

The Ager Newsletter

Waldemar Ager Museum June-August 2018



Coming Events

Board meetings, Ager Museum, Monday, June 18, July 16 & Aug, 20, 9:30 a.m.

Spring Yard Sale, Ager Museum Thurs., June 7, 8-5. Contact Mary Elworthy, (715) 379-7491 for information.

Kubb for Kids, Tues. June 12, 10-11:30, grades 2-12. Free on the Ager lawn, 514 W. Madison St., Eau Claire

Ole Bull Concert, Sat. June 16, 7 p.m. Unitarian Universalist Church, 421 S. Farwell St. Eau Claire. Ole Bull's last American concert.

Midsommar Activities, Ager Museum Sat. June 23, 1-4 p.m. Celebrate St. Hans Day!

Nordic Camp, Ager Museum, Mon.-Thurs. July 30-Aug. 2, 9-12:15 daily. Ages 7-12. Apply by June 25, 2018.

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

Saint Hans Day Midsommar Event at the Ager Museum

Saturday June 23, 1-4 p.m.

In Scandinavia the summer solstice is the occasion for all sorts of celebrations. Customs in each country differ slightly but all include food and drink, dancing, singing familiar songs and burning bonfires.

At the Ager Museum we welcome summer with strawberries and ice cream, flower garlands and lawn games. There may even be fiddle playing and folk dancing along with other events.

Join the fun—This event is free and open to the public at 514 West Madison St. Eau Claire.

Syttende Mai Banquet and Program 2018

You should have been there. If you were there, you know what I mean. The very positive evaluations from those who attended last year's program led the planning committee to choose the Best Western Plus once again for the Syttende Mai celebration. We haven't read this year's evaluations yet, but at the end of the evening we were hearing mostly good things.

Here's how it all went down. Waiting in the lobby, Janice Wnukowski greeted guests, handed out programs, encouraged folks to find a table, and invited them to browse the silent auction. At an adjacent table Burnell Hanson was selling Norwegian flags in multiple dimensions (small flags on sticks, big flags for your flagpole). Yours truly, a token Swede among all the Norwegians in the Ager Association, took Burnell up on the offer of a Swedish flag. Not sure when or where to display it!

For nearly an hour we enjoyed looking at the items in the auction, greeting friends, and being introduced to other guests.

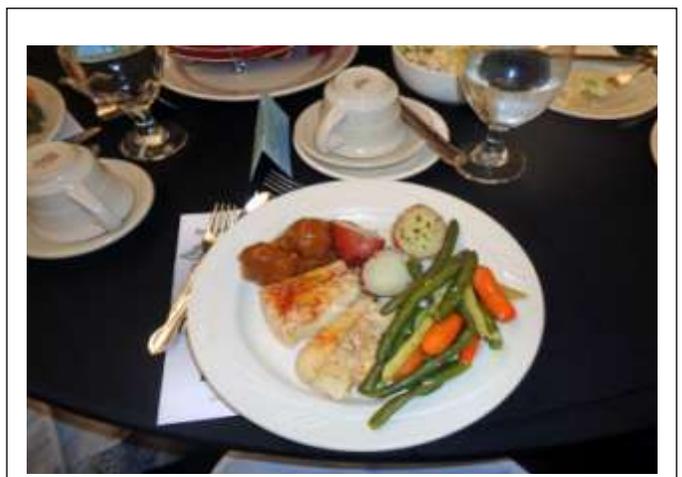
At 5:50, emcee Robin Fossum invited us to take our places, welcomed us to the night's festivities, and prepared us for singing. With Mary Elworthy at the piano and Jean Sivertson at the microphone to lead the singing, we sang the Norwegian and American national anthems.

Then we focused on dinner. Cutlery, dinner ware, and cloth napkins covered just about every inch of the 19 round tables of eight places each. The meal was a series of delights, starting with the fresh lefse from Blair; continuing with the served main course of cod, meatballs, fresh red potatoes, and a vegetable medley; and ending with almond cake with a touch of whipped cream and fresh fruit (the baking magic of Linda Curtis and Mary Elworthy). Coffee too. Serving nearly 150 people with three different courses, clearing dishes, and getting out of the way before the program started was no easy task for the Best Western staff.

By 7:30 or so Robin Fossum took up the microphone once again to introduce our speaker, Grant Aaseng, and his presentation on the Norwegian reality show "Alt for Norge." Aaseng was among the Americans who starred in the first episode of this popular Norwegian TV program. A man with Norwegian roots who had never been to Norway, Aaseng qualified for participation. It helped that he has a good sense of humor, lots of poise, and a can-do attitude. Using clips from the show, Aaseng showed us that the challenges were often daunting and sometimes gustatorily shocking (look up the YouTube video to see what I mean). But he obviously loved the experience, and the Norwegians loved him. And we did too. It was a night of laughs and good fun.

