

The Ager Newsletter

Waldemar Ager Museum

October, November, December 2020

TENTATIVE Activities

Board Meetings at 7 p.m.
Third Monday of the month.
Virtual until further notice.

Book Club Discussion:
Canceled until January. Likely
to be virtual then.

Open House:
Closed until further notice.



The Waldemar Ager
Association
514 W. Madison Street
P.O. Box 1742
Eau Claire, Wisconsin
54702-1742
715.834.3985
www.agerhouse.org

Update on Closure and COVID-19

Opening a museum to the public this year has become problematic throughout the country. This is no less true at the Waldemar Ager Museum.

Having been closed in the summer, we tried a “soft” reopening in September but had few visitors. On October 6 we sent out a press release noting that the museum would reopen its doors on a regular twice-a-month basis (2nd and 4th Saturdays). The consensus of docents and the Board was that our 3rd Wednesdays were not drawing visitors. We eliminated that the Wednesday openings.

On Saturday, October 10, after advertising that we were reopening, we posted signs on our doors saying that we were closed--because we were unable to staff the event with two docents (recently we had decided to return to the initial open house plan of 2016 to have two docents at every open house).

During that next week, officials in the state and local governments were asking citizens to avoid gathering places—bars, restaurants, museums, etc. We decided to remain closed for the rest of the year and to reconsider our open house plan in January of 2021.

“Fortunately,” our press release of October 6 was not picked up, but, ironically, on October 19, after our close down, the Eau Claire *Leader-Telegram* offered nine column inches about the Ager Museum under the headline, “Waldemar Ager Museum again open.” But we weren’t.

And we haven’t opened since then. And there will be **no Advent at the Ager Festivities at the Museum this year.**

This is not to say that there has been no activity at the house. Lots of things happened this summer and into the fall season. More about all of that in the following pages.

.....
Enjoy a safe holiday season. Keep the spirit strong.

President's Ramblings Ivar Lunde

Editor's Note: Ivar Lunde is President-Elect for 2021. Greg Kocken, president until January 2021, is on leave helping to care for Ansel, Sarah and Greg's newborn, who will need surgery in January. All our best wishes are with the Kockens.



Friends,

Most of my associates and friends have known that in recent years my right knee has given me great discomfort. Surgery was recommended. Then a Chinese gentleman appeared and asked if I could help him with a movie project. Could I write music for the film? Thinking that this would be a year-long project I said: Love to! The knee had to wait as several trips to China were required.

Four years later I said to my new surgeon, knee or bust! The surgery was set for March 2020, and you know what happened. An opening presented itself this October. Now, running around with my walker, I prepare for the other unexpected: The Presidency of the Ager Association and Museum.

In some ways I feel humbled to know that I am to continue the great work of the previous leadership. My predecessor, Greg Kocken, did a fantastic job. He even prepared a manual in a ring-binder to help with the transition. When I did accept the challenge, my life was different than now, recuperating from surgery, but I will try my best to carry on the work necessary to promote the Ager legacy.

Recruitment is paramount, so if you know of anyone interested in the subject of immigration literature, Scandinavian history and/or Scandinavian culture, please invite them to join.

We had hoped to open up the museum this October and the local paper printed a nice article with a picture, but the pandemic prevented us again from opening the museum.

I take this opportunity to offer my seasonal greetings as the pandemic prevents us from sharing our Advent tradition.

A special "good luck" is sent to Greg and Sarah in the hope of a successful operation for their newborn son Ansel in December.

