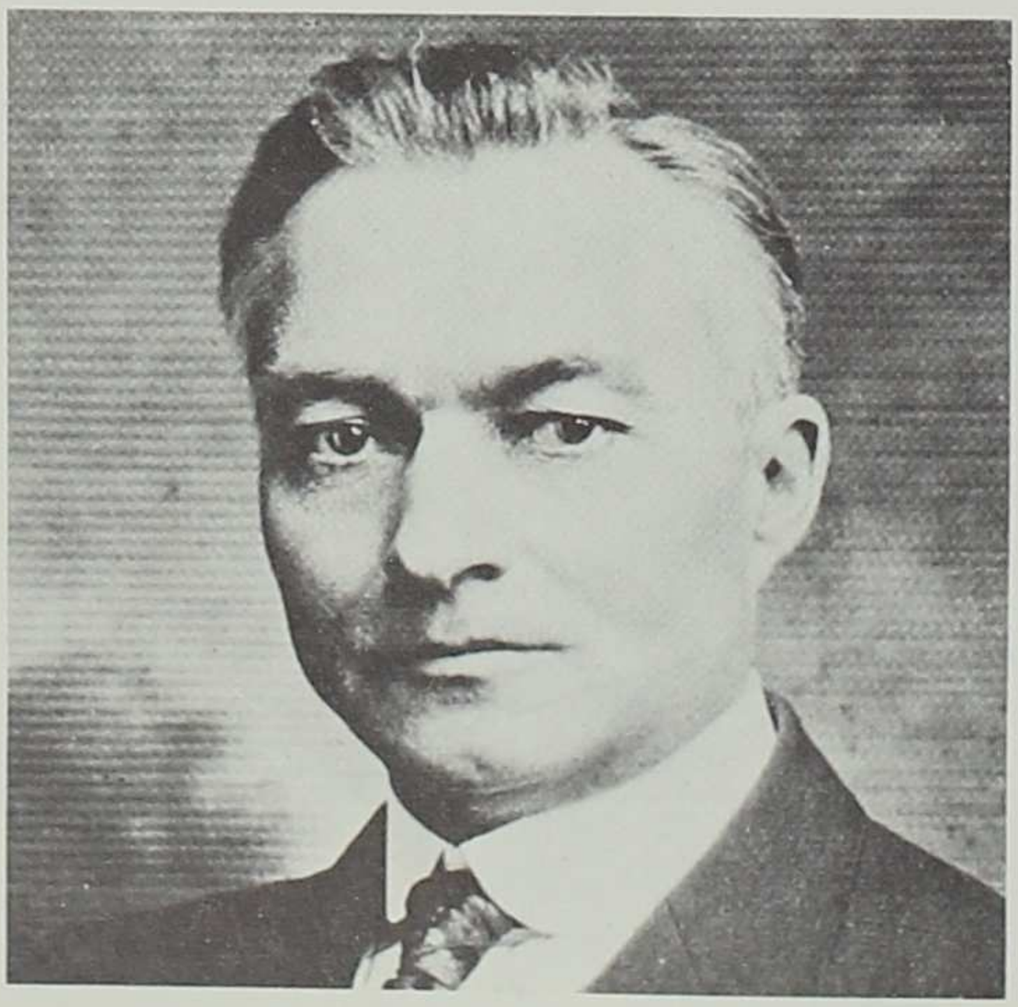
Professor Knut Gjerset, who already had an international reputation as an historian of Norway and Iceland, followed Preus as curator. He renovated the old museum building for some exhibits and moved the rest to the new building by 1923. The collections had grown to fill more than 60 cases and cabinets, besides the pioneer Egge cabin, and a whole room furnished like a Norwegian peasant home.

No sooner was the museum established in its new quarters than a major civic event loomed on the horizon of the 850,000 Norwegian immigrants to America and their descendants. Historians had determined that Norwegian-American mass migration had begun in 1825 with the arrival in New York harbor of the sloop "Restauration." Elaborate centennial celebrations were planned for 1925 in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Knut Gjerset was asked to direct the organization of a great centennial exhibition. He did so with resounding success, drawing much of his material from the Luther College Museum. The success of this exhibition transformed the museum into an ethnic institution of national prominence, and it was duly renamed the "Norwegian-American Historical Museum." Inspired by Anders Sandvig, a committee of Norwegian museum authorities donated five truck loads of Norwegian folk materials which arrived in Decorah in 1927.

By this time, the collections far exceeded the space available. A temporary building was erected on campus in 1931 for some of them, and A. A. Veblen's old home, "Sunnyside," was filled with artifacts. Then



Laur. Larsen, President of Luther College and a moving force behind the organization of the museum.



Knut Gjerset (courtesy of Vesterheim).

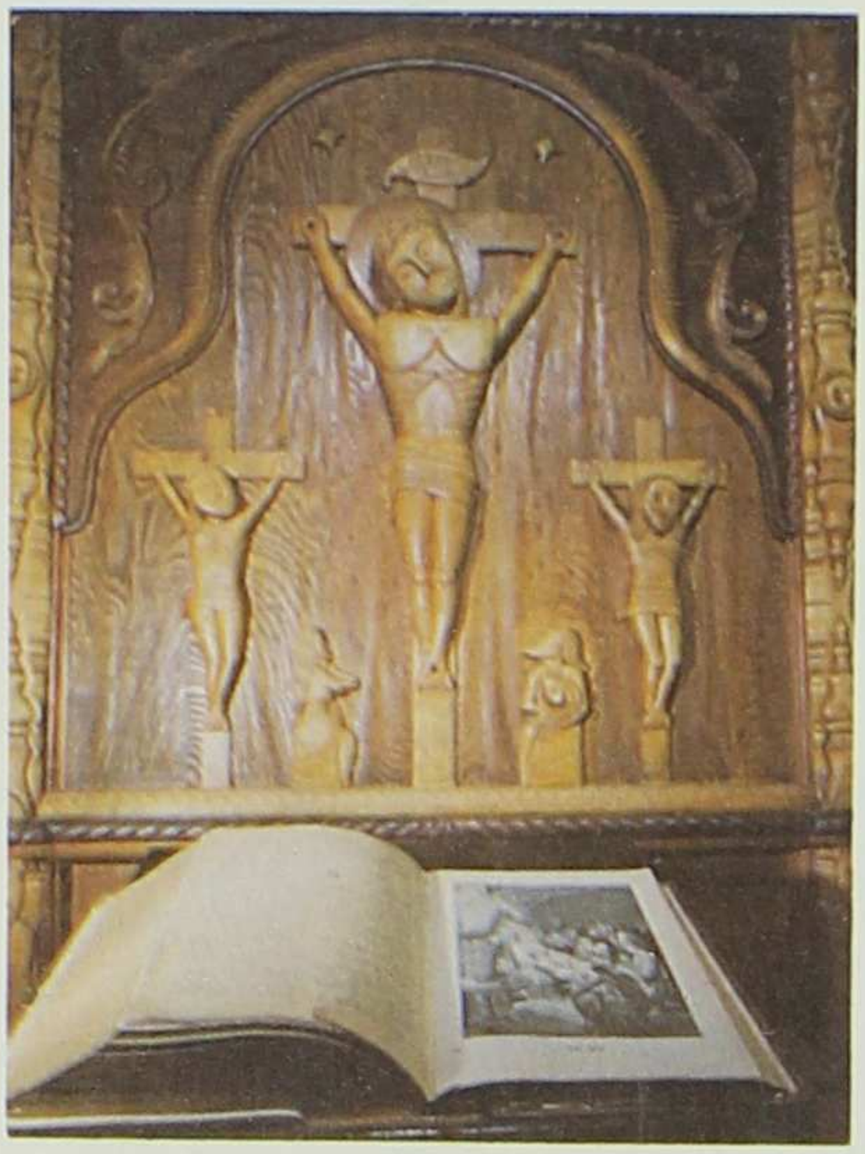
Prof. Haldor Hanson in the College museum around 1897. The collections as of that date were small and varied, not yet focused on the Norwegian heritage (courtesy of Vesterheim).

the college acquired a three-story brick building in downtown Decorah, built as a hotel in 1877 and later remodeled to serve as a printing office. This large building was refurbished under Gjerset's supervision, and most of the museum exhibits were moved into it during the summer of 1932, with formal opening ceremonies in 1933. Meanwhile, the open air collection, the oldest museum of its type in North America, was augmented with another log house, a schoolhouse, and various other pioneer buildings, and moved to a new site on the Luther College campus.

Gjerset died in 1936, leaving a legacy of tremendous growth and accomplishment for the museum. Three years later, Crown Prince Olav and Crown Princess Märtha of Norway visited Decorah and presented the museum another handsome gift of artifacts from 47 museums in Norway.

Times changed rapidly after that, and the course of world events seemed to leave the museum behind. World War II engulfed both Norway and America. Melting pot ideologies ran rampant to discourage ethnic identities, and the use of the Norwegian language declined rapidly in America. The museum did not lack leadership during these years, but it lacked support as the nation, the college, and Americans of Norwegian descent all grappled with more immediate problems. At one stage the college seemed on the verge of giving the whole museum away.

Then the museum, like some slumbering



The magnificent altarpiece carved by Lars Christenson of Benson, Minnesota between 1897 and 1904. Inspired perhaps by baroque altars in Christenson's native Sognal, Norway, the handcarved panels refer specifically to a popular Norwegian-American Bible of the 1890s. The Christenson Altar is a major work of religious folk art and is often cited as an example in major works on American woodcarving (courtesy of Vesterheim).

Within Vesterheim itself is recreated a typical Norwegian house of the mid-nineteenth century. The furnishings date from about 50 years earlier and are the gift of the Maihaugen Museum in Lillehammer, Norway. The corner fireplace was a feature of most traditional Norwegian homes (courtesy of Vesterheim).

A mounted, silver-chased drinking horn made in the late nineteenth century as a presentation piece. The design is based on early Norwegian drinking horns, but is more elaborate (courtesy of Vesterheim).

A carved wooden drinking vessel, used communally and passed from hand to hand during a beer-drinking session. The animal-headed double handle design dates from the Middle Ages, but was still used well into the nineteenth century in northern Europe. This example came to Dawson, Minnesota with an early immigrant and thence to the museum in 1924 (courtesy of Vesterheim).

Another example of a carved drinking vessel (courtesy of Vesterheim).

Craftsmen from Norway at work on the restoration of the Lars Christenson Altar (courtesy of Vesterheim).

troll of old Norse folklore, seemed to shake off its indolence and come alive. Inspired by a distinguished faculty member and former student of Gjerset, Professor David T. Nelson, the Regents of Luther College resolved in 1964 to change the name of the museum to "Norwegian-American Museum" and incorporate it as a separate not-for-profit corporation with its own staff and Board of Directors. Dr. Marion J. Nelson of the University of Minnesota was engaged to survey and catalogue the collection during the summer of 1964, and that fall, he was named Director of the museum. In 1965, the December issue of *The Palimpsest* was devoted to a history of the museum by David T. Nelson. Crown Prince Harald of Norway visited the musum in 1965, and King Olav V of Norway visited in 1968.