Closing out the evening, Robin Fossum thanked everyone, wished them safe journeys home, and advised us to find out if we had winning bids in the auction.

One final note: We made an effort to keep the cost of the event reasonable (\$20 this year, the same as in 2017). This pays for the room and the meal. To cover other expenses, the planners sought and received a small grant from Sons of Norway and also got financial support from many local businesses. Some of the support helped to put together the silent auction. The proceeds of the auction go directly to the Syttende Mai account and help with planning for the coming year. If you would like to be a sponsor or support this event in the future, please tell President Fossum (robertfossum@gmail.com). *Doug Pearson*



Syttende Mai at the Ager Museum

For the second year, the Ager Association partnered with the nearby Montessori School for a “Children’s March” on Syttende Mai. In keeping with the tradition so important in the cities and towns of Norway, 25 youngsters made their own Norwegian flags, learned the Norwegian words to “Ja, vi elsker . . . , and marched from the school down Whipple Street to W. Madison, and then on to the front yard of the Ager Museum. All the while, waving their flags and singing out, “Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!

A small assembly of Ager Association members and two friends from the Mayo Hospital across the street greeted the youngsters. President Fossum welcomed all and thanked the children for helping the Association celebrate Syttende Mai. Then, with considerable energy and joy, the “choir” of kids gave us their rendition of the Norwegian national anthem. Jan Hansen, along with wife Miriam, arrived just in time for the singing. Born in Norway, Jan was happy to say that he understood the pronunciations and enjoyed the song. Then, we all joined the kids in another run through the anthem.

The Montessori school principal and one of the cooperating teachers were glowing with pride at how well the children presented themselves. All of this happened this year and last because Ager Board member Mary Elworthy, a retired music teacher, spent time telling the children about Norway, Syttende Mai, and the national anthem. Then she coached them to get the right pronunciations as well as the tune. The result was great fun.

But then the children had to go back to their classes, still singing their Hurrahs, and the rest of us adjourned to the house for cake and coffee. Be sure to mark your calendars for this event next year! *Doug Pearson*

Plans to Celebrate Ager’s 150th Birthday—March 23, 1919

A couple of months ago President Fossum appointed a committee to plan various events to celebrate Waldemar Ager’s 150th birthday: March 23, 2019.

Committee members are Sue Avery, Ella Fossum, Robert Fossum, Robert Gough, Tim Hirsch, Greg Kocken, Doug Pearson, and Jane Pederson. If you would like to help with the planning, please contact Doug Pearson (715 834 5204 or pearsoda@uwec.edu).

So far, the committee has met three times, focusing primarily on events for February and March. The goal is to raise public awareness of and interest in Waldemar Ager and Nordic culture generally. We envision our audience in the widest terms and plan to offer programs that will attract people in all walks of life—especially residents of Eau Claire and Northwest Wisconsin.

We are thinking of many kinds of programming during the year: panel discussions, lectures, a banquet with entertainment, book discussion groups, children’s activities on open house days, story time for children, and more. Maybe you have some ideas. Please send them to us.

The next meeting of the committee will be on Tuesday, June 5, at 9:30 a.m. at the Ager Museum. You are welcome to join the discussions. *Doug Pearson*

Planning a Party?

Recently the Ager Museum was once more the venue for a celebratory event. Barb Arnold used the main floor of the house to host a family and friends party for a bridal shower. Good food, lots of gifts, and abundant smiles.

You too can make use of the house for a special event. Contact the house manager, Oscar Brandser, for more information (oscar.c.brandser@xcelenergy.com).

A Book from Rolvaag's Library

By Martin Fossum

If you are like me, you have probably caught yourself ambling down the street, kicking at some piece of trash or other, when a question like this comes to mind: *Did O.E. Rolvaag own any of Knut Hamsun's novels, and if he did, did he read them?*

