



# AGER NEWS



## Meetings

The Board meets at the Ager Museum monthly on the third Monday evening at 7 p.m.

## Open House/Tours

April 12 10 - 2  
April 26 10 - 2  
May 10 10 - 2  
May 24 10 - 2  
June 14 10 - 2  
June 28 10 - 2

And by Appointment 715.598.1776



The moment before the crowds arrived in the Scandinavian room at CultureFest 2026 on March 9, 2025.



Xcel Energy to the rescue: a problem with current flow. Temporary transformer.

The Waldemar Ager  
Association  
514 W. Madison Street  
PO Box 1742  
Eau Claire, Wisconsin  
54702-1742

715.598.1776  
[www.agerhouse.org](http://www.agerhouse.org)

## Coming Soon

### Syttende Mai

Celebrated on May 16, starting at 5 p.m.

Holiday Inn South, Eau Claire

May 17 at 11 a.m. A brief ceremony at Waldemar Ager's gravesite. Lakeview Cemetery.

June 20 all day. Yard Sale

June 20 Evening celebration of the summer solstice.

July 19 The Tusenbeiner 3 at 8:30 a.m. Start and Finish at Mayo Clinic Parking Lot. Refreshments directly after the event—at the Ager Museum.

Thanks to contributors for this issue:

William (Bill) Ager, Chris Engen, Martha M. Frey,  
Robert (Bob) Gough.

## 2025 Bicentennial Year of Norwegian Immigration by William Ager



When President Coolidge stepped off the train platform that hot day in St. Paul, Minnesota, he was greeted by a large crowd. The President and his wife, Mrs. Grace Coolidge, along with Secretary of State Frank Kellogg and his wife, Mrs. Clara May Kellogg, were in town for the

celebration of the 100th anniversary of Norwegian immigration, marking the arrival of the first shipload of Norwegian immigrants from Stavanger, Norway, to New York Harbor in 1825.

This multi-day event kicked off on June 6th, 1925, featuring choir performances, speeches, ceremonies, food, and entertainment. The list of speakers read like a who's-who of notable Norwegian-Americans at the time, including Professor L. Oftedahl, author O.E. Rolvaag, and author and editor of *Reform*, Waldemar Ager, among others.

My great-great-grandfather, Waldemar Ager, spoke to the crowd—perhaps the largest audience of his life. He recounted the occasion in his scrapbook:

*“1925--the year of the tremendous Centennial Jubilee for Norwegian emigration to America. When I spoke that day at the mass meeting on the Minnesota State Fair Grounds, 115,000 Norwegian Americans were packed into the stands. Those who saw this mass of people rise spontaneously to their feet when Norwegian was spoken from the rostrum I will never forget it. . . . One detail which impressed everyone was the President's honor guard . . . headed by a small group of Norwegian veterans from the Civil War, all wearing their worn and faded blue uniforms. Another and larger group was made up of Norwegian veterans of the Spanish American War, followed by a third company of Norwegian veterans of World War I.”*

Waldemar, an immigrant himself, wrote an essay for the occasion: *“Hvorfor feirer vi Hundred-aarsfesten i 1925”* (Why We Celebrate the Centennial in 1925). His central thesis was that the Norwegian immigrant community deserved pride for their contributions to this country, placing them on equal footing with the English who established it. Total assimilation was not an option for Ager; instead, he advocated a balance between preserving the best of both worlds, symbolized by the “hyphen.”

*“I ask you to remember,” he said, “that those emigrants whose highest ideal and desire was to be swallowed up in the new society into which they had come are all forgotten. No President comes to honor them and no foreign minister speaks for their country. It is because the Norwegians have desired and have been able to preserve that which was good and noble in their Norwegian cultural heritage that they are honored and remembered in America today.”*

As 2025 marks the bicentennial of the start of Norwegian immigration to the United States, it's an ideal moment to reflect on and celebrate the enduring contributions of immigration in general. Many immigrant communities have profoundly shaped our country, enriching our culture, economy, and society. Many of us are only a few generations removed from our ancestors who came to the United States uncertain about their future, but driven by hope and the determination to build better lives.

If we recognize the courage it took immigrants to sever their familiar life for an unpredictable situation in a new world, we have reason to welcome them. We share responsibility to create communities that uplift everyone. Our efforts help ensure that America continues to thrive as a nation.



