

Their Occupations

Agriculture

Literally thousands of Norwegians have given the best years of their lives to the cultivation of Iowa's soil. In 1870, 82 per cent of the Norwegians in the state were farmers. For many decades only the German farmers exceeded them in numbers, but since 1920 Swedish and Danish farmers have been more numerous than the Norwegians.

The early immigrants broke the sod; their children improved the land and acquired more. Few Norwegians were or are tenant farmers. If they were, they often rented from a relative or from a family estate. The Tow family in Benton County is such a case. Ole, Andrew, and Lars Tow came to Florence township about 1860. A 1917 plat book shows that several Tows still lived in the township; those who did not own their land rented from the Lars or Andrew Tow estates. Another Tow rented from a former resident of the community, B. L. Wick, a Norwegian attorney in Cedar Rapids.

Once the pioneer days were over most Norwegian farmers became financially solvent, though they had nothing to spare. By the 1890's many

were well-to-do and, with this economic flexibility, began to experiment with farming methods, develop purebred livestock, and participate in agricultural matters in county and state. Among Iowa's better known stockbreeders during the second decade of the twentieth century was Cyrus Tow of the Benton County family already mentioned. When he was elected to the state board of agriculture in 1913, his predecessor referred to him as "the younger man who is making a reputation for the state of Iowa." Tow served on the state board until 1925. Another well-known member of this family was Samuel Tow, prominent in the 1920's and '30's in Benton County agricultural affairs.

Others who made contributions to the agricultural progress of the state in the early decades of the century were three Winnebago County men, Ole A. Olson, Paul Koto, and G. S. Gilbertson, members of the state board of agriculture. Olson served as vice president for a number of years, Gilbertson as treasurer; Koto was the state veterinary surgeon. During the same period G. N. Haugen from Northwood, Worth County, was representing Iowa in congress and was chairman of the committee on agriculture.

Commerce and Trade

When the word "pioneer" is used in reference to the opening of the Middle West, one normally thinks of those who broke the sod. There were

also pioneer town builders like C. L. Clausen, who founded St. Ansgar, and entrepreneurs like B. O. Dahly, the Decorah merchant.

Dahly came to Winneshiek County in 1854 to a cluster of cabins called Freeport. Here he built a hotel, a livery barn, a general store, and millinery shop for his wife who had learned the trade. But his dream of a thriving city evaporated when Decorah was chosen to be the county seat. Later he moved there and made a fresh start with a millinery and fancy dress goods business. In eight years it had expanded from a modest stone building to a large two-story brick building called Dahly's Emporium employing sixteen people and advertized as the "finest establishment west of the lakes." And well it might have been, for its stock of millinery, plumes, silks, velvets, cloakings and shawls was more modish than one would expect to find in an Iowa village just after the Civil War.

In 1863 a woolen mill was started in Decorah by a group of Norwegians who invested \$54,000 and organized the Winneshiek Manufacturing and Commercial Association. Another Decorah Norwegian, Hartvig Engbertson, whose father came to the town in 1864 and established himself as a tailor, developed a very successful farm machinery business in the 1870's, became a stockholder and one of the organizers of the Decorah Opera House Company, as well as a shareholder in the Decorah Valve Company, the Winneshiek