Vi ønsker alle en riktig God Jul og et Godt Nytt År uten Covid-19!

~~~

## Forest Hill Cemetery: Oldest Burial Place in Eau Claire

By Robert Gough

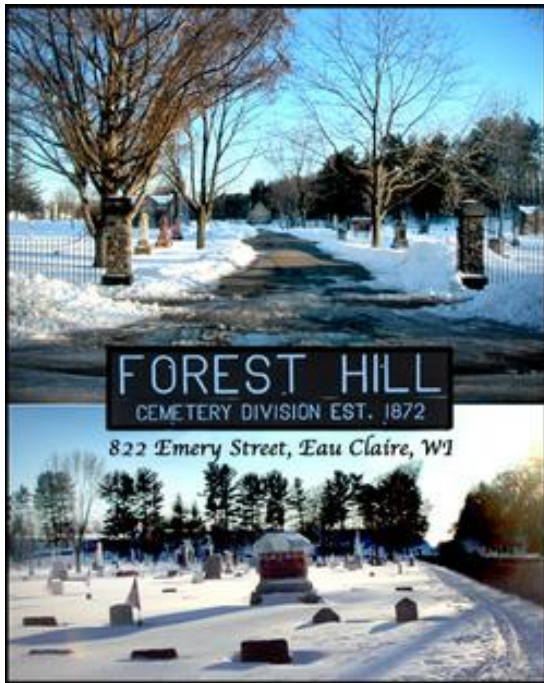


Photo by James Seidelman, Find A Grave

Forest Hill Cemetery is the oldest burial place in Eau Claire. At the top of the stairs from its lower to upper levels is a cluster of burial plots of the leading business and civic leaders of nineteenth century Eau Claire—Owen, Rust, Galloway, Gilbert, Porter, and others. In the midst of these deceased Yankees, the most impressive monument represents the Norwegian strain in the city's population.

The west side of the large monument, facing Dodge Street, is dedicated to Gjermand Hoyme. Born in Vestre Slidre (about 150 miles northwest of Oslo), Hoyme was an 1850 immigrant who studied at Augsburg Seminary in Minneapolis and came to Eau Claire in 1876. He was pastor for the next 26 years of what became the First Lutheran Church, where Waldemar Ager worshipped.

Beginning in 1890. He was national president (commonly referred to as “bishop”) of the United Norwegian Lutheran Church of America. After a series of mergers, the organization has become today's Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. His significance was such that he is included in the *Dictionary of American Biography*.

The Hoyme family lived at the corner of Bellinger and Chestnut Streets, two blocks away from Ager. It was here in 1902, literally on his death bed, that Hoyme married his daughter Regna to another Lutheran clergyman, Johan Arnd Aasgaard. Over 100 clergy attended Hoyme's funeral, and, according to contemporary reports, 2,000 mourners processed from the church, then at 5<sup>th</sup> and Hudson, to Forest Hill, led by a 20-piece band from St. Olaf College.

Aasgaard is commemorated on the east side of the monument, overlooking the lower section of the cemetery. A 1901 graduate of St. Olaf, Aasgaard was pastor at DeForest, Wisconsin, and then president of Concordia College, in Minnesota, for 14 years. From 1925 to 1954 he was president of the Norwegian Lutheran Church. He also headed the Norwegian-American Historical Association (NAHA) and, during World War II, American Relief for Norway. For these services, King Haakon VII awarded Aasgaard the Grand Cross of the Royal Norwegian Order of St. Olaf. His death in 1966 was recognized by an obituary in the *New York Times*.

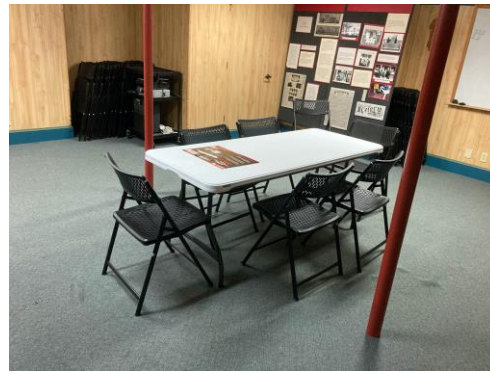
Visit Forest Hill. Climb to the top of the hill and view this monument to nationally known individuals who are buried there.



Old tables and chairs OUT



New tables and chairs IN



Thanks to the family of Karren Bloom for the improvements in basement furnishings.

Serious rot removed



Then it's patched



And the carpenter/painter paints



More rot is peeled away.



Steve Storlie, having painted the top half of the house, finishes the steps!



## How Do These Changes Happen?

Leaders and Doers have been part of the strength of the Association since its founding. This page introduces a new feature for the newsletter: Meet A Member.

### Meet Ella Fossum

Ella Fossum is the daughter of Trygve Ager and granddaughter of Waldemar and Gurolle. She was born in Washington, DC, where Trygve, Ager's third child, was employed in the Norwegian consulate during WW II.

After a few years in Albert Lea, the hometown of Ella's mother, the family moved to Eau Claire, Ella attended schools in Eau Claire and graduated from Memorial High School. Then she earned her college degree at St. Olaf College in Northfield, MN. After college, Ella married and moved with her husband to Eugene, OR, where she earned a degree in library science. Ella worked for three decades as a school librarian in Racine.

In the early 1990s, Ella and her brother Rolf inherited the Ager cottage in Chetek. Ella has since become familiar with some of the things that were important to her grandfather. According to all reports, Ager loved Huldrestua, the cottage near Chetek where he could fish and enjoy the company of his family and friends. My mother remembers him sitting in a rocking chair with his pipe, blowing smoke rings.

Today the pictures of his favorite Norwegian writers are still on the wall along with a large framed picture of a Native American and an itinerant artist's painting of Ager fishing on the Chippewa River.

In 2006, Ella began her affiliation with the Ager Association as a member of the Board, led at that

time by Ken Ziehr. She had recently retired from her library work, and her cousin Borgny Ager had encouraged her to become involved with the Association.

Eventually, Ella became president of the Board and a successful fund raiser. She helped the organization get funding sufficient to reroof the house and tear off and replace the siding on the house in 2014. She notes that preserving an historic house is not something everyone knows how to do, and members of the Board had to learn a lot in order to