## President's Update

Association Members and Friends,



**A**s we leave winter behind and head into spring, I am excited to report several upcoming events and activities for us to socialize, learn, and celebrate Nordic culture. Highlights include our annual Syttende Mai celebration (May 17 - Norway's Constitution Day), a yard sale and Solstice celebration, and our 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Tusenbeiner fun run/walk. Additional details about these events and others are available on our updated website (<https://agerhouse.org/>) and Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/AgerAssociation/>).

We encourage you to regularly visit these online platforms to receive the latest updates and sign up for events as applicable. Special thanks go out to our Program Committee for their event planning, and to Board Member Bill Ager for his work rejuvenating our online presence.

If any of our planned events spark your interest or if you simply want to lend a hand, please let us know. We need volunteers and appreciate any amount of assistance. No experience is necessary – all are welcome!

In closing, please continue to send us your thoughts, suggestions, and ideas for the remainder of the year. We value your input and want to generate new interest and membership to sustain our future.

Warm Regards,  
Chris Engen



## Volunteers

*still*

## Needed

**Tours:** We need docents to give tours.. If you are ready to take one of the shifts this year, we'll arrange training.

Write [pearsoda@uwec.edu](mailto:pearsoda@uwec.edu)

**House Maintenance:** There's always something to look after. We need a few people to share the work of maintaining the house. We have lots of groups and individuals who visit the house. We want the house to be recognized as a well kept Eau Claire attraction. If you can help with outdoor upkeep, send us your offer. If you can help with house cleaning (indoor work), send us your name.

Write [pearsoda@uwec.edu](mailto:pearsoda@uwec.edu)

## Yard Sale 2025

The Ager Museum plans for a Yard Sale and celebration of the Summer Solstice on June 20.

You can help by **donating things of value** that are in good repair: furniture, appliances, collectibles, jewelry, tools, toys, etc.

You may bring donations to the Ager Museum on any open house day between April 12 and June 14.

We'll store donations in the basement. If you can't deliver on an open house day, please leave a voicemail on the Museum phone: 715 598 1776.

We can arrange pick up of donations. Give us a call and leave your number for follow-up.

Thank You.

## A Norwegian Idiom

**"Ugler i mosen."**

Literal Translation: Owls in the moss.

Meaning: To believe something suspicious is going on.



## Immigration Program #1 “Literacy and Immigration”

6:30 p.m., February 13 |

L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library

Dr. Elizabeth Hart, Executive Director of Literacy Chippewa Valley presented a picture of what it takes to run a nonprofit agency in contemporary circumstances. It must depend on donations and grants to meet its goals. Because there can be and often are uncertainties in both of these areas of funding, the organization depends on volunteers for instruction.

The needs of the Eau Claire community also vary over time. But Literacy Chippewa Valley has worked with clients from 33 countries over the past several years. Barriers to success are not just financial. Clients have jobs that demand their time. They often have children who need care. Even though developing their language skills is important in the daily life of most of the clients, time for that work often comes second to more pressing needs.

## CultureFest

Sunday, March 9, noon to 4, Davies Center,  
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

The Ager Association shared a room with the Midwest Institute of Scandinavian Culture and Løven Lodge 5-029, Sons of Norway. Hundreds of people toured the exhibits, sampled many ethnic foods, joined in song and games, and attended the main stage events.

We promoted the museum and invited passersby to try our trivia quiz, such as, Name two of the Scandinavian countries. What countries border Norway? Name a play by Henrik Ibsen.

On the main stage, the Ager players offered a reading based on the opening chapter of Ager's *On the Way to the Melting Pot*.

## A Doll's House

Having planned to read and discuss Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, the book discussion group took the opportunity to see the play at the Pablo Center for the Arts on March 5.

Director Arthur Grothe and members of the cast helped us understand the challenges they experienced. The student who played Nora noted the problem of making believable Nora's decision to leave her husband and children. Other actors commented on the way the play pushed them to evolve and cope with the situations that Ibsen creates. They felt that the modern translation and setting the play in the mid-20th century helped them.



L to R: C Engen, I Lunde, J Kiffmeyer, Hart, S Pearson



Two well dressed guests at the Sons of Norway cookie "cafeteria."