In 1969, a new contract was negotiated with Luther College, giving the old, three-storied building to the museum corporation for a consideration of one dollar and allowing that corporation to acquire other properties and artifacts. At the same time, the college loaned the total collection of artifacts to the museum corporation for a period of ten years, subject to renewal.

Under the terms of this agreement and the leadership of Dr. Marion J. Nelson, the museum entered a period of phenomenal growth. Luther College appointed Professor J. R. Christianson as Assistant Director to represent the interests of the college under the new contract, and Darrell D. Henning, a graduate of the Cooperstown program, became Curator in 1969. A Museum Studies program at the college has given academic support to the museum. In 1973, the museum became one of the early institutions to be accredited by the American Association of Museums.

During the last decade, the museum has published an impressive series of books, pamphlets, brochures, recordings, posters, and cards, as well as issuing a regular newsletter and maintaining a book store and gift shop. Numerous special exhibits, demonstrations, conferences, and musical programs have been sponsored by the museum, and it has played an important part in Decorah's annual Nordic Fest during the last weekend of July. Traditional Norwegian crafts have been revived through

classes in rosemaling, woodcarving, embroidery, weaving, and other skills. Memberships have been established, with special categories and newsletters for rosemalers and genealogists. In short, the museum has become a place to do things, as well as to see things. This has been symbolized by a new name, "Vesterheim," the Norwegian-American immigrants' name for their home in the New World.

Collections have grown no less dramatically. A stone mill from the 1850s and a Norwegian Methodist church from the 1860s have been acquired and restored. Several other historic buildings near the museum have been acquired. A pioneer smithy and a dwelling from Valdres, Norway have been added to the open air collection. During the past year, in celebrating the Norwegian-American Sesquicentennial, the main museum building has undergone a $500,000 restoration and modernization, and all exhibits have been redesigned.

When King Olav V of Norway officially reopens the main building on October 14, 1975, as part of his sesquicentennial tour of Norwegian America, he will witness the fact that Vesterheim has grown into an institution attuned to the "New Ethnicity" of a new generation. It has become a center for all who value vitality, craftsmanship, cultural diversity, simple quality in domestic furnishings, and an honest, natural way of life. □

A smith at work attracts a crowd to the restored Norwegian-style blacksmith's shop, part of Vesterheim's open-air exhibit (courtesy of Vesterheim).

The restored mill, now a museum of Norwegian-American agriculture, and the smithy (courtesy of Vesterheim).

Two of the cabins originally gathered on the Luther College campus to form one of the first open-air museums in the United States. This year, the cabins will be moved to the site of Vesterheim.

THE GOLDEN AGE OF LUREN

by J. R. Christianson

Singing societies were a popular kind of social organization in Norwegian cities of the nineteenth century, as they were in Germany and elsewhere in Scandinavia. They were primarily an urban phenomenon, and in Norway, they originated in the capital city of Christiania (now Oslo). Three male choruses—one each of students, craftsmen, and merchants—were organized there around the year 1845. From Christiania, the concept of male chorus as combined musical and social organization spread rapidly to other Norwegian cities and towns. Before 1870, it reached the urban Norwegian settlements in the New World.

Luren Quartet, founded in 1868, was the first Norwegian-American male choral society. A singing society named Idun was organized at Luther College in 1869. Chicago and LaCrosse, Wisconsin both had Norwegian-American male choruses by 1870, and scores of other cities and towns followed in the years to come. Luren was reorganized as a larger chorus on March 17, 1874 and has had a continuous history to the present day.

These early Norwegian-American singing societies were purely Norwegian organizations, and they had direct ties with similar organizations in the Old Country. Pastor Vilhelm Koren, who inspired the organization of Idun, had sung in the students' chorus in Christiania in 1845. Hartvig Engbertson took the name of Luren from that of a singing society he had known as a boy in Christiania. Luren's greatest baritone in later years, O. W. Holm, and its greatest director, Carlo A. Sperati, were both natives of Christiania. Likewise, the repertory of the Norwegian-American male choruses consisted of the same four part Scandinavian songs that were sung by their compatriots in Norway, composed by Lindeman, Nordraak, Grieg, and others. The very song books were imported from Scandinavia.

By the 1880s, there were so many of these male choruses in America that they began to hold annual conventions or sangerfests, *a tradition that has continued to the present day.*

When Luren Singing Society celebrated its centennial in 1968, J. R. Christianson was commissioned to write a centennial history. The following is an excerpt from that history, treating the first decade of the twentieth century. It gives a lively picture of urban social life among the second generation of Norwegians in northeastern Iowa.

Early in the forenoon of Thanksgiving day, 1900, three large, horse-drawn wagons rumbled out of Decorah, Iowa on the northward road. They bore the 11 active members of Luren Singing Society—E. M. Sunnes, O. W. Holm, John Jackwitz, Carl Larsen, H. C. Hjerleid, O. P. Rörvig, Louis Helgesen, N. N. Quandahl, Axel Bergh, John S. Alstad, and B. E. Johnson—together with two passive members, B. Anundsen and Professor R. R. Monrad, and the clarinetist, M. J. Soukup. Druggist Quandahl had "provided each wagon with two kinds of medicine," as Anundsen later reported in *Decorah Posten*, so that the throats of the singers would not suffer in the late autumn cold, the one "to be taken two spoonsful every third mile, and with the other, the throat should be rinsed

every half hour. These prescriptions were followed faithfully."

After five "pleasant" hours on the road, the three wagons rolled into Spring Grove, Minnesota. The singers enjoyed a good, warm meal at the hotel, and then they went over to the new opera house and put on a concert for "the largest gathering of people ever witnessed" in Spring Grove, according to the *Herald*, "fully four hundred and fifty people." The program included songs by Luren, two clarinet numbers by Mr. Soukup, and a song, as well as a piano solo, by a daughter of Pastor Reque. A banquet following the concert was attended by over 150 guests, and the speeches, dining, and fellowship lasted far into the evening. "There is something strangely magnetic about Luren," recorded the *Herald*, "and they never fail to captivate, completely, their hearers."

With such an enthusiastic reception, it is not surprising that an annual Thanksgiving concert in Spring Grove became a regular part of Luren's calendar during the early years of this century. Hesper and Harmony, Mable and Cresco, Kendallville and Calmar also became the scenes of Luren concerts. The group usually travelled by horse-drawn wagon but sometimes by train, and they always made a splendid outing of the out-of-town concerts. Their hosts always staged a festive banquet following the concert, with speeches and song, lots of good Norwegian food and fellowship. The hosts either paid the expenses or shared receipts after a certain guaranteed amount to Luren, and these concerts raised much of the money needed to send Luren to *sangerfests* in those years. Thus they rode off in high style to the Sioux Falls Sangerfest of 1902 in a private Pullman car, even going so far as to bring their wives along. They also travelled to the LaCrosse Sangerfest of 1906 by private railroad car.

Luren had a vaudevillian side that was given full rein in those years around the turn of the century. "Ole Olsen and Ching Foo" performed on the slack wire (Ching Foo was Louis Larsen), and sometimes the entire Luren chorus dressed up in costume for a Chinese march and song. On other occasions, the Roman Gladiators, Marius and Sulla, appeared on the program, or Luren would be spelled by the Mandolin Club, the Tobiason Harp Orchestra, or Professor Haldor Hanson and his violin. A group of rough looking hoboes might burst into the room and commence to perform on instruments made of soap cases and cigar boxes—they were the "Hard-up Kvartet," E. M. Sunness, N. N. Quandahl, John Alstad, and Ole P. Rörvig. There was also a Nisse Quartet of youngsters, a group called the trolls of Dovre Mountain, and an elaborate performance of a wedding festival from Hardanger, billed as five scenes with "music, games and spring dances. A chorus of thirty voices in national costumes. New scenery."

All in all, there was an aura of good fun and *joie de vivre* over those fleeting years from 1900 to 1905 that make them a kind of golden age of Luren. There were parties, outings, and picnics accompanied by shooting and fishing as well as song and food. Sometimes Luren got together with Frohsinn, a German society in Decorah, or with Det Norske Selskab and Symra for such events. They were also in frequent contact with the other, newly-formed Norwegian singing societies of the area. Laerken in Calmar and Gauken in Naseth were both active by 1902, and from 1909 onwards, there was an active organization

The Luren Singers as they appeared in an early twentieth-century photo. All of those pictured, save one, made the trip to Spring Grove in 1900 (courtesy of the Winneshiek County Historical Society Collection, Luther College Library, and Luren Singing Society).

known as the Winneshiek County Sangerforbund, consisting of Luren, Laerken, Gauken, and Grieg from Nordness, which put on concerts and held outings together. There were parties during these years to honor B. Anundsen and Professor Haldor Hanson, and there was even some involvement in politics, naturally enough on the side of the Republican Party.

