

# The Ager Newsletter

Waldemar Ager Museum Dec. 2018-Feb. 2019

## ***Special Event***

***Advent at the Ager  
Sunday December 9,  
2018***

***1-4 p.m.***

***At the Ager Museum  
Music—Delicious  
Food—  
Activities for the Kids.***

***Everyone is Welcome!  
No Admission Charge  
Please bring a Christmas  
Snack to Share.  
Free admission to all.***

**Board meetings**, Ager Museum,  
Monday, Jan. 21, Feb. 18, 9:30 a.m.

**A 150<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration:**  
**Save these dates: Mon. Feb. 11,**  
Evening; **Thurs. Feb. 28,** Eve.  
**Fri. March 22,** Afternoon and Eve.  
**Sat. March 23,** All Day. **See page 4.**

## ***Celebrate with Us in 2019!***

In 2019, we as Ager Association members will have two reasons to celebrate the past and dedicate ourselves to the future.

**First, we will want to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ager's birth.** As members we can help the 150<sup>th</sup> Planning Committee support our primary mission by remembering the legacy of Waldemar Ager. We can attend the various events planned for 2019. We can invite friends and acquaintances to attend with us. And we can participate in the discussions of the things that mattered most to Ager: temperance, the importance of one's mother tongue, citizenship, service, and the experiences of immigrant settlement and daily life. **Note: Elsewhere in the newsletter you will find a listing of the several events scheduled in February and March.**

**Second, we can take pride in the Association's achievements and help support and celebrate its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of existence.** Next September, we will have an event to remember our beginnings with a panel of founders and house restoration workers. In the meantime, we will focus on Ager's achievements and interests. In the months of April, May, and June, the newly formed Ager Association book club will include book discussions of Ager's three translated novels. Also in June, President Kocken will help us learn about digital access to *Reform*.

**Finally, the 150<sup>th</sup> Planning Committee is pleased to announce that we have received grants from Mayo Clinic Health System and the Wisconsin Humanities Council.** These grants go a long way toward covering expenses for our programs, but we are still fund raising. If you would like to **donate** to support the events in 2019, please send your donation to Treasurer, Waldemar Ager Association, PO Box 1742, Eau Claire, WI 54702-1742. Note 150<sup>th</sup> in the memo line. We sincerely thank you for your interest in our organization and your financial support.—*Doug Pearson*

The Waldemar Ager  
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P.O. Box 1742  
Eau Claire, Wisconsin  
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## President's Column

Greg Kocken  
([kockeng@uwec.edu](mailto:kockeng@uwec.edu))

It is an honor to serve as the new President of the Waldemar Ager Association. We have an energetic and dedicated group of volunteers, and I hope we can continue the wonderful programming and other events that connect with our members and the community we serve.

I would like to take this column to introduce myself to everyone, but before I do, I want to thank our immediate Past-President, Robert Fossum. Robert served as the President of the Waldemar Ager Association over the past two years. I am extremely grateful for Robert's leadership over the years, and all his on-going support. Our association is in a great place today thanks to his leadership. I hope that you will all join me in thanking Robert for his service.

I am still a relatively new member of the Waldemar Ager Association, having joined only a few years ago. As the Special Collections Librarian and University Archivist at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, I frequently encounter stories of Waldemar Ager in the research I conduct. Several of his novels are found amongst the rare books preserved in my department at the University.

In 2015 I had the opportunity to supervise an intern student, Taylor Struwe, who worked with Ager Library. During this time, I became quite interested in Ager's story and, along with Taylor, co-authored an article on Waldemar Ager that appeared in the summer 2016 issue of the *Wisconsin Magazine of History*. A copy of that article, "A Simple Soul: The Life and Legacy of Waldemar Ager," is available in the library.

Our association's mission, to "promote, preserve, and maintain the home, heritage, and literary works of Waldemar Ager; to create opportunities for the study of Nordic culture; and to promote the study and appreciation of immigrant cultures," is important to me. I am particularly drawn to the last

component of our mission. It is often said that we live in a nation of immigrants. My great-grandfather came to the United States around the same time as Waldemar Ager, and like Ager he often associated with individuals who shared his ethnicity. I believe it is important that we all understand the roots of our American experience.

I am proud to work with an organization that appreciates Waldemar Ager's contributions to defining identity and the immigrant experience in our region.

