

The Ager Newsletter

Waldemar Ager Museum
July, August, September 2021

TENTATIVE ACTIVITIES

Board Meetings at 7
p.m.

Third Monday of the
month. Currently:
masked, in person.

Annual Meeting

Thursday, October 28

Light refreshments,
business, entertaining
program.

6:30 p.m.

L. E. Phillips Senior
Center

Open House:

To Be Decided

In October

The Association is planning to conduct the annual meeting on Thursday evening, **October 28, beginning at 6:30 p.m.** We ask that members **wear masks and practice social distancing.** The space available at the L. E. Phillips Senior Center will make it possible for us to have a safe and secure meeting.

Packaged refreshments will be available. There will be a social period, a business meeting, and entertainment that Waldemar Ager would probably approve of. Ivar Lunde and Robert Fossum will read some Norwegian sayings and idioms that often turn out to mean something quite different from the literal translation. Lunde and Fossum will also read a selection of a few modern Norwegian poems, and the audience will be recruited to read the translations (everyone will have a copy of the program).

Be there for the Association and the
FUN.

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President's Ramblings, by Ivar Lunde



Friends,

For years now, the Ager Association has discussed the limited space the upstairs provides for our collection of books. New books arrive from time to time and the question is always where to place them. Some years ago it was possible to buy the property to the north, but the Board did not find that the Association's financial situation allowed for the purchase. However, that would have been an ideal way for us to expand.

Recently we have been offered an opportunity to purchase two other properties close to the Ager House. Again, it is a question of raising funds for the purchase. The properties will allow us an opportunity to expand, move the library, allow for a meeting space other than the present basement, and perhaps create the possibility of a new Scandinavian Shop. The upstairs could provide a few rental apartments. What to do? Of course, my hope is that all the local Scandinavian Associations could use this new building as a home base.

The Ager Association will have its annual meeting with elections and entertainment in October. I am certain the question of acquiring the properties will be discussed as well. Ideally a campaign to raise \$300,000 would secure the properties. An additional campaign would be required to build anew. Your input is extremely important, so please don't remain silent.

Speaking of not being silent: The "Waldemar Ager Association Museum Tour" is now available for you to share with friends and foes. Just go to the Ager Association home page, or better, to YouTube <https://youtu.be/9Xih-2n9Uml> for your 5 minute and 41 second entertainment.

Rachael Trudell provided many of the photographs used; local radio host Al Ross read Doug Pearson's text. I provided some expertise as well.

And finally, a new basement door will be installed this week!

Sincerely,

Ivar

Donations

Ray Bloom

Ivar Lunde

Doug Pearson

A rocking chair from the Ager side of the Bloom family. Donated by Ray Bloom and sister Beth.



READING: AN UPDATE AND SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

LIBRARY COMMITTEE

After a long hiatus caused by the pandemic, activity in the library is once again picking up. Librarian and Past President Greg Kocken recently connected with board member Kathryn Larson to review and organize recent donations, train with the cataloging software, and tidy up the library space. We catalogued and shelved several new additions to the collection.

We are looking forward to opportunities to reconnect the library with our members, friends, and visitors soon. The Library Committee is currently interested in adding English language translations of Nordic/Scandinavian Noir to the collection. This is a genre of crime fiction typically written from the perspective of police and usually set in Scandinavian countries. If you are interested in donating copies to the collection, please contact our librarian, Greg Kocken (kockeng@uwec.edu).

PROGRAM COMMITTEE

October 28: Annual, general meeting

December 12: Advent at the Ager???
Still not sure that it will be safe to have this event. Watch for news online.

April 4, 2022: Co-sponsored event featuring Peter Geye, author of *Northernmost*. Date still tentative.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Report at Annual Meeting.

BOOK DISCUSSION

Recently read and discussed by the Book Discussion group at bi-monthly meetings: Cecilia Ekback's *The Historians* (set in Sweden during WWII; political and social intrigue); Lars Myttig's *The Bell in the Lake* (set in Norway at a time when few stave churches remain and the world of fjord and hillside is changing); Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* (classic tale of a linguistically talented braggart written in verse; *Brand* is Ibsen's other verse drama).

November 17 at 6:30, Ager Museum

Hakan Nesser's *Woman with a Birthmark*.