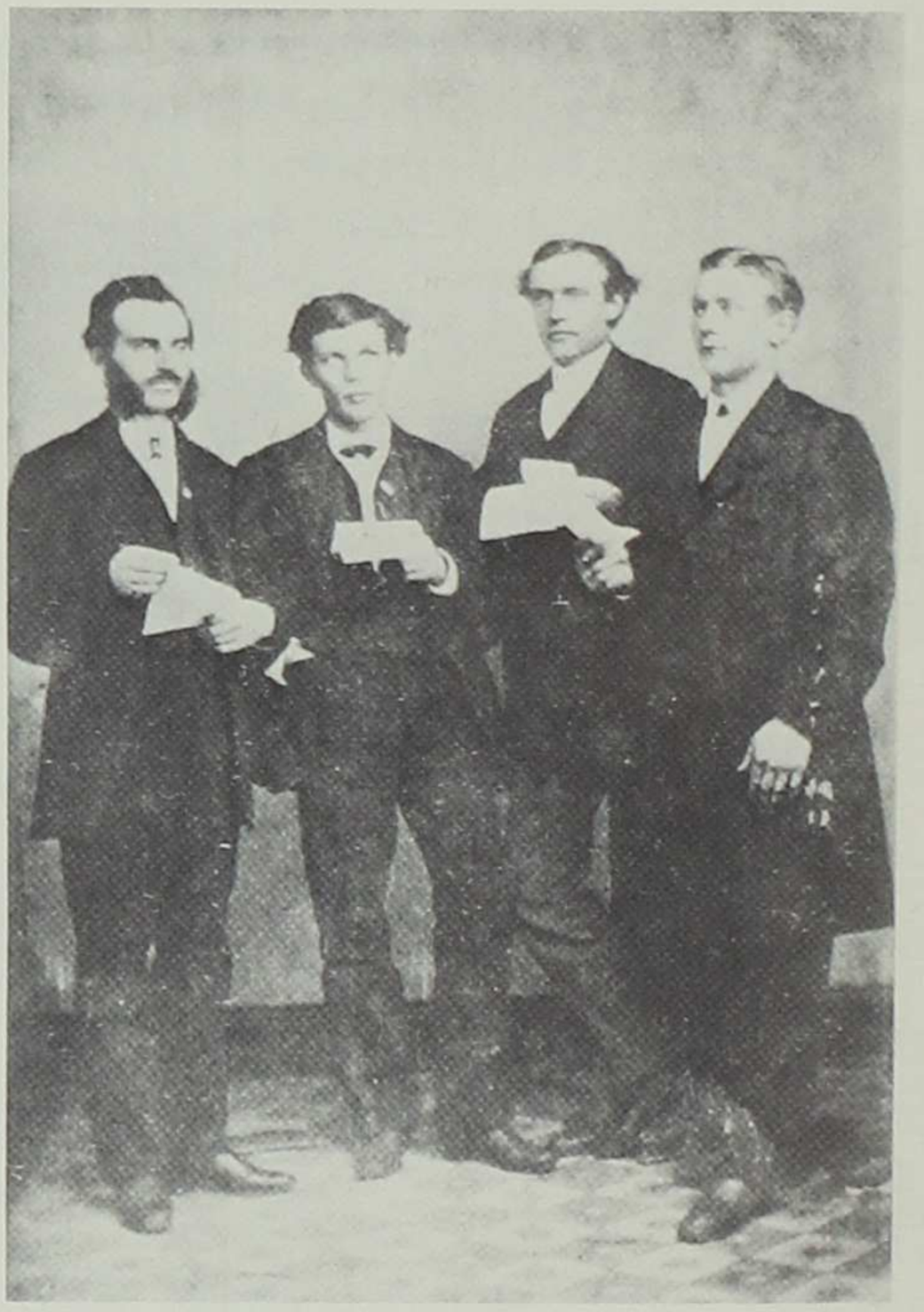
The political involvement started with Congressman Gilbert Haugen's presence at the Luren anniversary festival in 1899 in Decorah. Two years later, Haugen arranged Luren's successful tour to his home town of Northwood. In 1901, Senator Knute Nelson of Minnesota visited Decorah and was serenaded by Luren. In 1902, Luren accepted money from the Republican Central Committee to sing at political gatherings in Calmar and Decorah, and in both cases, the speakers were Congressman Haugen and other prominent Norwegian-American politicians. Most of the members seem to have shared a bias towards the Republican Party, though at least one, Rörvig, refused to go to the gathering in Calmar, saying that "he had something better to do."

A benefit concert for the Luther College Museum was held by Luren in the Grand Opera House on April 17, 1901. Professor Haldor Hanson arranged the program and contributed to it with his violin; he was director of the college band

as well as curator of the museum. Luren sang in English and in Norwegian. Sunnes and Holm sang a duet. Mr. Soukup played a clarinet solo, and Mrs. Jessie Ervin-Marsh contributed a piano solo. The program ended with four numbers by the Luther College Band, including opera overtures by Verdi and Rossini. *Decorah Posten* called it "One of the best concerts we've heard in a long time," but the attendance was disappointingly meager. As Luren well knew, it took Chinamen and spring dances, and refreshments after the show, to turn out a big crowd in Decorah during those years. As for Professor Hanson, he and his two colleagues, Reque and Bothne, were all made honorary members of Luren in 1904, although Hanson left Decorah in that same year.

John Jackwitz had been president of Luren almost continually for more than a quarter of a century by 1901, and when the spring election of officers was held on March 6, the old warrior "informed Luren in a little speech that he felt obliged to resign as an active member," pleading that he "felt old and tired, and no longer had the old glad humor." He was unanimously elected an honorary member of the society, and Holm succeeded him as president, with Quandahl as vice president, Carl Larsen staying on as secretary, and Hjerleid as treasurer. Jackwitz continued to attend Luren affairs as long as he lived in Decorah. He spent his last years in Lyngblomsten Home in St. Paul, where he died in 1926.

Other veterans of Luren were honored by their comrades during these years. Thus Carl Larsen, the little bookbinder with the big walrus moustache, was presented with a gold-headed ebony walking stick in January of 1901. He was the secretary



The original Luren Quartet, forerunner of the larger Luren Society (courtesy of the Winneshiek County Historical Society Collection, Luther College Library, and Luren Society).

of the society, and his volumes of minutes, written in a clear hand and flawless Norwegian, always with a dry sense of humor, are basic to the history of Luren Singing Society in its greatest years. Sunnes, with his immense beard and basso profundo voice, was serenaded by Luren and presented with a splendid meerschaum pipe on the occasion of his forty-ninth birthday in September of 1901. A man of lively wit and a vivid imagination, he was the life of Luren's programs during that era. He had been director of Luren 1879-1885, relinquished the job to Carlo A. Sperati in 1885-1886 and to Julius J. Hopperstad in 1886-1892, then took over again in the years 1892-1905. Sunnes also directed the

construction of sets and backdrops for plays, skits and farces, organized the Nisse Quartet, and made the instruments for the Hard-up Kvartet.

Holm was another veteran. Both he and Sperati were married to daughters of Ole G. Hoffoss, who played a lively Norwegian fiddle till close to his nintieth year and had been a stalwart tenor in the very early days of Luren. Holm was a baritone and often sang solo. He was also the one who wrote the skits and plays, and he was president of Luren from 1901 almost continually until his retirement in 1909. He rejoined in 1913 and remained an active singer until his death in 1929. Mrs. Holm was also a tireless supporter of Luren, and not merely with the many delicious Norwegian dishes which she and other women brought to Luren picnics, parties, and programs. She was a member of the Luren Ladies' Quartet organized in 1904 with Mesdames Holm, Quandahl, and Arneson, and Miss Haugen. She served as secretary of the Luren Ladies, participated in the Hardanger wedding tableaux, the skit about the trolls of Dovre Mountain, the children's party held in the Luren clubrooms in 1904, and many other Luren events.

Other members of Luren during those years included Ben. Johnson Klingenberg, first tenor, 1900-1902; Adolf Hansen, first tenor, who joined in 1901; Ivar Hove, first tenor in 1902 and again from 1904; Blakstvedt, Linnevold, and Dotseth, first tenors from 1903; Agrim A. Lee, second tenor beginning 1903; Duffie Hansen, A. Berger, Ole Winger, and Jos. Hopperstad, all first tenors who became active in 1904; G. A. Bolstad, baritone, 1905-1906; Jens Lee, baritone, beginning 1906; Mr. Baldani, tenor, who on the day of his election in 1907 "was invited by the president to sing a solo, which he was willing to do"; S. Nilsen and J. B. Linde, baritones from 1907; O. L. Hamre and J. L. Hamre, second tenors from 1907; O. L. Anderson and Lars L. Moe (died 1908), first tenors from 1907; as well as Emil Johansen, Dr. O. Boe, and Thorson. Quandahl, Holm, Sunnes, and Carl Larsen were all named honorary members in 1908, and Hjerleid was in 1910.

As men grew old in the service of song, so did material things, and the Luren banner from 1874 was among them. By the beginning of the twentieth century, it was worn with age, and in 1901, Luren began to discuss the acquisition of a new one. President Holm and Banker Hjerleid raised pledges of $159 in the Decorah area, and Luren voted on January 2, 1902, to order a banner priced at $156 from the Fjelde sisters of Minneapolis from whom the society had received a number of sketches. These renowned sisters sewed for six or seven weeks, and on March 24 the new banner arrived in Decorah via American Express. It was displayed to the society at the meeting of March 26 and publicly unveiled before an enthusiastic full house in the Grand Opera House on Friday evening, April 18, 1902.

A Note on Sources

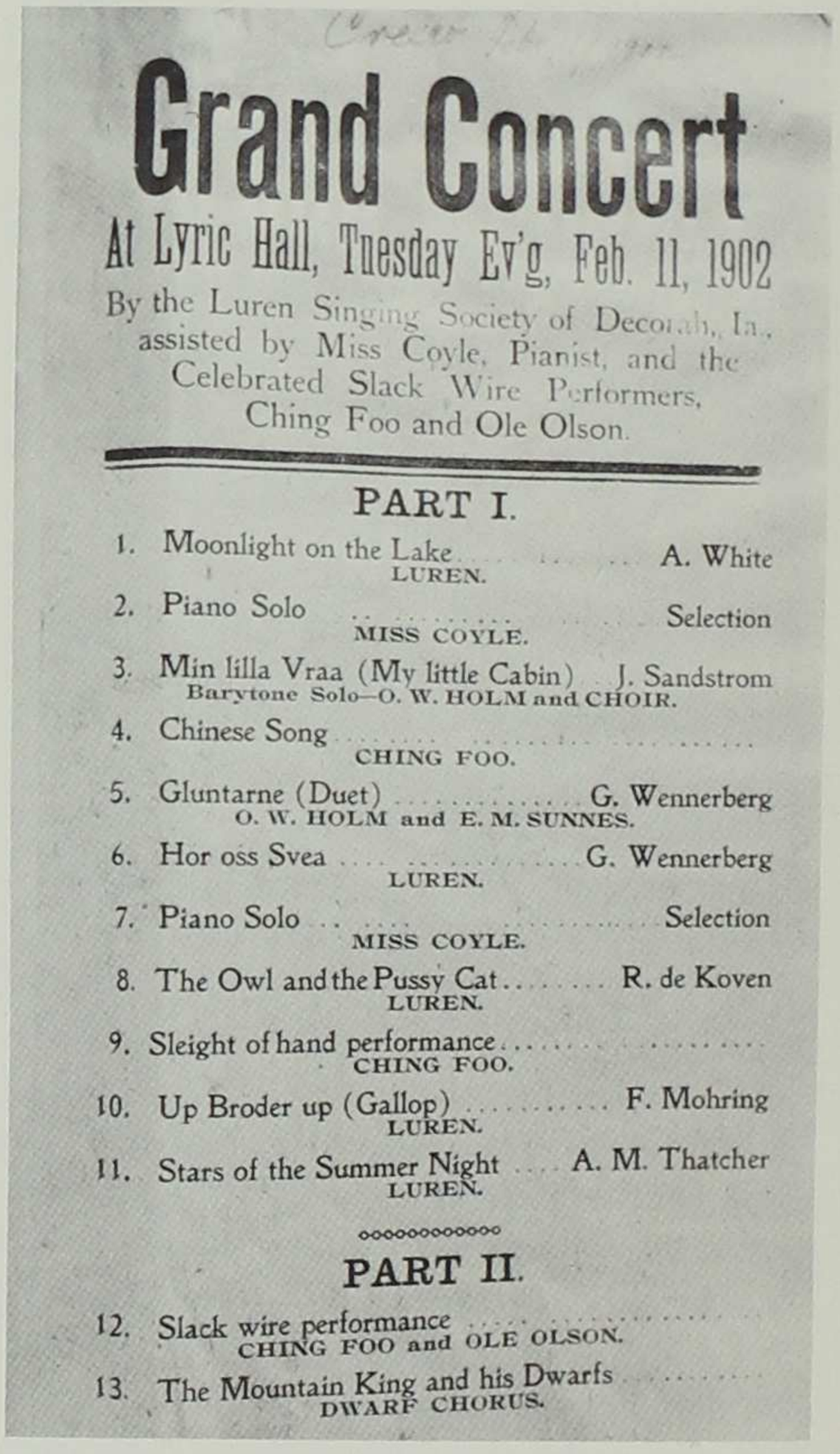
This article was taken from a manuscript history of Luren Singing Society 1868-1968, commissioned for the centennial of the society in 1968. Sources came mainly from the unusually rich and comprehensive archives of the society. Besides scrapbooks of clippings, cards, reviews and programs going back to 1874, and the original secretaries' protocols since 1884 (kept in the Norwegian language till 1943), these archives contain many photographs of Luren, its clubrooms, sangerfests, and the like, from 1868 to the present. These materials are currently deposited in the Winneshiek County Historical Society Archives. Other artifacts associated with the society, are deposited in Vesterheim the Norwegian-American Museum.