The year ahead promises to be exciting with events celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ager's birth and the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Waldemar Ager Association. I hope that you will join me, and other members, in participating and contributing to these wonderful events. Along the way, I look forward to meeting all of you.—*Greg Kocken*



*Greg Kocken and Robert Fossum at Annual Meeting, Sept. 25, 2018. Photo by Dennis Weise.*

## New Members Welcome

The Ager Association would love to have you as one of its members. Simply complete the enclosed form or go online. Our memberships follow the calendar year, January 1 to December 31. As a member, you will receive our newsletter via U.S. Postal Mail. Members are also invited to attend our annual meeting and other events throughout the year.

## Renew your Membership Online!

Our members are the backbone of the Waldemar Ager Association. Everything the association accomplishes, from our unique programming to the on-going preservation of the Ager House, is achieved through the support of our members. Historically, our members submitted membership payments through postal mail. This year, in addition to the option of mailing payments, we are providing an additional option for our members: **online payment**. Our vendor, a specialist in providing non-profit organizations with online credit card processing services, provides us with a secure, private portal to submit online membership payments. To renew or join online, please visit: [agerhouse.org/membership](http://agerhouse.org/membership) and select "Renew your membership online here."

Thank you for your support!

Membership Levels (please select one)

General Membership (\$30.00)

Sustaining Membership (\$60.00)

Supporting Membership (\$120.00)

Lifetime Membership (\$1000)

The following describes the financial and privacy options you may have when using the online payment process.

### Contact Us

If you have any questions, please contact us at [agerassociation@gmail.com](mailto:agerassociation@gmail.com) or call 715-834-5204.

Waldemar Ager Association, 514 West Madison, Street, Eau Claire, WI 54703

To reach us by mail please use our PO box address:

The Waldemar Ager Association, P.O. Box 1742, Eau Claire, WI 54703

### Refund Policy

All membership purchases are non-refundable.

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Please contact us using the contact information above if you have any questions. Included is the postal mail form in case you prefer to pay that way.

# Conversations About Immigrant Identity

Celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> Birthday of Waldemar Ager

Presented by the Ager Association

Program Schedule at a Glance

## MONDAY, FEB 11

7 p.m.

*Ager, Language and Culture*

Speaker: Vue, Khoua, Moua

L.E. PHILLIPS MEMORIAL PUBLIC LIBRARY

## THURSDAY, FEB 28

7 p.m.

*Immigrants in Eau Claire*

Speaker: Brian Blakeley

L.E. PHILLIPS MEMORIAL PUBLIC LIBRARY

## FRIDAY, MAR 22

4 p.m.

*Ager and American Literature*

Tim Hirsch

5:30 p.m.

Reception, Cash Bar

6:30 p.m.

**\*Banquet:** Norwegian Buffet

Featuring Recognition of historian/author/professor

Odd Lovoll

7:30 p.m.

*Women in Ager's Writing*

ecWI

DAVIES CENTER, UW-EAU CLAIRE

## SATURDAY, MAR 23

9-noon

Open House,

Tours

10-10:45 a.m.

*Story Time for Children*

11-11:45 a.m.

*Introduction to Ager's Fiction*

WALDEMAR AGER MUSEUM

## SATURDAY, MAR 23

2:30 p.m.

*Norwegian Migration:*

*Women, Gender and Historical Patterns*

Betty Bergland

MAYO CLINIC HEALTH SYSTEM AUDITORIUM

## SATURDAY, MAR 23

4:30 p.m.

*Ager as Citizen of Eau Claire*

LAKEVIEW CEMETERY

## SATURDAY, MAR 23

6:30 p.m.

*Pre-Concert Talk about Norwegian Composers*

Gretchen Peters

7:30 p.m.

ECCO Concert featuring Norwegian composers

PABLO CENTER AT THE CONFLUENCE

*\*Payment of \$27 for reception and banquet on Friday may be made electronically (agerhouse.org for information) or by check: Treasurer, Ager Association, PO Box 1742, Eau Claire, WI 54702-1742.*

*Attendance at program following the banquet at approximately 7:45 is free. No tickets required.*



*Photo of Waldemar Ager in 1905 by Daniel B. Nelson. Special Collections, UW-Eau Claire McIntyre Library.*

**From Robert Gough:** If you are planning to attend Ager's 150th Birthday Celebration, *Conversations about Immigrant Identity*, you may wish to read Odd Lovell's latest book.

Odd S. Lovoll, *Two Homelands: A Historian Considers His Life and Work*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2017. 248pp. \$24.95 (paper).