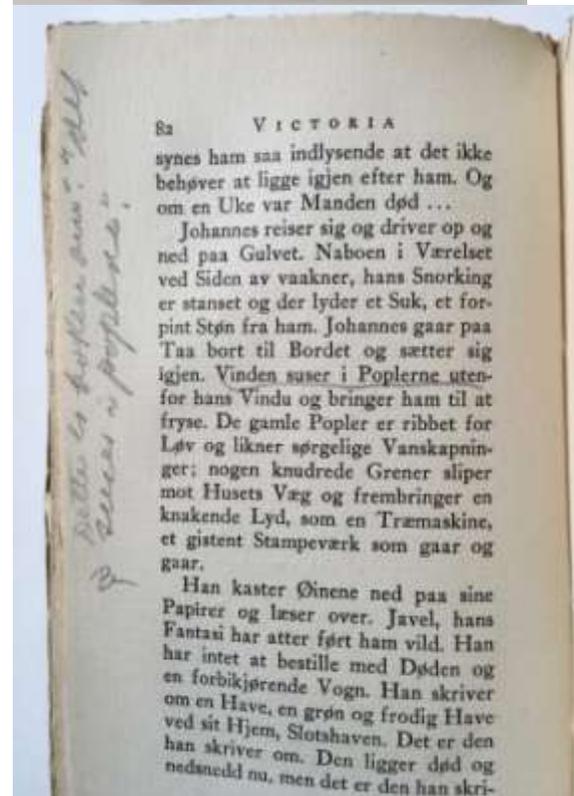
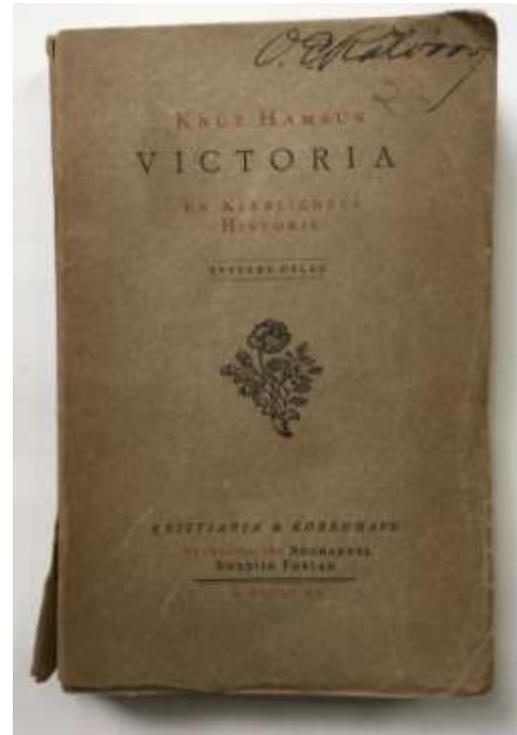
Ole Edvart Rolvaag, best known for his tales of strong-willed Norwegians living in sod houses on the Dakota prairies, was born in 1876 in the village of Donna, a small town in northern Norway. In 1896, at the age of twenty, Rolvaag immigrated to the U.S. where he would eventually become a professor and a well-known novelist of the Norwegian-American experience.

Knut Hamsun paid two visits to the U.S. in the 1880's but returned to Norway after each trip unable to weave himself into a section of the American tapestry. While Rolvaag was putting down stakes in the American Midwest, Hamsun had built himself a considerable reputation as a Norwegian novelist, and by 1918 Hamsun would attain literature's highest honor by winning the Nobel Prize.

So, did O.E. Rolvaag own any of Knut Hamsun's novels, and if he did, did he read them? Well, it is likely that Rolvaag did read Hamsun. In fact, it's hard to believe he didn't. (Of course, there's probably a scholarly work on this very subject.) Rolvaag, a writer himself and head of the Norwegian Department at St. Olaf, would have surely been interested in the talent that earned Hamsun the Nobel, and after a rush by publishers to profit from Hamsun's backlist, Hamsun's fame was high and his novels more accessible than ever.

Which brings us to 1920, two years after Hamsun won the Nobel, and the year a paperback version of *Victoria*, by Hamsun, was reprinted and sold (or perhaps given) to none other than O.E. Rolvaag. See, I was given this very book by a friend who is an antiquarian bookseller. (He thought I'd be interested in it, being he knows I go about kicking at trash and thinking about Scandinavian literature.) On the cover

of this canted and browned paperback (see the picture) stands Rolvaag's name in black ink on the top right corner indicating that this book was the property of O.E. Rolvaag. To silence the skeptic, Rolvaag included his name (in black ink again) on the top right corner of the inside leaf.



So, Rolvaag did own a copy of one of Hamsun's novels: *Victoria*, in this case. (Again, this shouldn't

come as a surprise.) But I own a copy of *Love in the Time of Cholera*, and I've never read it. How would I know if Rolvaag actually read the darned book? It occurred to me, then, to look inside and see if there are any margin notes or something that might lead me to believe that Rolvaag indeed read it. And there lay the proof...not a few pages in there were the evidential jots and underlined passages of a book studied as opposed to a book simply read or skimmed through.

On page 82 is the strongest evidence that Rolvaag closely read this copy of *Victoria*. On this page, in the margin, in Rolvaag's handwriting, are the words: "Dette er bokens (something or other...): 'det suser i poplerne.'" [*This is the book's...: it rustles in the poplars.*] The phrase may not mean much to us, but it meant enough to Rolvaag to have copied it. Interestingly enough, the passage concerns the writing process of Hamsun's main character – *the artistic process* – and Rolvaag was surely taken by it.