The program that evening included songs in English and Scandinavian by Luren, two eight-handed piano pieces (Mendelssohn, C. M. von Weber) by four young Decorah ladies, and two selections by the Luther College Band. Mayor F. W. Daubney then took the stage and delivered a presentation address before unveiling the new banner. Luren replied with a song written in English for the occasion by J. J. Hopperstad, the first verse of which ran:

> Glorious banner, now unfold thee,
> To the breeze thy beauties fling.
> All enraptured we behold thee
> While we gather here to sing.
> Strengthen our determination,
> Give us courage for the fray,
> Grant that hope's sweet inspiration
> In our souls may never die.

When the ovations finally died down, Luren ended the program with a lavish, new production of the Wedding Festival in Hardanger. From that day until Luren's centennial year of 1968, the Fjelde sisters' banner waved above the Luren Singing Society, and it now hangs in the Norwegian-American Museum beside its predecessor.

A new clubroom was next. In November of 1902, a committee was appointed to look for a better locale, and in December, they reported that the third floor above the National Bank was available for $75 a year. On December 17, all of the active members except two went up to look. They sang a trial song in the empty room and soon thereafter signed a contract to rent the locale for three years. By January of 1903, they had agreed to share the clubroom and costs with Det Norske Selskab,



Grand Concert

At Lyric Hall, Tuesday Ev'g, Feb. 11, 1902

By the Luren Singing Society of Decorah, Ia., assisted by Miss Coyle, Pianist, and the Celebrated Slack Wire Performers, Ching Foo and Ole Olson.

PART I.

1. Moonlight on the Lake ..... A. White
   LUREN.
2. Piano Solo ..... Selection
   MISS COYLE.
3. Min lilla Vraa (My little Cabin) J. Sandstrom
   Barytone Solo—O. W. HOLM and CHOIR.
4. Chinese Song .....
   CHING FOO.
5. Gluntarne (Duet) ..... G. Wennerberg
   O. W. HOLM and E. M. SUNNES.
6. Hor oss Svea ..... G. Wennerberg
   LUREN.
7. Piano Solo ..... Selection
   MISS COYLE.
8. The Owl and the Pussy Cat ..... R. de Koven
   LUREN.
9. Sleight of hand performance .....
   CHING FOO.
10. Up Broder up (Gallop) ..... F. Mohring
    LUREN.
11. Stars of the Summer Night ..... A. M. Thatcher
    LUREN.

PART II.

12. Slack wire performance .....
    CHING FOO and OLE OLSON.
13. The Mountain King and his Dwarfs .....
    DWARF CHORUS.

The program presented by Luren in Cresco. Note the vaudevillian influences supplied by Ching Foo and the Dwarf Chorus (courtesy of the Winneshiek County Historical Society Collection, Luther College Library, and Luren Society).

and in March of 1903, the two societies moved in: There were the usual rounds of house warmings, and some new decorations as well, including portraits of Sunnes, Holm, and Carl Larsen in gold frames, by the local artist, Arne K. Berger. The total property of the society was listed in the secretary's protocol for 1908 and appraised at $742.75. It included a piano and piano chair, music stands and song books and a book case, innumerable

framed pictures of Luren, of various 'sangerfests' and of other Norwegian-American singing societies, portraits of the Norwegian royal family, one leather upholstered chair, two marble topped tables, a sofa, 16 common chairs and two long tables, one banner, one old banner, one golden harp, a stove, and many other things, acquired through the years since 1868. They still did not have everything, though, for when Luren entertained in the clubroom, they had to borrow the dishes belonging to Det Norske Selskab.

By 1905, times were changing and growing more nationalistic. In the Luren clubrooms, as among Norwegians everywhere in the world, there came to be more and more talk of politics. This gay singing society, with its carefree skits and its picnics and outings, and its motto of *Egen Fornöielse* ("Self satisfaction"), began to grow serious. Solemn discussions, solemn patriotic songs, large Norwegian flags and heavy bunting in the Norwegian national colors, long-winded speeches and lectures made their way into the meetings of Luren in those years. Ties with Norway, which had long consisted of fond memories, letters from the family, and an occasional summer vacation trip, now began to take on a more official character.

So it was with Norwegians everywhere in the world. Great things were happening at home: independence from Sweden was in the air. Every Norwegian knew that independence would come in one way or another, but the question was whether it would come through warfare and bloodshed, or by peaceful means. The tense anxiety of those years around 1905 helped to build up a great wave of national feeling, and that feeling swept the Norwegian-American colonies, Luren and Decorah included, with as much power as it swept the Old Country.

The sixtieth birthday of Edward Grieg in 1903 gave a focus to this national resurgence among lovers of Norwegian music. Luren staged a Grieg festival on June 15, 1903, and they also sent the composer a birthday gift of 20 Norwegian crowns, together with a letter in Norwegian, hailing Grieg as "the world's greatest living composer." Two months later, President Holm received a postcard of thanks, written in Grieg's own hand, which is preserved in the scrapbook of the society.

When Norwegian independence finally came by peaceful means in 1905, the joy in Decorah was as boundless as in Christiania. Prince Carl of Denmark was elected to become king of the new realm under the name of Haakon VII. His coronation took place near the grave of St. Olaf, in the cathedral of Trondheim, in June of 1906, and two passive members of Luren, K. I. Haugen and B. Anundsen, were present as representatives of the society. They presented His Majesty with a splendid document of congratulations from Luren, rendered in polychrome and golden letters upon parchment. In return, the delegates were awarded the Royal Coronation Medal in silver.

Back in Decorah, the Norwegian national fervor reached a kind of peak at a "Syttende Mai" celebration sponsored jointly by Luren and Det Norske Selskab in one of those early years of the century. *Decorah Posten* wrote that "we cannot remember having celebrated a similar festival in this country with a more national stamp than this one. The locale was tastefully decorated with Norwegian and American colors, which looked unusually

fair and inviting in the glow of the newly installed gas lighting." Professor Thrond Bothne lectured on the meaning of May 17 to Norwegian history. Next came Luren with "Ja vi elsker dette Landet" and other national songs, followed by Professor Haldor Hanson, who played a selection of Norwegian national songs on his violin. The main address of the evening was by Professor Gisle Bothne, and it "treated national song and was really more in the form of a popular lecture than an after dinner address. . . . It was from first to last a penetrating appeal to a Norwegian's best national feelings and thoughts. With powerful, immediate examples, the speaker illustrated how the idea of nationality—which is the great undertone bursting forth with such power in national song—has been one of the fundamental elements in the history of our people." Still another speaker came after that, Mr. K. Thompson, who talked about some of the obscure local poets of Hardanger and Voss, and recited their verse in witty dialect. Finally, Luren sang again, and then everybody joined in the splendid repast which the ladies of Luren and Det Norske Selskab had prepared. There was song and music and conversation far into the night, until old John Jackwitz, whose birthday was May 17, humorously told the assemblage how the day should be properly celebrated. Professor Siewers ended the evening with a few warm words for Ole Bull, "one of the most *norske* Norwegians who ever lived."

Along with the heavy, self-conscious spirit of Norwegian nationalism, a new

The banner of Luren made by the Fjelde sisters and first unfurled in 1902. The relic is now preserved among the collections of Vesterheim (courtesy of Vesterheim).

generation shouldered its way into Luren. One by one, the fun loving Old Guard passed out of the picture. Jackwitz was the first to go in 1901. Holm resigned in the heat of a squabble in 1909, and Sunnes succeeded him as president but stalked out of the very next meeting when more controversy arose, and apparently never came back. He and Carl Larsen resigned in January of 1910, and Hjerleid resigned in 1909. Luren did not lose its vigor, however, with the passing of the Old Guard. New members flocked to the society: O. N. Quandahl, Fagerli (bass), Carl O. Hagen (bass), and G. O. Lermo (second tenor) in 1910; Einar Josephsen, E. E. Berg, and Professor Bjarne Svanoe the year following. In July of 1910, Luren Singing Society was incorporated as a legal entity in the state of Iowa, and a new set of bylaws replaced those from 1885.

Only the problem of a director seemed to stand in the way of the society's progress. Sunnes had held the job more or less continuously since 1892, but his health was poor and he asked to be relieved in March of 1909. Since "Professor Sperati would not assume the directorship of Luren under any circumstances" (Luren minutes, March 2, 1909), old J. J. Hopperstad, who had served temporarily as director of Luren as early as 1886, took up the baton again and held it until 1911, but then he could do no more.

Between January and March of that year, President Boe of Luren negotiated with Professor Carlo A. Sperati, and to a special meeting of the society on March 10, 1911, he was finally able to report that "he had now gotten a reply from Prof. Sperati and he asked for 5 dollars for every time Luren meets to rehearse, and a similar sum for each time he meets for rehearsal with the Winneshiek County Sangerforbund, that is, an average of 3 meetings each month with Luren and one with the Sangerforbund."