Odd Lovoll is a long-time friend of the Ager House and professor emeritus of history at St. Olaf College where he was King Olaf V Chair in Scandinavian Studies. In *Two Homelands* he interweaves his own professional and personal stories with an account of Norwegian-American immigration, of which he is the leading authority in the United States.

Lovoll is truly a man with two homelands. He was born in Bjorlykke in 1934 and lived in Norway until he was twelve. One of the most engaging parts of *Two Homelands* is Lovoll's memories of surviving Nazi-occupied Norway with his mother and siblings while his father, a commercial fisherman, was interned in the United States. When the family reunified they resided in the Norwegian-American neighborhood of Ballard in Seattle. When the Lovolls returned to live in Norway in 1952 Odd "felt that I had come to a foreign land;" in his subsequent scholarship he examined the experience of repatriated Norwegian Americans and their impact on Norway.

Lovoll returned to the United States in 1967 to earn advanced degrees in history and begin teaching at St. Olaf in 1971. But the Lovolls remained "an international family, and travels back and forth across the Atlantic became commonplace." Odd's daughter, Audrey, married a Norwegian and settled in Norway and Odd regularly taught fall semesters as professor of history at the University of Oslo.

*Two Homelands* is both an engaging autobiography and a brief introduction to recent scholarship on Norwegian-American history. Members can borrow it from the Ager House library.

## Reminder: 2019 is the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Ager Association

This newsletter celebrates the fact that 2019 is not only our year to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> birthday of Waldemar Ager, but it is also the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Ager Association.

Much of what is already scheduled for the first half of 2019 concentrates on the Ager celebration. **But we are planning one major event for September that will be an opportunity to explore the history of the organization.** How it got started. Who were the people who started and completed the restoration of the house? How did the library come into existence? How did the organization develop and promote its mission? And other topics.

The Program Committee will have much more to say about this and the remaining events for 2019 after it gets back to work in January.—*Doug Pearson*



*No Ager House gathering is complete without food and fellowship. The annual meeting did not disappoint. Photo by Dennis Wiese.*

## Book Suggestions

From Mari Carlson

Nan Bentzen Skille, translated by Tiina Nunnally, *Inside the Gate: Sigrid Undset's life at Bjerkebaek*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2018. \$19.95.

### Check this out at the L.E. Phillips Public Library.

Nan Bentzen Skille's biography of Sigrid Undset crafts a dignified picture of the Norwegian Nobel Prize winner on her own property.

Undset first comes to Bjerkebaek, in Lillehammer, her father's ancestral land, in 1919, to escape Oslo and a dissolving marriage. She eventually buys the property and enlarges it to include two homes, out buildings and a luscious garden. Her status as a prestigious writer and critic of Nazi Germany force her to flee to America during WWII. After the war, she comes back eager to help restore Norway and her home.

Chronological and casual in form, the book is easy to read. Information is neatly categorized, mirroring Undset's well managed way of life. At its height, Bjerkebaek was more like a patrician household (although under "Mistress" rule) or a manicured garden than a dwelling in a small town; everything and everyone had its rightful place.

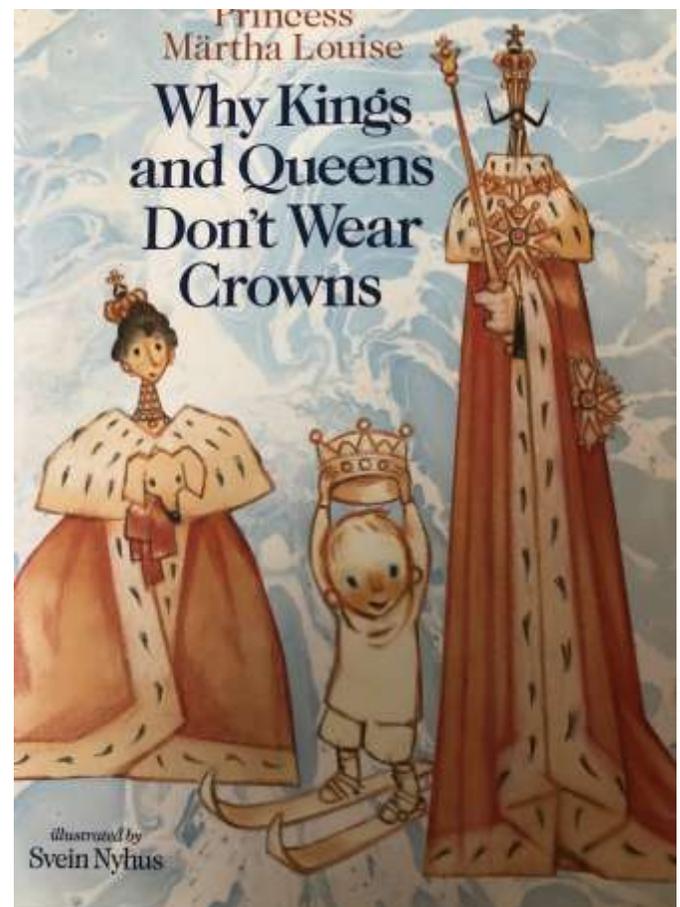
The author draws her information from news articles, letters, photos and Undset's publications, including her historical novels. Her father, an archeologist, passed on to her a love of documenting, as well as dramatizing, the past. One of the most delightful aspects of the read is the use of Undset's accounting books. By learning what is bought and sold, Skille imagines the ins and outs of Undset's daily life.