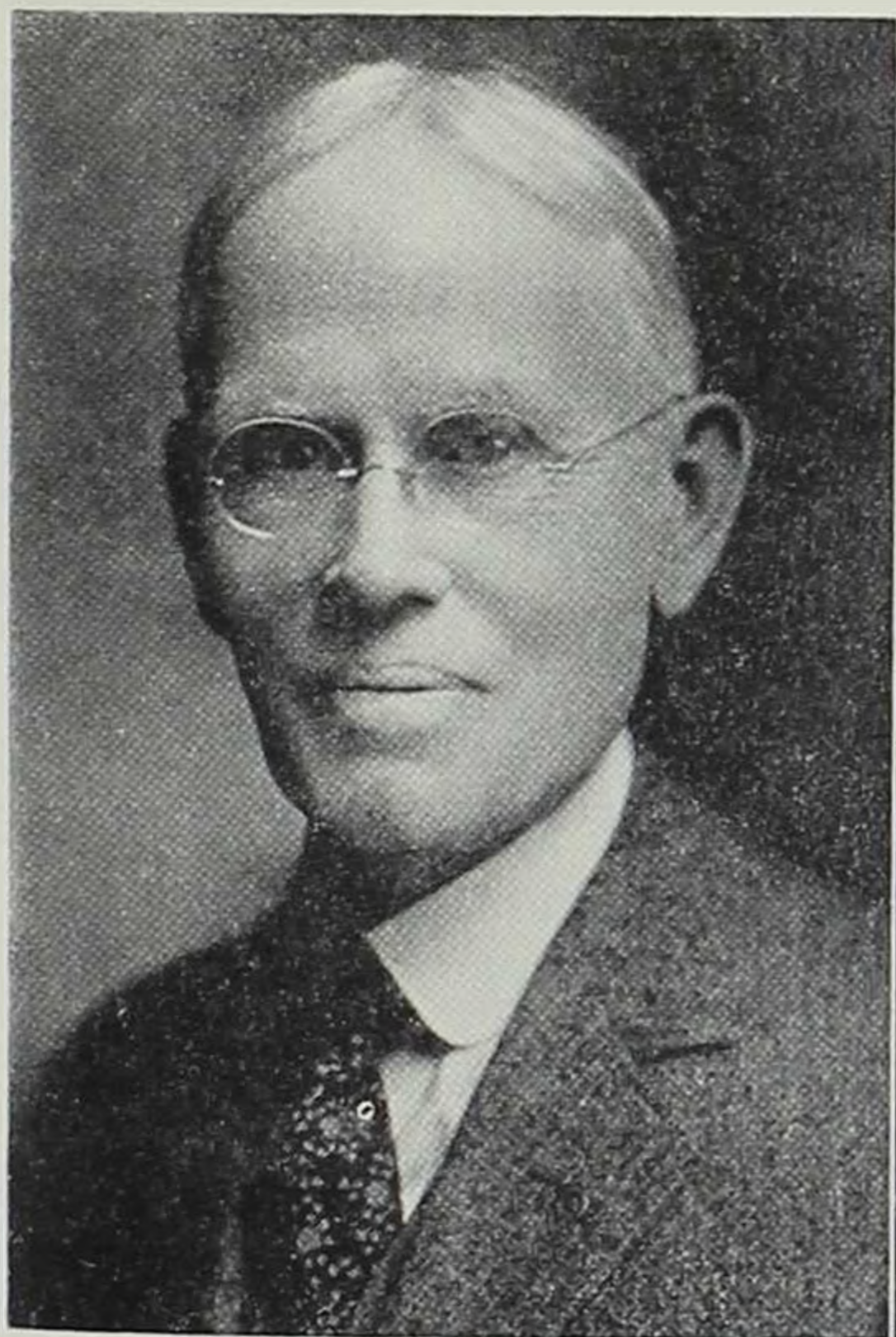
Hotel Company, and the Decorah Gas Company. His Norwegian-born wife operated a millinery shop. By the 1880's practically every town in the northeastern counties had a vigorous Norwegian element.

Rural areas and the small town still form the core of Iowa's "Norwegian" population. They are economically comfortable as garage owners, implement dealers, insurance agents, bank presidents, creamery operators, attorneys, and physicians. Occasionally one finds a Norwegian operating the movie theater.