Luren accepted the offer. On March 14, 1911, Carlo A. Sperati directed a rehearsal of Luren Singing Society for the first time in 25 years, but not for the last. This time he stayed at the podium for a third of a century, and Luren entered a new era in its history: the Sperati Era. □

AT LUTHER COLLEGE, 1877-1881

by A. A. Veblen

Andrew A. Veblen like his famous brother, Thorstein B. Veblen, went to Carleton College, and both of them followed an academic career after graduation. The similarities do not go much further. Thorstein was a brilliant, volcanic scholar who led a tempestuous life and carved out a reputation as one of America's great social critics. Andrew was a good family man and an orderly person who pursued a distinguished career as professor of physics at The University of Iowa. Thorstein's writing style was a passionate chaos of ideas and images. Andrew's was precise, pensive, and clear.

Andrew Veblen spent four years on the faculty of Luther College before going on to the university. During these years, he seems to have seen an older colleague, Throng Bothne, as his bane. Sheer clash of personality was certainly one reason why they could not get along. Perhaps Bothne reminded Veblin too much of his brother Thorstein. Bothne for his part may have seen in Veblen something of the smug Yankee arrogance that could make life so miserable for an immigrant. Differences in age, education, and cultural preferences also played their part. Bothne had been born and educated in Norway; Veblen grew up in a bicultural Norwegian-American environment but had been educated in a Midwestern citadel of New England folkways. Veblen was temperate, young, and tidy; Bothne was a shaggy, bearded giant who liked a sociable drink.

Both Veblen and Bothne were farmer's sons, not the scions of established middle class families like Vilhelm Koren and Laur. Larsen. Though their social aspirations were similar, their cultural aspirations were diametrically opposed. Bothne related to his colleagues insofar as they, like him, wanted to preserve what was best in Norwegian life and culture. Veblen related to them insofar as they realized, as he did, that an accomodation to Anglo-American cultural values was a necessary corollary of living in North America.

Long after he had left Decorah and the faculty of Luther College, A. A. Veblen wrote the following memoir. It is a lively sketch of personalities and episodes of urban life among the Norwegians of northeastern Iowa during the pioneer generation. Veblen was a thoughtful writer, deft in delineating situations and individuals, and he also shared something of his brother's insight into the driving forces behind a given social situation. These characteristics lend and air of verve, immediacy, and credibility to his memoir, even though it was actually written long after the events described. This edited version of the memoir is shorter than the original, and punctuation has been altered slightly in places for the convenience of the reader.

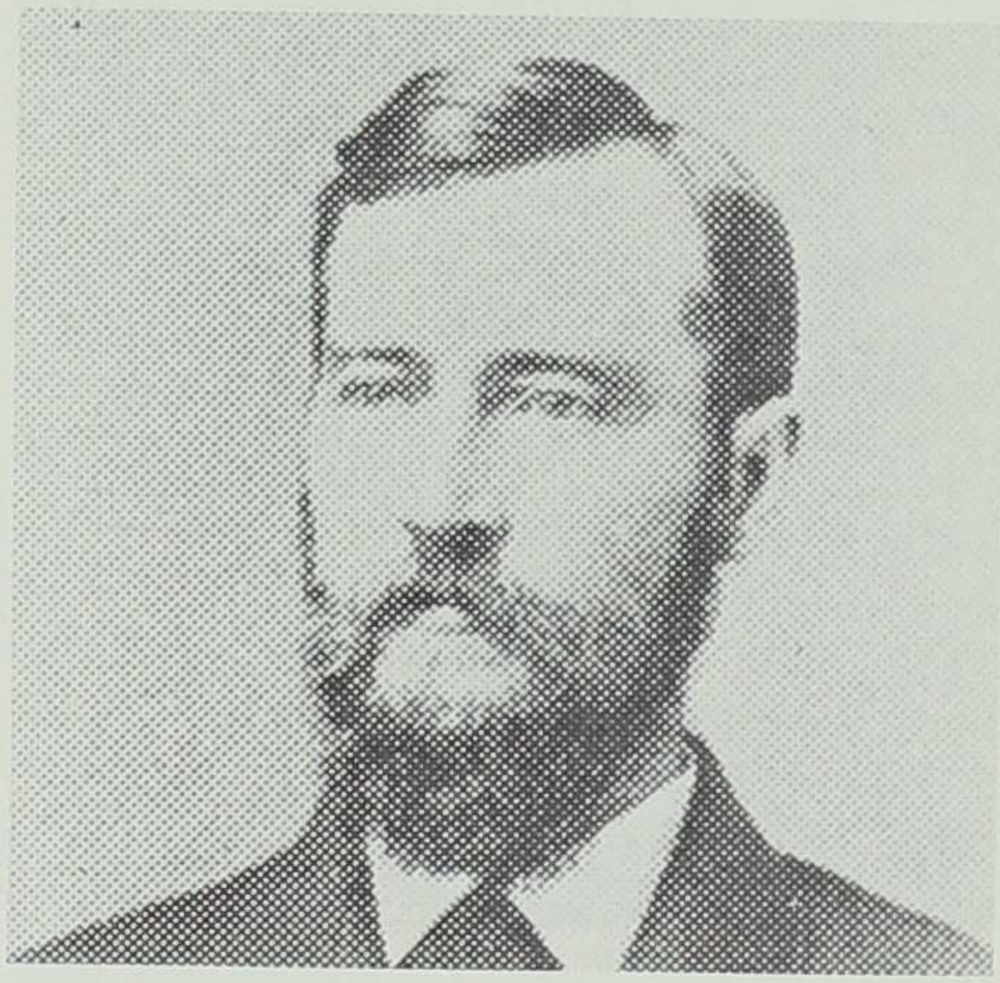
I received my bachelor's degree at Carleton College, June 27, 1877. The cornerstone of the main building of St. Olaf College was laid on July 4 following. I was present at this ceremony and met several of the leading men of the Norwegian Synod, who were gathered in Northfield to participate in the festivities of the cornerstone laying. On the following day, I made a trip in southern Minnesota (Rushford, Lanesboro, Spring Valley) to look up some high school vacancies of which friends had advised me. On my return to Northfield some two days later, I met

there Reverend B. J. Muus and Professor L. S. Reque of Luther College. They informed me that such members of the Luther College faculty, including President Laur. Larsen, as were in Northfield at the St. Olaf exercises, together with Mr. Muus, Reverend N. A. Quammen, and perhaps others who were especially interested in the college, had held a conference on the matter of finding some one who could fill a vacancy at Luther College, and that they, Muus and Reque, had been delegated to ascertain whether I would be willing to accept the position if tendered me.

My answer was that I was willing to undertake such a position as they had in mind, and Professor Reque undertook to inform President Larsen of the result of our interview.

In a few days, I received from President Larsen a letter of date, July 10, 1877, offering me the place. On receiving my letter accepting, he wrote again, July 30th, outlining briefly my duties. Among these he insisted that I should have the class beginning Latin, Sexta, which was the designation of the class entering the school. The classes were known as Prima, Secunda, &c., down to Sexta, the course covering six years of preparatory and college work.

The assignment of any class in Latin to me, and most of all that of the beginners, was a surprise to me. The truth of the matter was that no one on the staff was willing to take it, and as the faculty had the authority to make up the program, and I was not present to make a protest,



Andrew A. Veblen as he appeared while on the faculty of Luther College.

they simply decided to make me take it. But I had heard remarks from different persons who had been educated either in Norway or at Norwegian and German institutions in America, including President Larsen himself, to the effect that the classics, and especially Latin, were not taught properly and thoroughly and were not well learned at American higher schools. The medium of instruction in Latin at Luther College was to be Norwegian, by a Norwegian textbook, and I had had no school in Norwegian and was unfamiliar with the grammatical terms I should be obliged to use in conducting recitations in the Norwegian language.

In view of the derogatory remarks made by the class of men who were to be my colleagues, about American institutions of learning such as Carleton College in which I had received my training, and especially

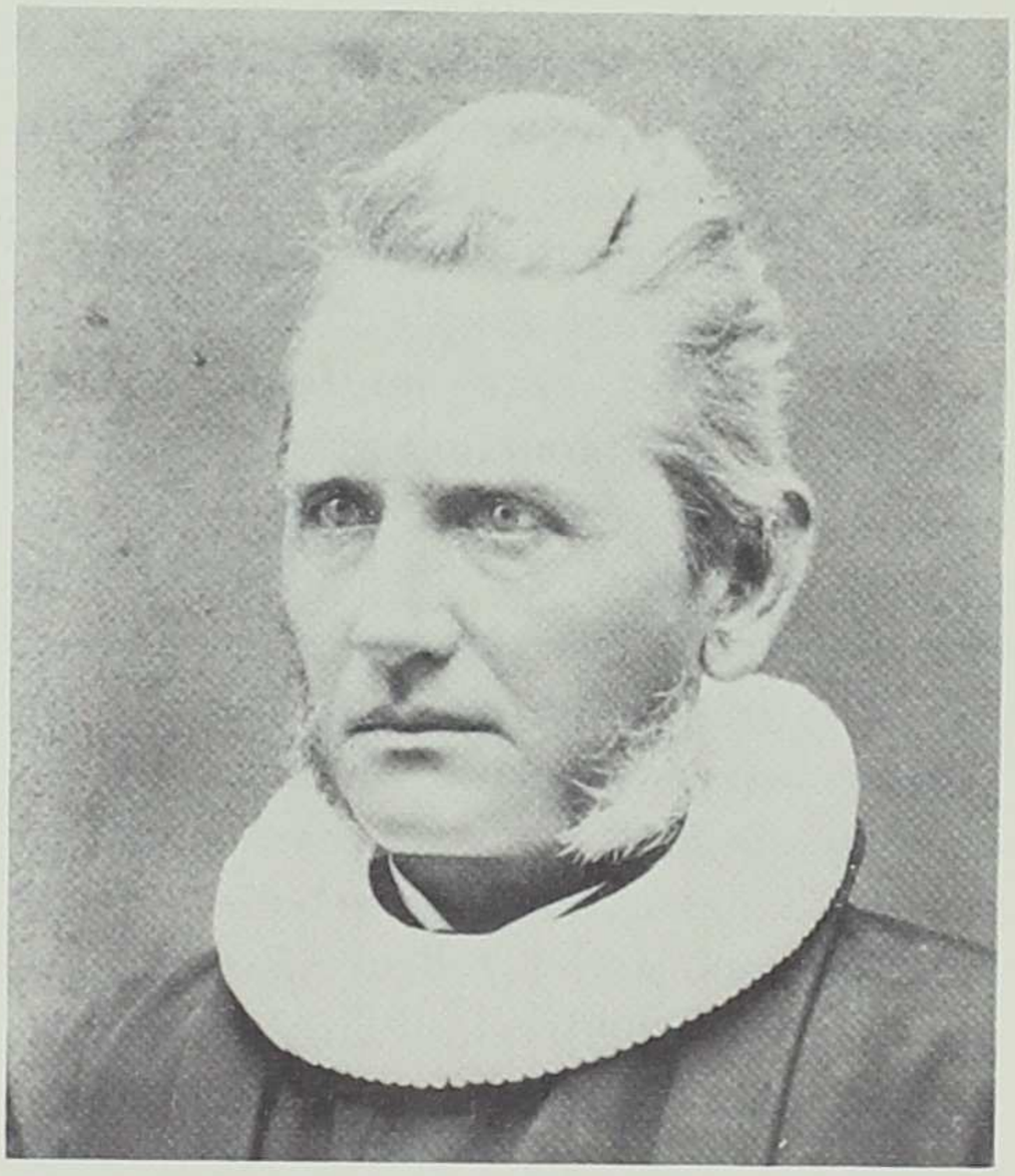
as the unfavorable opinion concerning American schools was applied to the whole system and the methods pursued in them, my selection to fill the vacancy at Luther College was an entirely unexpected surprise. But I was slightly acquainted with Mr. Muus, and of course my pastor, Mr. Quammen, vouched for my being safe as to character and orthodox in faith, and the favorable regard of these two men, as well as others like Professor Reque, of my acquaintance, seems to have decided the Luther College people to make the experiment using a man whose entire training had been received in one of these selfsame American colleges. As soon as my appointment was settled, I obtained a copy of Voss's beginners' book in Latin and sought to prepare myself for the unwelcome task.