## ~ Membership Renewal Reminder ~

Please renew your annual membership in the Waldemar Ager Association. You can send a check for \$30 or more to Treasurer, Ager Association, PO Box 1742, Eau Claire, WI 54702-1742. See **four membership levels** (newsletter, p. 6) at [agerhouse.org](http://agerhouse.org). You may pay for your membership online. Your mailing label indicates the year of your



## Ager Book Study Group Meets in Madison

By Martha Frey, Group Leader

Waldemar Ager's novel *Sons of the Old Country* recently received some special attention. In February 2025, a group of twelve people gathered at the Norwegian American Genealogical Center (NAGC)/Naeseth Library in Madison to discuss this book, written in 1926.

At the beginning of the book study, most of the participants did not know anything about Ager or his writings. After reading *Sons of the Old Country* and discussing it, almost all participants came away with a positive view of Waldemar Ager and his third novel.

What did the group think about *Sons of the Old Country*? They liked the book because it offers wry vignettes, subtle humor, and a window into the life of a Norwegian-American community in the mid-1800's. The group concluded that Waldemar Ager's *Sons of the Old Country* is well worth reading almost 100 years after publication.



Photo: John Murray Mason

On April 1, some of the book study participants visited the Ager House. The group learned a little Norwegian in Ager's home office, viewed original copies of the *Reform* newspaper, and admired the St. Olaf medals awarded to Ager by King Haakon VII of Norway. The group also enjoyed a dramatic reading from *Sons of the Old Country* by the six members who produced this program in 2024. Then they visited Ager's gravesite, where Bob Gough talked about the Ager family and the public cemeteries of Eau Claire. Tim Hirsch and Doug Pearson helped organize the tour and were hosts for the day.

As noted, the NAGC helped make this activity happen. Over the years, there have been connections between Naeseth Library and the Waldemar Ager Association. "The Naeseth Library is one of the largest collections of Norwegian-American resources for genealogy in North America. We hope those who are trying to solve a mystery about their heritage will pay us a visit," said Dana Kelley, NAGC/NL Executive Director.

Naeseth Library welcomes visitors! It is located at 415 West Main St in Madison. There is free parking behind the building. For more information, call (608) 255-2224 or email [genealogy@nagcnl.org](mailto:genealogy@nagcnl.org). The website address for Naeseth Library is [www.nagcnl.org](http://www.nagcnl.org).



## Syttende Mai, an Annual Celebration of Norway's Constitution Day

**Tom Loftus**, former ambassador to Norway, will be the speaker at the Eau Claire celebration.

**On May 16 | Doors open at 5, Dinner at 6, Program at 7. Silent Auction from 5 - 7.**

**At the Holiday Inn South, 4751 Owen Ayres Court, Eau Claire**

**Tickets (\$30 each)** are available at Festival Foods, **Mall Drive**, Eau Claire, and online at **agerhouse.org**.

**Buy your tickets before May 9!**

Appointed by President Bill Clinton and approved by the Senate in 1993, Tom Loftus served as U.S. ambassador to Norway for four years. A successful politician in Wisconsin (he was speaker of the assembly from 1983 -1991), Loftus had also been a "world traveler," having made trips to China, Japan, Central and South America, and Europe. He was ready for the job of "representing the US government, building and maintaining diplomatic relations, promoting US interests, and protecting American citizens abroad."

The event includes a silent auction, a Scandinavian meal, and a program—a talk by Loftus. Consider buying Loftus's book about his years as ambassador: *Mission to Oslo: Dancing with the Queen, Dealmaking with the Russians, Shaping History*. The book is available at Dotter's in downtown Eau Claire and will also be sold and signed at the Syttende Mai celebration.

The book uses Loftus's diaries and other documents to tell the story of 1,460 days of life led mostly at the ambassador's residence, Villa Otium, where there was a view of Oslo Fjord and Frogner Park. The ambassador's office was the library, and a sauna served also as a bombproof room. As Loftus notes in the book, "the steel door closed when the sauna was on. That did not invite relaxation—what if it got stuck?!"

The book offers maps of Norway and the Arctic Circle, reminding us that Norwegians have a long history of exploration and adventure (look up the perils that Fridtjof Nansen faced). The map of Scandinavia also marks Norway's borders with other countries: the long line that separates Norway and Sweden, the shorter but still significant connection with Finland, and, finally, the almost 200 kilometer (121 miles) border with Russia. U.S. relations with Russia get tested many times during Loftus's tenure in Norway. The book's index includes 21 references to Russia, most of them focusing on conflicts of various kinds.