Swedish detective Van Veeteren

In January, Lori Erickson's *The Soul of the Family Tree* memoir that is also a guide to genealogical study for amateurs)

In March, Peter Geye's *Northernmost* (a novel of Norway and Minnesota). In his earlier novels, Geye has also explored the life of Scandinavian immigrants who settled on the north shore of Lake Superior: *The Lighthouse Road*, *Safe from the Sea*, and *Wintering*.

PUBLICITY COMMITTEE

New "feather" to signal open house events.
New trifold brochure; available at house and Visit Eau Claire, If you have a site where brochures are displayed, make it a point to contact us and get copies (leave a message at 715.834.3985).

The committee needs your ideas about how to let more people know about our activities. If we ever get back to having them.

Feature Story

Where Writers Lived

Summarized by Bob Gough

The spring issue of *Preservation: The Magazine of the National Trust for Historic Preservation* includes an article by Melanie Rock, "On the Books: A Peek Inside the Places Five Famous Writers Called Home." The places Rock discusses differ among themselves and make for interesting comparisons with Ager House.

The Willa Cather Childhood Home in Red Cloud, Nebraska, is modest-sized, like the Ager House, and also exhibits many personal family objects. Cather's novels included *O Pioneers!*, a story of Swedish-American immigrants in 1880s Nebraska paralleling in some ways the accounts of Norwegian-Americans in Ager's work.

The Zora Neal Hurston Home in Fort Pierce, Florida, is even more modest than Cather's; it is a two-bedroom cinder block 1950s tract home. Like the Ager House, it has been moved. (Being moved normally disqualifies a property from listing on the National Register of Historic Places; that an exception was made for the Ager House speaks to its significance.) Hurston lived in this house not as a child, like Cather, or when she was a central figure in the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s but in the 1950s towards the end of her life.

Much grander than these properties is the Carson McCullers House in Nyack, New York. Overlooking the Hudson River, it is a large house built in an eclectic mix of Queen Anne, Second Empire and Colonial Revival Styles. In *Member of the Wedding* and other works McCullers sensitively portrayed isolated misfits wrestling with small-town prejudices and gendered stereotypes. She

seems to have seen the artistic village of Nyack as a place where these characters might have been comfortable, perhaps in the way Ager was also comfortable in his house in the Norwegian-immigrant community of the lower west side in Eau Claire in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Most of the houses that Rock examines have writing-related programs—writers in residence, public readings, conferences on the subject writer's works, classes, public lectures. The board of the Ager Association hopes to increase the number of these types of programs at what we now call the Ager Museum.

These houses, like the Ager House, depend on the support of the members of a nonprofit organization. The continued existence of these properties, and their role in maintaining awareness of the significance of their writer-residents, offer testimony to what such organizations can accomplish.



Meet Dorothy Sorlie

By Doug Pearson

I don't recall when I met Dorothy Sorlie, but I can say that I have seen her regularly at Ager events over the past several years, most recently when she and husband Jim Urness picked up their Syttende Mai dinner last May.

She is a loyal and interested member of the Association. Her smile lights up the room. At an Ager event prior to the long closing of the Ager Museum, she walked in the back door holding a cane. I asked her if she had had knee surgery or an injury. I think she said, "It's the brain." I thought it indelicate to inquire further.

It turns out that Sorlie had endured a fairly long period of decline. In a presentation she makes to tell her story, she notes that she gradually began to lose interest in favorite activities: "reading, cooking, writing, walking, swimming, volunteering."

She was aging. She knew that, but she was looking for a better explanation of, and treatment for, what ailed her. In circumstances like this one, it is not unusual for a person to try nearly any remedy. Sorlie did: "Native American Healing in Alabama, Diagnostic Chiropractic in Michigan, Eastern, Natural, Western medicine.

Finally, Sorlie's physician, Dr. Kevin Wergeland, an internal medicine doctor at Mayo, arranged a CT scan that led to an important discovery. Sorlie was suffering (the right word it seems) iNPH (idiopathic Normal Pressure Hydrocephalus). It's a rare condition sometimes confused with Parkinson's or Alzheimer's.