In August, about the 20th, we [Veblen and his wife] arrived in Decorah, where neither of us had ever been before, and we were very hospitably received by President Larsen and his family, and we remained their guests until our house was ready for us some four or five days later. At Luther College, it was then the practice to furnish the members of faculty living quarters. Bachelors were supplied with unfurnished rooms in the college building or elsewhere, while married teachers were given a house or a suite of housekeeping rooms, in addition to the stipulated cash salary. Just outside the campus to the east was the property, "Sunnyside," which had been occupied by Professor Siewers. This was assigned to us as our residence.

During the few days that we stayed with the Larsens, there was one thing which we learned and which was characteristic. We knew that among Norwegians in America it was the custom to speak of the wife of a minister or other professional man as *Fru* So-and-so (Fru Larsen, Fru Muus, &c.). It seemed that in the college circle this title was used to discriminate between the ladies in some way by denoting some simply as *Mrs.* There were Fru Larsen and Fru Bothne, but Mrs. Jacobsen. Later, there was Mrs. Narvesen. In some way, it was a graduation in which *Mrs.* was an indefinable degree lower than *Fru.* We knew this distinction to be accepted in the country congregations, where the wives of farmers and other common folk were Mrs. So-and-so, while the minister's wife was Fru——. When President Larsen met us at the station on our arrival, I introduced my wife to him as Mrs. Veblen. But when we came to be presented to his wife, he designated her as Fru Veblen, and in all the four years of our stay in Decorah she was, among the Norwegians there, always known as Fru Veblen. Being par excellence the "Americans" of the faculty this was singular, especially in view of the fact that other professors' wives had to content themselves with the designation of *Mrs.* while others in the faculty circle received the more coveted title of *Fru.* In our case, the thing probably came about through the accident of the president's using the word *Fru* when we arrived.

Reverend V. Koren, one of the foremost leaders of the Synod, resided a few miles out from Decorah. He was a frequent visitor at the college and an important member of the men who formed the college sphere. On the day we were to move into Sunnyside, Mr. Koren happened to be in town. He therefore came over, accompanied by President Larsen, to pay his respects to the new college family. I had gone "down town" on some errand and accordingly was not at home. But Koren afterward related what took place. With a plane which I had brought along, and

an old saw and a hatchet which I had found about the house, I had that morning constructed a kitchen table out of lumber from one of the boxes in which our goods had been shipped. I had found a rusty pair of hinges upon an old piece of wood in the yard and had used them in supplying the table with a leaf. The table, on my hurrying away down town, was left in the kitchen, surrounded by the chips and shavings resulting from the process of construction. Mr. Koren spied the table and the shavings &c., and the tools used and wanted to know whose handiwork it was. On being told, he inspected the table from all sides, taking a good, long time to do so. Then he turned to President Larsen and made the remark, "Han er praktisk. Jeg liker praktiske folk" ("He is a practical man. I like practical folk."). The incident was fraught with much good fortune to me, for Mr. Koren became my very good friend and on various occasions his interest in me served me well.



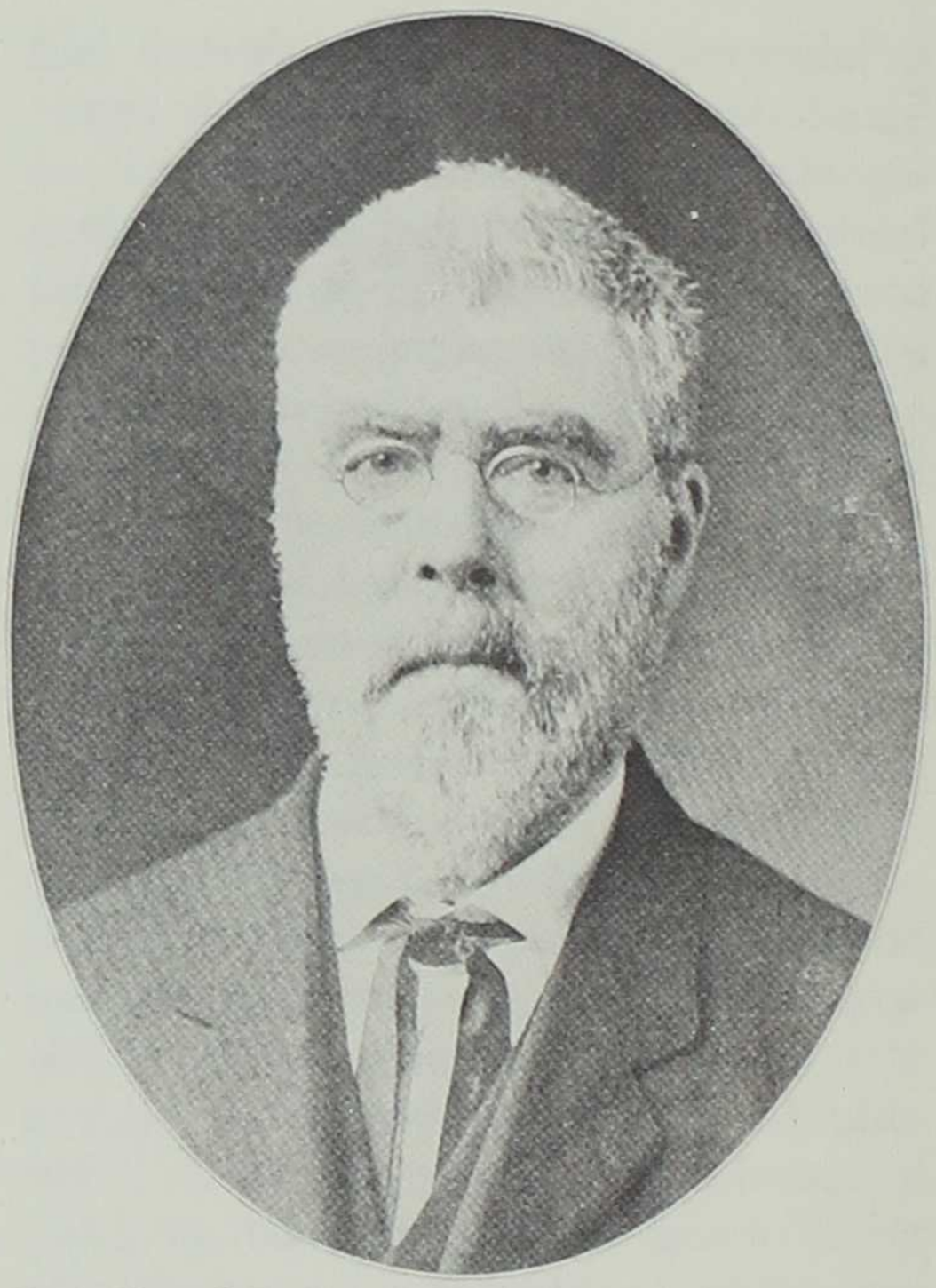
Rev. Vilhelm Koren, a pastor of great influence among local Norwegians in northeastern Iowa. He wears the traditional collar of the Luthern clergy (courtesy of Vesterheim).

Another man of some consequence there was Professor Thrond Bothne, who was regarded with a curious mixture of fear and respect because of the rugged and sometimes rough element of his personality, and who for still other traits was likeable and liked. He was an extreme case of the professional Norwegian of that time, and the worst he could say of one was that he was "Americanized." Having come there as an American, or rather *the* American of the faculty, I naturally enough wondered what judgment he made as a consequence of the hardly polite looking over that he gave me when I was introduced to him. But it happened that he had been the instructor in the beginning Latin (Sexta) the year before, and I soon called on him and asked him to explain to me his method and to advise me on any points he thought would be helpful to one who was inexperienced. He seems to have been considerably flattered, and he gave me a long lecture on the whole subject of teaching elementary Latin. I gained his liking, and flattering remarks that he made to others about me were repeated to me, and for the first year of my stay at the college, I retained the good will of Professor Bothne even though I was an "American." This may be taken to mean a good deal, for his constant criterion when questions of practice or policy arose, as in faculty meetings, was: thus we do "at home" ("hjemme"), and he cared not at all what the practice in a given case might be in American institutions. Neither did he seem to accept as decisive what might be the practice or custom of the Germans, whose standards and opinions in those days counted for so much among the leading

lights at the college, as well as among the theologians and laymen generally of the Synod.

Besides the class in beginning Latin, my work consisted chiefly of the instruction in English—grammar, composition, rhetoric—in the four classes Quarta to Sexta, and the two Normal classes, and penmanship in the lower classes. I had twenty-six hours of instructing each week through the year. As I anticipated, the Latin proved hard work. Sexta was a large class, more than sixty in the beginning. Few of them had had any systematic training in school, and it fell to me to do the major part of the work of "breaking them in." In Latin, English, and writing, the classes were in my hands twelve fifty-minute recitation periods each week, which was very nearly half of their total instruction. Teaching this untrained and miscellaneous flock of country boys was hard work, though they were not at all difficult to handle, and very naturally, to get them interested in such a subject as Latin might be expected to be especially difficult. Th task was of course particularly hard for me, who had no experience in using Norwegian as a means of instruction and was unfamiliar with the special Norwegian terminology of grammar. But the class as a whole proved apt. They took hold of the work with a will and gained somewhat of a reputation particularly for their proficiency in declensions and conjugations. But I was after that one year relieved from any further teaching of Latin.