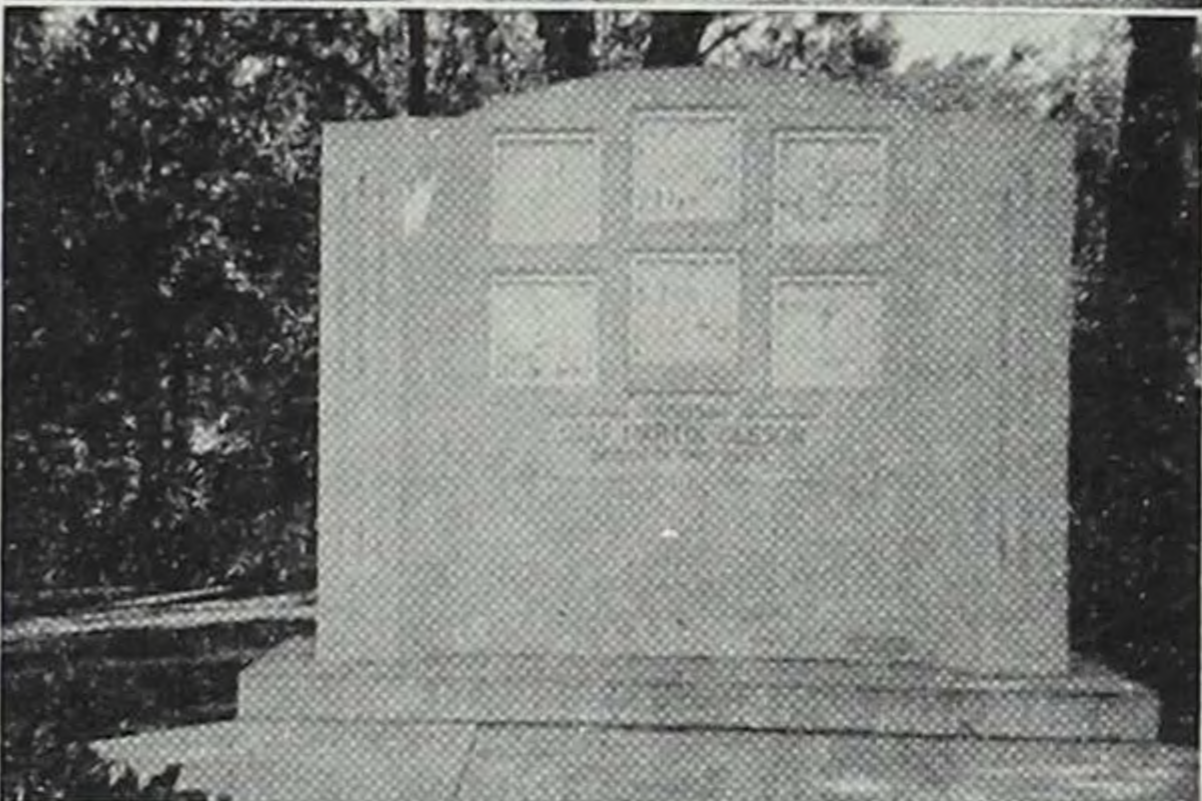
In the growing cities of the state, the immigrants, whose Old World training in the skilled trades served them well, went into the construction business. During Sioux City's expansive 1880's and '90's one of the foremost contractors was Arnt Olsen Halseth, who built the Union Stock Yards, the Silberhorn packing house, the Exchange Bank, the Union Depot, several public buildings and churches.