The book focuses on Undset's devotion to the key players at Bjerkebaek. She would not have been able to work without Mathea Mortenstuen, housekeeper, nanny and friend. She gets a whole chapter to herself, as do her kids and her Catholic community. Undset's devotion comes at a cost,

however; her Catholicism and her out-spoken diatribes against the Nazis put her at risk of losing the Nobel prize. The book sheds light on the her "fight for all you hold dear" attitude for her household and on all those depending on her. A colorful biography that reads like a novel, *Inside the Gate* is a glimpse into an author whose relevance goes beyond the pages she writes.

From Mary Elworthy

Princess Mårtha Louise, *Why Kings and Queens Don't Wear Crowns*,



This charming book by Princess Martha Louise of Norway tells us about her father little Olav, the new prince of Norway, who finds that every time he goes out to learn more about his new country, he damages his crown and is then punished, so he asks his mom and dad to find a solution. Available on Amazon.

**The Ager Association  
2019 Board of Directors**

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**Items for next newsletter must be  
received by Feb. 16, 2019**

**Visit our website *Agerhouse.org* to  
view the newsletter in color and learn  
more about the Ager House.**

**New members**

Don Gabrielsen—San Rafael CA

**Transitions**

Betty Larson

**Donations**

Borgny Ager—In memory of Betty Larson

Frederik Ager—In honor of the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

**Changes on the Board of Directors**

In January we welcome Mari Carlson to the 2019 Board of Directors. Robert Gough moves from Director to Treasurer and Greg Kocken becomes our new President.

Congratulations to all. Thanks to Robert Fossum and Mary Elworthy years of service on the board, and we hope they will stay nearby.

**Docent News from Doug Pearson**

Yes, I am writing again about our need for volunteers for our regular Ager Museum open house days. Think of it, we have been opening our doors three times a month for three years now. **Our regular hours each month are 10 – 2 on 2nd and 4<sup>th</sup> Saturdays, 4 – 7 on 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesdays.**

I wish I could say exactly how many people have visited the house these past three years. It's not a huge number—maybe 6 – 10 each month. Some days no one shows up. Sometimes we get requests to give small or large groups special tours. But most people in the city and region still don't know we exist.

If you haven't yet taken a tour with one of our docents, do so soon. If you already know the stories, then it's time for you to tell them.

Please consider doing your part by being a docent or by promoting our regular open days—or BOTH. If you are willing to give this service a try but are worried that you are not ready, one of the experienced docents would be glad to give you a "script" that will make it easy—and fun—to do. Call me (715 834 5204) or write [pearsoda@uwec.edu](mailto:pearsoda@uwec.edu)

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

## Reminder: You are invited to Advent at the Ager

The annual Advent at the Ager will take place on **Sunday, December 9, from 1 – 4.** **Please join us for this holiday celebration.** If you are willing to bring baked goods other foods for this Christmas event, please let Doug Pearson know that. (715 834 5204) [pearsoda@uwec.edu](mailto:pearsoda@uwec.edu). Families and the public are welcome. Free admission.

## A Christmas Memory

In 1954 Gudrun Ager Bergh described Christmas Eve at the Ager House when she was growing up many years earlier: After the house was cleaned, the tree trimmed, and the food prepared, Ager and some of the children walked over to their maternal grandparents' house with supper, gifts and an envelope of money. Below, making their way from left to right: Roald, Borghild, Valborg, Magne, Solveig, Trygve, Hildur, Gudrun, Eyvind and "Pop".