My chief branch was to be English, and I knew that my work would be largely judged by the sort of English the boys came to speak on the campus. I therefore made it a rule to speak no Norwegian to the students in or out of hours (except in the Latin class), and I exacted of them that they should speak English to me. Such a course seemed necessary enough. When I came there, I think English and Norwegian were used to about an equal extent among the boys on campus. Larsen, Brandt, and Bothne never spoke English to the boys. The intercourse between the other men and boys took place in one language or the other—indifferently. The language used in the various games or sports would also vary. But baseball could hardly be played except in English. It was the chief sport cultivated at Luther College, and I believe one is justified in crediting the gradual Americanization of the college partly to the influence of this, the "national" game. One could hear Norwegian used by the croquet players, and even in the old fashioned foot ball playing Norwegian was heard to a considerable



Prof. Throng Bothne, Veblen's bane (courtesy Luther College Archives).

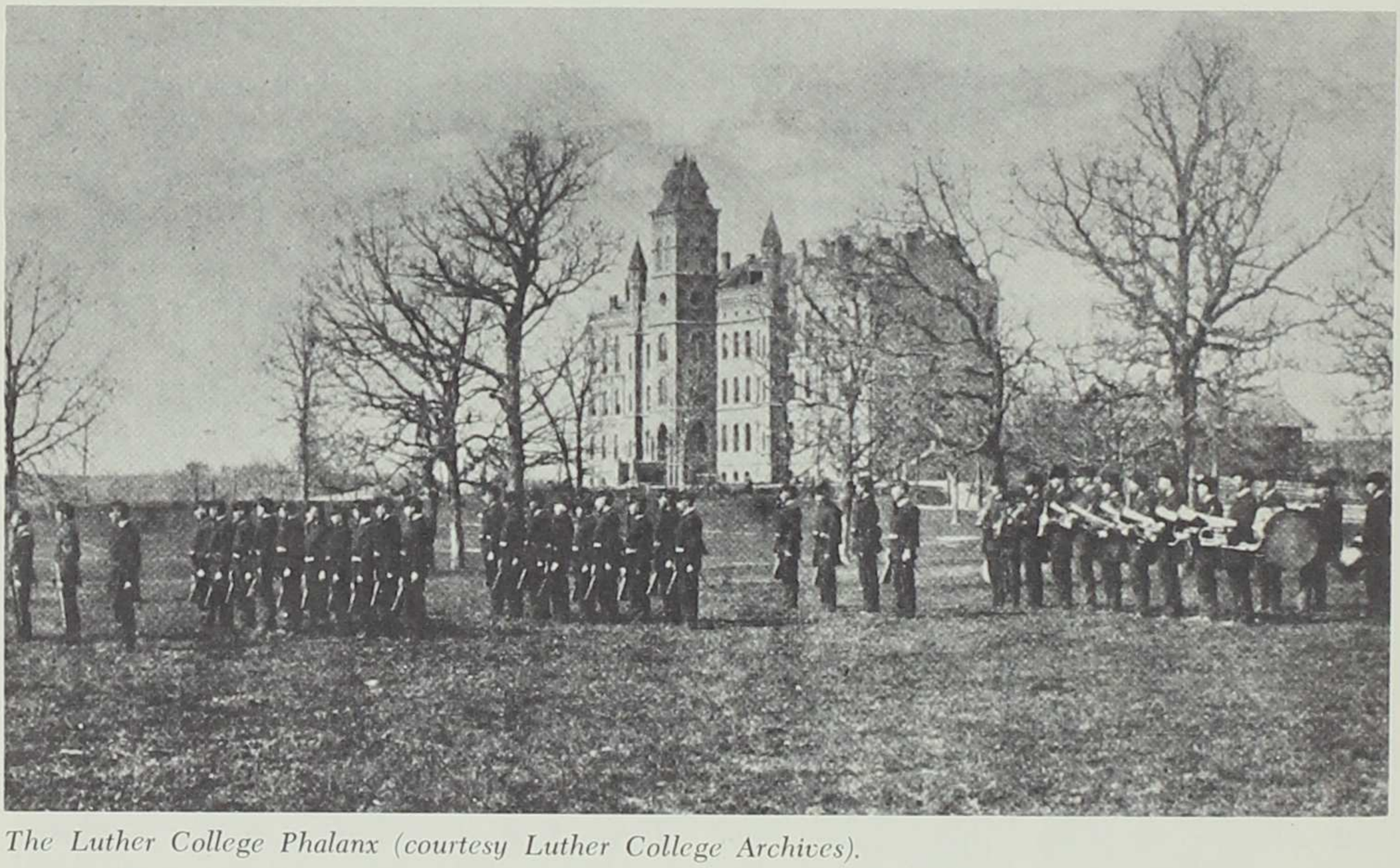
extent. I am speaking of the usages as I found them at the beginning of my first year there.

M. J. L. Lee was then manager of the Lutheran Publishing House of the Synod. He was a Civil War veteran and took much interest in the young men of the college. Largely owing to his encouragement, a movement was started in the fall of 1877 to form a voluntary military company in the college. A majority of the older students joined, and the company started with a membership of about seventy-five. By the bylaws, all officers were elected by the company. Mr. Lee was chosen captain; Professor Reque first lieutenant; Olaf Larson, a student, second lieutenant. Professor Bredesen was elected first orderly sergeant; three more sergeants and several corporals were also elected. Being a "new" man, I took no part in the organizing, but as soon as the offices were filled, I applied for membership, and being admitted as a private, I began to drill in the first lessons in the school of the soldier. Partly because I had had some training in gymnastics, marching, and evolutions, and partly, I have always suspected, because it did not look right to have a member of the faculty without some "office," the position of fifth sergeant was created and the place was offered to me. I think this was due to Captain Lee's suggestion. We had no arms to begin with, but we took hold of "setting up" and all exercises and evolutions of the company with a good deal of earnestness and no little success. As might be expected, however, many dropped out for various reasons or on various pretexts. I drilled in all sorts of capacities, taking the place of different officers when they were absent, even of the lieutenants. And when the second lieutenant after a short time resigned, I was elected to take his place. By this time, we had organized a campaign for raising money to buy equipment, as the captain's efforts to get arms and accoutrements supplied by the government had failed. With two hundred dollars contributed by students and others, we bought fifty muzzle loading muskets that showed abundant signs of having seen hard service, together with fifty belts and cartridge and cap pouches. The officers supplied themselves with the regulation dress swords and belts. In the matter of uniforms, the most that we could put through was the requirement that each should wear a blue uniform cap which in shape was much like the officers' caps now (1918) used in the army. One of the first floor rooms in the "Chicken Coop" or annex was set apart as an Armory, and gun racks were put along three of its walls. The possession of arms and accoutrements and the wearing of the uniform cap gave the company a distinct standing, and for several years no place was long vacant in the number of fifty to which the membership was virtually limited by the number of available stand of arms.

When the company was formed, there was a good deal of study on an appropriate name, but in the absence of any acceptable suggestion, the question was postponed until after other matters of organization were disposed of. At the

A Note on Sources

A. A. Veblen's manuscript, "At Luther College 1877-1881," is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and is printed here with the gracious permission of that Society. The manuscript has not previously been published, but portions of it were quoted in David T. Nelson, *Luther College 1861-1961* (Decorah: Luther College Press, 1961), and in Leola Nelson Bergmann, *Americans from Norway* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1950).



The Luther College Phalanx (courtesy Luther College Archives).

first meeting held after my admission, the matter of a name came up for discussion. A great many names had been proposed and more were suggested at that meeting. Having been called on by some one to make a suggestion, I said, why not call it the *Phalanx*? No decision was made at that meeting, but at an adjourned meeting a day or two later, the name "The Luther College Phalanx" was adopted.

It was my purpose to get as fully and intimately acquainted with the boys as I might, and for that reason, I made it a point to miss no meeting and no drill of the Phalanx. There were times when the captain was unable to be present, and the first lieutenant was not very regular in his attendance, being hindered occasionally, for one thing, by an ailment of the throat. And when both these officers were absent, it fell to me, and not infrequently, to assume charge. We had company drill twice a week when we could, but at least once a week anyhow; and squad drills as often as the sergeants and corporals could get their squads assembled. Once a week, the non-commissioned officers were drilled by the captain or one of the lieutenants. The men worked with no little enthusiasm and became quite proficient both in the manual of arms and in marching. We took part in the Memorial Day parade in the spring of 1878 along with the military or N.Y. Company of Decorah, and were commended by the officer of that company for the showing we made.

During my first year in Decorah, the faculty consisted of President Laur. Larsen, Reverend N. Brandt, Reverend C. D. Jacobsen, C. Narvesen, L. S. Reque, Reverend A. Bredesen, A. A. Veblen. Mr. Brandt was the pastor of the church and could only give half time to the college. He instructed in religion and singing. Except in English as a subject and in mathe-

matics, practically all the instruction, up to this time, had been conducted in Norwegian. There had developed a party within the faculty in favor of so changing this matter of language that class instruction should be more fairly shared between the two languages. By the changes which had been going on, the "English" party had been gradually strengthened, and as I was naturally looked on as an accession by them, they took the matter up for action during this year.

A committee of which I was secretary brought in a report which was adopted after slight amendments. Reverend V. Koren attended the meetings at which the report was considered and took a prominent part in the discussions. The result of this action was to divide the time of employing English and Norwegian, as the medium of class instruction, about equally between the two. Perhaps the most important change was that of taking the instruction in Greek out of the Norwegian and making it an English subject. To this change in the relative standing of these two languages in the college, there was no strenuous objection. It was the inevitable consequence of the process of Americanization going on among the people of Norwegian origin as it worked out at the college. At the time of my leaving Decorah in 1881, English had practically displaced Norwegian as the language of the campus and largely so in the everyday intercourse between the student, as well as among those of the teachers who had been reared in this country. Many glaring Norwegianisms in use on the campus had disappeared, such as *free-day, free-quarter,* to *"have free,"* to *write dictates,* ceased to offend the ear. But in many important matters the college continued long to be patterned on Norwegian (and German) practice and methods. Standards appealed to and precedents cited were those of Norway rather than of America, that is by the older men whose education had been attained mainly in Norwegian institutions. Perhaps the most extreme was Th. Bothne, who at that time was bitterly opposed to all things American in school methods and practice, and who invariably cited the custom or rule that was applicable "hjemme."

Students who were less than eighteen years of age were not allowed to smoke tobacco. Smoking was forbidden to the students in all parts of the college, but a room had been set apart in the so-called "Chicken Coop," in which those over eighteen might smoke. Most of those entitled by age to the use of pipe (or cigar) therefore spent some part of their leisure time in this room. It became a sort of informal social center. The smokers effected definite organization, to which they gave the name *Niffelheim.** I am not sure, but I believe the room itself had been dubbed Niffelheim before the organization was made. Niffelheim had its by-laws and officers and was a sort of exclusive club. The members sometimes had formal programs, a written periodical, and other features in the ways of festivals. All this was calculated to make the younger students long for the day when they might attain the age and the accomplishment which constituted qualification for membership.