Olaf Martin Oleson came to Fort Dodge in the 1870's, established himself as a druggist and in the years that followed became one of the founders of the Fort Dodge Light and Power Company, the Fort Dodge Telephone Company, and various banking enterprises. A renowned philanthropist in his community, he was also a leader in Norwegian cultural affairs.

Generally speaking, however, the Norwegian

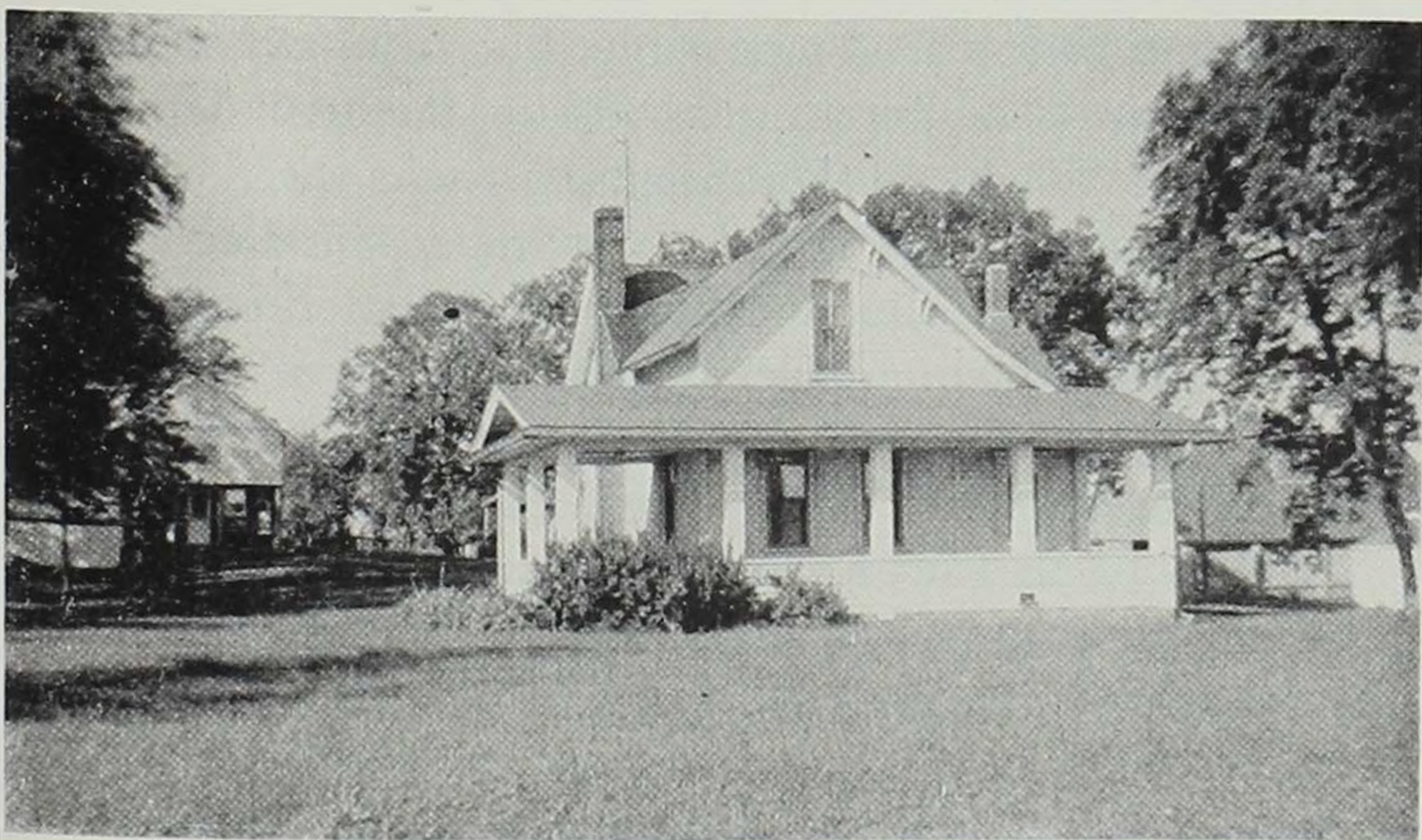


O. M. OLESON
Courtesy A. J. Moe



Concert Shell and Olesen Memorial
Oleson Park, Fort Dodge

Among many generous gifts to his community, Oleson gave land for a park which bears his name and has many rare plants and shrubs because of his avid botanical interests.



Follinglo Farm

For two generations the Tjernagel family — farmers, musicians, writers — contributed to the cultural life of the Story City area. The Riverside Band, popular in the late 1880's, was organized by them. Later the family had its own chamber group, Follinglo Orchestra, which played classical music after evening "chores" and on Sundays.

urban immigrants were unskilled and skilled laborers who worked for construction and machine manufacturing companies or in food processing and meat packing plants. The more able advanced to supervisory positions. Those of the second and third generations who remained in industry often became division heads, plant supervisors or general managers in medium-sized and large companies. A few small industrial concerns have been founded, such as the Osmundson Forge Company at Webster City and the O. A. Olson Manufacturing Company in Ames, but among Iowa's nearly four thousand manufacturing companies only a small percentage are owned by people of Norwegian stock.

Professions

An accurate count of Norwegians in the professions in Iowa is impossible, but from available data one gets an impressionistic picture. Until nearly 1900 the Lutheran ministry was the recognized outlet for young men with an intellectual bent. Luther College in Decorah, founded for the purpose of training clergymen, drew most of the Iowa farm boys who desired an education. During the first six decades of its history (1861-1922) 1,060 Iowans attended the college, 222 of them graduating. Out of that group 115 became clergymen, the majority before 1890.

In the twentieth century other fields, particularly teaching, drew the students' attention. The

strong classical training at Luther College propelled more than a few into historical and linguistic studies. Some of these men became well-known scholars in American institutions. Meanwhile an increasing number of men and women of later generations were graduating from colleges, thereby sending a steady flow into the Iowa public schools as teachers and superintendents, gradually into the colleges as professors.

Few have been associated with Coe, Cornell, Grinnell, Drake and the other colleges, but the three state educational institutions have a fair number of men and women of Norwegian ancestry. The State Teachers College, Cedar Falls, and Iowa State University, Ames, each have some two dozen, while about a dozen of the teaching and research professors at the State University of Iowa, Iowa City, come from this background.

Norwegians entered other professions somewhat more slowly and certainly in fewer numbers. More seem to have gone into medicine than into law, and more into law than into dentistry. By the 1890's sons of Norwegian immigrants were receiving degrees from Rush Medical College, Hahnemann Medical School in Chicago, the State University of Iowa Medical College, and from the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Keokuk. Winnebago County had quite an influx of young Norwegian doctors during the 1890's, and shortly before World War I at least eight doc-

tors of Norwegian background or birth were practicing in the county. At the present time between 1 and 2 per cent of the members of the Iowa State Medical Society can be identified as having Norwegian backgrounds.

Among those who led the way into the legal profession were Barthinius L. Wick of Cedar Rapids and Ole Naglestad of Sioux City, both of whom were born in Norway and came as youngsters to America, began their practices before and after the turn of the century respectively, and carried on actively for almost half a century. Most Norwegian communities eventually came to have a "Norwegian" lawyer of second- or third-generation vintage, but by and large this field, dominated from the beginnings of statehood by Yankees, did not draw Norwegians in sizable numbers. In 1940 scarcely more than a dozen lawyers of Norwegian ancestry were practicing in the ten counties having the largest number of Norwegians. The situation for the dental profession has been fairly similar.

LEOLA NELSON BERGMANN