[Editor's Comment: Sorlie's doctor has the same surname as that of Henrik Arnold Wergeland (1808-1845), referred to in Britannica. Com as "Norway's great national poet." Serendipity? Poetic Justice?]

When Sorlie said to me those many months ago, "It's the brain," she wasn't kidding around. She had been diagnosed with, and finally began receiving care for, the so-called "treatable dementia."

Not long ago, Sorlie's story came to the attention of freelance writer Russell McLendon. He published "A Dementia That Can Be Cured," an article featured in *The Healthy*, a section of the June 2021 *Reader's Digest* (the article appeared originally in *The Healty.com*).

McLendon notes that "An estimated 700,000 people in the United States have NPH, although it's believed that fewer than 20 percent of them are correctly diagnosed."

NPH is a disease of the elderly with three main symptoms: difficulty walking, cognitive problems, and urinary incontinence. Because these conditions are also linked to other health issues, diagnosis can be difficult. Once identified, however, NPH can be treated surgically. Recovery involves dedicated work with therapists and doctors. Sorlie's story tells us that perseverance can pay off.



Norway News

Colonel Heg returned to the front pages of the Eau Claire *Leader-Telegram* on Wednesday, September 22. The headline was “Workers reinstall Wisconsin statues downed in 2020 protest.” Protestors of George Floyd’s death had pulled down “Forward” and “Colonel Heg” in late May 2020. Both statues were damaged and needed restoration.

Waldemar Ager had celebrated the efforts of Heg, who led the 15th Wisconsin Regiment during the Civil War. Ager’s book, *Colonel Heg and His Boys*, offers sketches of key figures, narratives of some battles, and a collection of letters and memoirs written by Heg’s “boys.”

In addition to being a strong leader in the Civil War, Heg was actively opposed to slavery.

The statue of Heg had been erected in 1926 with funding from the Norwegian Society of America. The Wisconsin State Historical Society assisted with fundraising for the restoration and reinstallation of the statues this year.

The Waldemar Ager Association contributed to the cause.

Orcas, according to Pete McBride (“In Their Element,” *Smithsonian*, October 2021), “are the largest dolphins on the planet.” Although Orcas swim in many oceans, swimming with them is not allowed in most places. McBride reports, “Norway . . . has no laws against swimming with dolphins and whales.”

And that is what McBride did—in water that registers 40 degrees Fahrenheit at the surface. In the northernmost fjords of Norway. He explains what the orcas eat (mainly balls—not schools—of herring for example). And like the humpback whales that often come to steal the herring “balls,” the Orcas make remarkable sounds: “I never knew how powerful an orca’s sonar pulse could be until I got into the water and felt one reverberate deep in my chest, like the bass at a rock concert.”



**Ager Association
2021 Board of Directors**

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Items for the Next Newsletter
Send to pearsoda@uwec.edu by
December 10.

Messages
For the Ager Association
Text or call 715.834.3985

MEMBERSHIP

Doug Pearson

A couple of weeks ago, I discovered that I had not donated my membership funding to another nonprofit I belong to. *Have* belonged to. So I rejoined. After all, I had been a loyal member for more than 40 years! And nonprofits are glad to get support whenever it comes.

We inform you of the status of your membership on the top line of the mailing label for the newsletters you receive..

Our current records show that we have 15 LIFE members. We have 25 members with 2021 donations. We have 51 who were members in 2020 but have not rejoined. We have 13 more who were members in 2019 but have not renewed since then. Another 77 have been members some time between 2013 and 2018.

We need and are grateful for member support and hope that you will renew your membership.

Our goal is to have at least 100 members at the end of 2021.

Your membership donation shows that you value the Ager Museum and its mission.

Rejoin online: agerhouse.org

OR send a check by mail:

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\$30 General Membership
\$60 Sustaining Membership
\$120 Supporting Membership
\$1000 Life Membership

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In the translation of excerpts from *Reform* (this interesting book is available at the Ager Museum and online at agerhouse.org), we find an interesting item from 19 November 1918.

The influenza serum has arrived here from the Mayo Institute in Rochester. On Friday a goodly number of people were "vaccinated" over in the City Hall. It is said about the serum that it is completely uninjurious, so if it does not help, it does no harm either. It is understood that it is a preventive for influenza. They say no clearly defined case has developed among those who are "vaccinated."