But there were some who did not smoke although of smoking age. Virtually excluded from Niffelheim with its social features and companionship, these, together with the minors under eighteen conceived the idea of forming a club of

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**Niffelheim* is a region known as the "World of Mist" [or smoke] in traditional Old Norse mythology.

non-smokers, which they gave the name *Muspelheim.** They obtained the use of a room on the ground floor of the main building to serve as a club room and reading room, which was supplied with magazines and papers bought with the dues of members. This took place during the year 1877-78. A delegation of Muspelheimers one day called and tendered me honorary membership in the society. I understood this to be because I was at that time the only member of the faculty except President Larsen who did not smoke, and the idea was that I should act as an official representative of the faculty.

The college year regularly ended at the close of June. The annual meetings of the Synod were held about the middle or just after the middle of the month. The members of the college faculty were expected to attend, and the week of the Synod meeting was given the students for review of the half year's work, and the examinations took place on the return of the teachers from the Synod convention. Some member of the faculty was of course left in charge to look after the students during this season of review. It was a duty which was considered both difficult and unpleasant and quite thankless, and no one desired the detail or assignment. The Synod met in 1878 in Stoughton, Wisconsin. All the teachers wished to attend. Some one moved that I, as the junior member, should be detailed to be in charge during the absence of the others.

Accordingly, I was left in charge of the college for about eight days. It did not take long to develop matters for discipline. Some of the "upper class" or older men began to smoke in the class and dormitory rooms and, in answer to the complaints made, held that this was vacation time and the rules against smoking in the building were thereby suspended.

But my ruling against them put an end to the trouble. In the next place, a number of Seniors (Prima men) openly proposed to violate the rule of study hours by taking croquet mallets and balls and going out upon the croquet ground in front of the college to play. The quartette that attempted this breach of discipline were two of the sons of one of the professors, the son of the virtual leader of the Synod, and a man who was generally prominent as a malcontent. When I called their attention to the rule which they were violating, they said they had studied till they were tired and could see no reason for my interference with their recreation. On my saying that I could not allow them to display their infraction of the rules and asking them to go back to their rooms or disappear at once in the woods, their spokesman, the son of the clergyman, said, "Oh, well, let us go," whereupon they threw down the mallets and went off into the woods bordering the campus. After these incidents, which took place respectively the first and second days of my administration, there were no further serious attempts at breaking rules. One other incident may be related as indicative of what boys sometimes would do. The students who were of age were required by the local "road boss" to work out their poll tax in West Decorah, but in order to cause as little interference as possible with their studies, he arranged it so that the day or two they worked fell within this week of reviewing. It happened that year that these men were given work in the road leading north up the ravine near the Mill Spring. By this piece of road stood one of the saloons designed to give a last

**Muspelheim* is the mythical "World of Fire."

chance for a drink to such as were driving out into the country. The first evening the returning student road members were quite lively in their behavior and there was a suspicious odor accompanying them. The next day, I took a walk to the top of the hill overlooking the road. I stood there in full view of the boys if they had chanced to look up, and was seen by the pathmaster who was directing their work. Presently two of them went over to the pump by the roadway in front of the saloon, pumped a cupful of water, smelled of it and poured it out, and walked into the saloon. When they came out, some of the others went in, and these were followed by others until the eight or nine boys there had taken turns at entering. The pathmaster several times looked up at me, but none of the boys looked up and so they did not see me. In the evening, they came back to the building as the students were gathering to go down to the dining room, and they came marching up the walk, boisterously tramping and with loud exclamations. In fact, they showed considerable ill mannered hilarity, which they continued for a while in the washroom downstairs. I went down to them and silently looked on until a profound silence took the place of the noise. Some of them became very serious, and they all ate their supper in glum silence. The next morning, one of them asked me whether I had a list of the company of the day before. I told him I needed no list. He asked whether I should report them to the president. I said, of course. "Of course you were all drunk?" I said. "Of course we were," he said. "But I don't think you'll see any more of this behavior," he said. For the remaining days that the college students worked on the road that week, the pathmaster assured me, no one went into the saloon again.

The seven or eight days of my "stewardship" sped along busily and pleasantly. At the first faculty meeting after, I was asked to report and mentioned the incidents related above, together with other matters. Unexpectedly, my report was characterized as an attack upon the behavior of the boys by none other than Professor Reque, who after stating that the case of the boys required an advocate, proceeded, as I took it, in the character of such an advocate or attorney to cross question me and to express doubt as to the truth or accuracy of my statements, ending up by declaring he should not consent to such "spying" on the students while at work and supposed to be on their honor. To this angry tirade, I listened in parliamentary silence, and then appealed to the president for protection against further abuse. The president then said that he had already heard substantially the same account from the boys themselves as that given by me in regard to all the incidents I mentioned. And he commended both my own report and the successful way I had filled my place.

The last few weeks of the summer vacation 1878, I proposed to spend at my father's, helping with the harvesting and stacking of the grain. Those of my colleagues who heard of this tried to dissuade me from such a course. They argued that a teacher could not safely do such hard physical work without injury, and that I should probably render myself unfit to do good work in my calling when the term opened. I did, however, go home and did a man's full work, both in binding on the Marsh harvester and later in building some forty stacks of grain on father's farm. And I believe I proved myself quite fit for the indoor work of teaching when the school

year began. There were doubts expressed as to the accuracy of my story that I had bound and stacked as a regular harvest hand, but fortunately, one of the students worked for one of our nearest neighbors and corroborated my story as having daily seen me at work as I claimed. I had a distinct impression that my engaging in manual work in that way was not exactly approved by such of my colleagues as were bred in the traditions of the old country, that it was not really good form for an educated man and a teacher to do ordinary work such as harvesting, and the idea that it would be unhealthy was probably a corollary to the class prejudice against an educated man's demeaning himself in such a manner.

Bothne's last pronounced attempt at humiliating me took place during the summer of 1880. Professor Reque was then away from Decorah, "travelling for his health." While he was gone, the faculty met at my house for the purpose of passing on the program of recitations for the year 1880-81. I had one year earlier stated to President Larsen that I thought it was time to turn over to me the work in English in Secunda and Prima (junior and senior years). When I was appointed in 1877, the English in these classes was reserved for Professor Reque for the time being, as it was not considered wise to turn this work over to one just out of college, and I was told by Larsen at the time that when I had got established at the college, the transfer of this work to me might be effected. When in the summer of 1879, I spoke of the matter to the president, he said he disliked at the time to take it up with Reque because the latter was not feeling well, and he begged me to let it pass for the time being. But now, at the faculty meeting held at my home in 1880, when I asked that the work in question be shifted to me for the coming year, Bothne made an abusive attack on me, accusing me of being "grov" ("coarse") in seeking to take advantage of an absent member who moreover was sick. On my stating I had mentioned the matter to the president a year before, which the latter acknowledged was true, Bothne indulged in further personal flaying of me. I did not in my own sitting room wish to provoke a scene such as I feared an answer might have incited, and kept quiet, limiting myself to the statement that if it were not for the inconvenience it might cause the college, and because it was too late in the year to hope to find another teaching position that year, I should certainly resign, and I stated that the coming academic year was likely to be my last at Luther College. As usual, no one present took issue with Bothne, for fear of an unpleasant scene. The president made no effort to protect me. No one made any motion, and the subject of course was dropped.

After the meeting, I received from faculty members privately expressions of regrets for the way I had been used, but these statements were simply private, and in them my self control under such provocation was favorably commented on. The president sometime later said to me: "Of course you did not mean that you intend to resign, that was surely a threat under the heat of feeling." I then told him I should quit at the end of the year and advised him to begin looking for a successor. □

COMMENTARY

One of the better ideas to emerge from the welter of plans and programs and propaganda surrounding the celebration of the Bicentennial is the American Issues Forum, co-sponsored by the National Endowment for Humanities and the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration. The idea is simple, but important. Throughout the coming months Americans should be attuned to the issues which face us today and which have been faced since 1776. The Forum program asks that we, as a nation, engage in a serious discussion of the fundamental ideas of our society. In other words: what is America?

To spark interchange on this widest of all possible questions, the American Issues Forum has drawn up a calendar which proposes that Americans think about special questions during specified time periods. The calendar runs from August 31, 1975 to May 29, 1976. There are no groups to join in order to participate, and anyone may organize in whatever way they wish to engage the issues. Both institutions and individuals are invited.

During the coming months *The Palimpsest* will attempt to coordinate at least part of its contents with the schedule of the American Issues Forum. From late August until late September the topic was "A Nation of Nations," which focused on the many streams of nationalities which have flowed together to form the American nation. The happy coincidence of the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Norwegian immigation to these shores brings the three topics to the fore.

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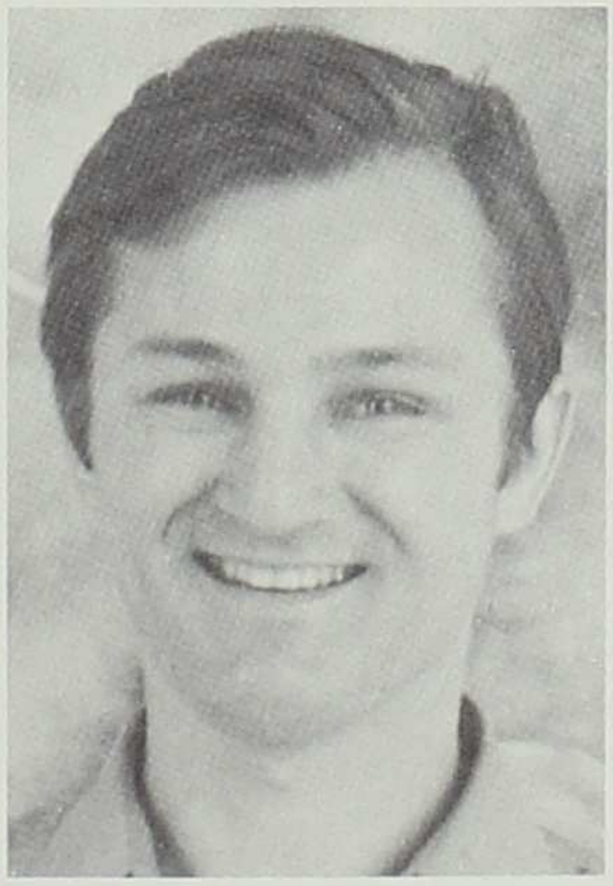

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