Although much of the ambassador's life involves diplomatic activity, many cultural events dot his calendar. Preparing receptions, meeting dignitaries, and attending traditional events keep the ambassador very busy. If he's not learning about Norwegian whaling, he is celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fulbright Program at the University of Oslo, or he's joining other notable public figures at the annual celebration of Syttende Mai.

You will learn a lot from reading the book, but you'll get some highlights of an ambassador's Norwegian experience if you **attend the banquet and program on May 16**.



## ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP APPEAL

If you haven't joined the Association, or if you are renewing, consider doing so online at [agerhouse.org](http://agerhouse.org). Or send your check to Treasurer, Ager Association, PO Box 1742, Eau Claire, WI 54702-1742. Levels of support: General (\$30), Sustaining (\$60), Supporting (\$120), Life (\$1000).

**THANK YOU!**

## FROM THE LIBRARY

### Warrior Women by Robert Gough

In the March issue of *National Geographic*, author Heather Pringle describes “The Warrior Women of the Viking Age.” New archaeological excavations and reevaluations of long-held museum collections, she writes, have led scholars—females in particular—to find that some Norsewomen were “powerful queens, regents, seeresses, sorceresses, landowners, leaders of sacred cults, alliance-builders, traders, and travelers.”

Most interestingly, DNA evidence now suggests that the famous skeleton found in 1877 near Birka, in southeastern Sweden, is that of a Viking-age warrior who was a woman, not a man as had been assumed for 140 years. Following up this discovery, scholars re-examined the 12<sup>th</sup>-century Irish-language narrative *The War of the Irish with Foreigners*. This text recorded that among the sixteen Viking commanders who led attacks into Munster in the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century was a Viking woman, “Red Girl” (or “Red Daughter”). Other recent textual and anthropological research has confirmed this emerging picture of Viking women as respected military commanders.

Norwegian descendants of these Viking women immigrated to North Americas in the nineteenth century. A recent overview of their experiences is the subject of a collection of essays, *Norwegian American Women: Migration, Communities, and Identities* (2011), edited by Bety A. Berland and Lori Ann Lahlum (Ager Association members will recall Bergland’s talk about Norwegian-American women at the Ager sesquicentennial celebration in 2019). These essays, by a variety of historians, anthropologists, textile experts, geographers, sociologists, and literary critics, describe women in ways that would not surprise readers of Pringle’s *National Geographic* article.

The general picture they present is that of females with agency about their lives, determination to remain and succeed in America, skills transferred with them from Europe, and abilities to help build homes, hospitals, and social movements. The essays recognize that there was a collective and interdependent aspect to the American “frontier” which has been buried in the popular imagination by the image of a male “frontier” of rugged individualism associated with the scholarship of University of Wisconsin history professor Frederick Jackson Turner. Specifically, they help to reverse the dominant picture of passive and weak women created by Waldemar Ager’s friend Ole Rolvag in his celebrated novel *Giants in the Earth* (1924-5, trans. 1927) in which the leading female character, Beret Holm, is reluctantly dragged by her husband to the Dakota Territory where she is driven insane by the harsh and lonely conditions of the frontier.



### Furnace and AC Replaced

The new furnace and AC heat the basement and main floor. Another furnace and AC provide the heat and cool air for the second floor.





## The Waldemar Ager Museum

Center for Nordic Culture

P.O. Box 1742

Eau Claire, WI 54702-1742

### Physical Address

514 W. Madison Street

Eau Claire, WI 54703

#### Events Still to Come in 2025

Questions? Leave a message at 715 598 1776

##### Traditional

##### Syttende Mai (May 16)

- Syttende Mai (May 17) Ceremony at the Ager Museum at 10:30
- Summer Solstice and Yard Sale (June 20)
- Tusenbeiner (July 19)
- **Multicultural Fair/Festival**
- Scandinavian Food Demonstration (November 9 or 16)
- Art and Crafts Sale (November 22 or 29)
- Advent at the Ager (November 30)

##### Special, Themed Events

##### February 13 Immigration and Literacy

- September 9 Important Immigrant Events: Restaurationen as a weaver has captured it
- October 9 Immigration in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century USA

##### Goals

To raise awareness of Waldemar Ager and his many achievements.

To acknowledge and explore the experience of immigrants.

To provide rich and various cultural programs for the community and region.