assure the integrity of the structure. Over the years, major decisions on the restoration, repair, and decoration of the Ager House were made with the effort and expertise of such members as Ken Ziehr, Helen and Norb Wurtzel, Tim Hirsch, Rod Johnson, Ellie Paulson, Tom Tomkins, and Sue Nelson. Ella will always remember the skill, energy and dedication of all the Association members she worked with through the years.

~ ~ ~

Photo: (l – r) Tim Hirsch, Jane Pederson, the queen-of-strawberries-and-ice-cream-on-Midsommar-Day Ella Fossum, and Mari Carlson.

## Member Support

Members support the Association in many ways. Since the last newsletter we have received the following donations:

**Brian and Vickie O'Meara**, a donation in memory of Victor C. Froseth

**Barb B. Culver**, daughter of Gudrun Ager. Barb donated various books and documents likely to have been in the Ager household. She also presented Waldemar's flute. It was passed on to Barb, who played flute in junior and senior high school. Barb told the story that Waldemar would march around the house playing the flute, the children following him, while Gurolle prepared the noon meal.



## Membership Meeting

The decision to have the meeting on Sunday, October 4, at 3:00 p.m., was a bit of a gamble. People were being careful to avoid large gatherings, but at least the Packers weren't playing. And the temp was in the 50s.

It was a small group seated on the front lawn of the Ager Museum at appropriate social distances.

The treasurer's report was approved.

Next **President Kocken** presented the nominations for officers and directors of the Board:

for president: **Ivar Lunde**

for treasurer: **Kathryn Larson**

for member-at-large: **Robert Gough**

for member-at-large: no nomination

The entire slate of candidates was unanimously approved.

Marty Zens was called on to note the improvements made in the last several months: trellis and deck surfaces repainted, front stair decoration and structure renewed, rotting soffit repaired, whole house painted, windows cleaned.

In spite of the declining temp as it got toward 4, Mari Carlson presented a short program of Norwegian fiddle music.

**Barb** also donated a painting attributed to Gustave Leonhard de Jonghe (Belgian, 1829 – 1893). Barb said the painting was given to Waldemar and that Gurolle had it in the parlor when her bed was moved there late in her life. The painting now hangs on the west wall of the parlor.

## At the Membership Meeting



President Greg Kocken, second from left, recognizes Bob Gough, Mari Carlson, and Marty Zens for their contributions to the work of the Association in 2020.

## Ager Association 2021 Board of Directors

Ivar Lunde, President  
[ivar@skylinestudio.com](mailto:ivar@skylinestudio.com)

Marty Zens, Vice President  
[martyzens@gmail.com](mailto:martyzens@gmail.com)

unfilled, Secretary

Kathryn Larson, Treasurer  
[bradandkathrynlarson@gmail.com](mailto:bradandkathrynlarson@gmail.com)

Mari Carlson, Director  
[Mlcarlson@usfamily.net](mailto:Mlcarlson@usfamily.net)

Bob Gough, Director  
[Robertgough@gmail.com](mailto:Robertgough@gmail.com)

Tony Rongstad, Director  
[Tony.rongstad@gmail.com](mailto:Tony.rongstad@gmail.com)

Greg Kocken, Past President  
[KOCKENG@uwec.edu](mailto:KOCKENG@uwec.edu)

### Also

Andy Hanson, Webmaster  
[hansonaw@uwec.edu](mailto:hansonaw@uwec.edu)

Doug Pearson, Newsletter editor  
[pearsoda@uwec.edu](mailto:pearsoda@uwec.edu)

### Messages for the Ager Association

Text (or call) 715 834 5204

### Items for the Next Newsletter

Send to [pearsoda@uwec.edu](mailto:pearsoda@uwec.edu) by March 1.

## Membership

Please notice the envelope enclosed with this issue of the newsletter. **Renew** your membership any time—by mail or at our website: [agerhouse.org](http://agerhouse.org).

**Consider giving a membership** as a Christmas gift this year. Thanks, in advance, for renewing your commitment to the Ager Association.

## Program Committee

Co-chairs Mari Carlson and Doug Pearson have not convened the committee in months. They had hoped to have one program a month at one of the two monthly open house events. But the last one that was held happened almost a year ago.

Two productions are still in progress: an audio recording of *Sons of the Old Country* and a short film introducing the Ager Museum to the public via Facebook, our website, and, possibly, YouTube.

## Book Discussion

Not wanting to gather in small groups and respecting the fact that the Ager Museum is closed until further notice, the Book Discussion group has not met for several months. We may choose to meet on a Zoom call in January.

In the meantime, we have recently read or are reading the following:

Jonas Jonasson, *The 100-Year-Old Man* (absurd and funny); Haldor Laxness, *Independent People* (some concern about how dark this book is); Helene Tursten, *An Elderly Lady Is Up to No Good* (humorous collection of stories); and Helen Russell, *The Year of Living Danishly* (researched memoir of a young woman trading England for Denmark; compare with Anu Partanen's *The Nordic Theory of Everything*).



The Waldemar Ager Association  
P.O. Box 1742  
Eau Claire, WI 54702-1742

**ADMONITION**

Stay safe, live carefully.  
Wear a mask.  
Maintain social distance.  
Avoid large groups.  
Wash hands often—thoroughly.  
Be WELL!

Beware the Corona virus.