Another interesting thing on this page is the letter

"B" which Rolvaag scratched beneath his commentary. (Again, see the picture.) Throughout the book this letter pops up in the margins. In one margin Rolvaag wrote out the word "bruk," which in Norwegian means *use*. And it leads me to wonder if these passages marked with a "B" are passages that Rolvaag hoped would inform his own writing? It's hard to know exactly, but it's grist for future investigation.

So, my question about Rolvaag and Hamsun seems to have been answered. Clearly, Rolvaag took an interest in Hamsun's work, and it's exciting to see the physical evidence of this interest. What is fascinating is that I have held in my hand, not only Hamsun's famous novel, but a novel that Rolvaag himself has touched. There is a story now, and one that transcends this old paperback...a story of contemporary Norwegian writers, one at the peak of fame, the other at the cusp, and the person – me – who is telling you about it.

Martin is Ager's great grandson and lives in St. Paul with his wife Emily and Max, a terrier. May, 2018

Sigrid Undset's *Jenny*

Reviewed by Mari Carlson

Set in Rome, then a return to Norway at the turn of the twentieth century, Sigrid Undset's *Jenny* is one woman's journey to determine her own fate.

Jenny and art school friend Cesca share lodging while they paint in Italy. Out with male friends Ahlin and Heggen, they meet another Norwegian, Helge, who falls first for the vivacious, Cesca, but later discovers a deep affection for Jenny. When Jenny and Helge move back to Norway, she meets his unhappy parents whom she pities, particularly to Helge's father Gert. She's now torn between the joy of her work and her pursuit of love. She returns to Italy.

Undset sees Italy is an alternative universe in which Jenny develops as an artist. Italy's carefree beauty contrasts with the reality of Jenny's Nordic home, her impoverished mother and Helge's dysfunctional family.

Jenny resides in both worlds, an idealist holding out for one whom she can love wholeheartedly, and who will love her for her independent, artistic self. Although much of the novel takes place in Jenny's head, she is beautifully drawn as a product of her time and place. She is on the threshold of modernity and freedom, yet beholden to her own and her society's principles.

Jenny is a Norwegian tragedy. It may be set in glorious Italy but is grounded in Norwegian tradition.

Each character expresses his or her views on Norway's relationship to the past. Gert is stuck in the romantic period. Helge is a historian. Heggen is a critic of women's rights and a staunch socialist. Cesca opts for marriage over work. Jenny wants to create something new, to bring beauty to whatever she sees. She wonders if it is possible to succeed in her work as an artist *and* as a woman. She embodies the creative tension of her era.

Jenny's wonderings are never fully resolved. Undset creates a female character in the midst of becoming, without dictating what she becomes. (Steerforth Press, 2002)

Recognizing Ager Member: A.K. Hellum

Recently the association received an address change from A.K. Hellum. He wished to notify us of his move from Edmonton, Alberta to St. Albert, Alberta. Since Dr. Hellum is our only Canadian member, Robert Fossum decided to follow up with an email explaining we had made the change, but first he checked the internet and learned the following:

Dr. Andreas Kåre Hellum studied forestry at the University of British Columbia and completed a PhD at the University of Michigan. He went on to teach silviculture at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, where he is now a Professor Emeritus in the Department of Forest Sciences. A father of three, he currently lives with his wife in Edmonton and works as a translator of Norwegian, his native language.

Hellum is one of few Westerners to have visited the nation of Bhutan, which is located between India and China. While there, Hellum organized a Bhutanese foundation for forestry research, in addition to painting the local flora. His previous title, *A Painter's Year in the Forests of Bhutan* is the result of his research and original artwork from Bhutan, which portray several species of flora never seen by North Americans.

Hellum has also written a series of handbooks on how to identify selected tree seedlings native to Bhutan, Guyana, Thailand, and Malaysia, and cites examples of what further work is necessary if reliance on indigenous tree species is to be pursued in reforestation.

But it wasn't clear how he learned about the Ager House until he replied to Robert's email:

Hi there Robert Fossum:

Delighted to hear from you. So we have both been academics. My specialty was forestry and my degree at U of Michigan was Forest Ecology. We had a very wonderful time at that university. We spent summers at Pellston where the university had a summer camp. I also graduated in 1965. I left campus in 1964 to work for the Federal Government in research in Calgary, Alberta.

My mother was Anna Louise Midelfart, oldest daughter of Hans Christian Midelfart, surgeon. And his wife Margarita Hande Midelfart. I have been in Eau Claire many times for family gathering. The first time was in 1937, then in 1946, and again in 1952, and then many times since this too. I do not have any Midelfart family now in Eau Claire but I have a relative there on my father's side. Her name is Margo Miller. Then I have many more family in Menomonie, not too far from Eau Claire. Also on my father's side.

I am too old now to travel much except very locally being 85 years old.

I have always been touched by the efforts of descendants of Norwegians to maintain customs. I am a member of the Halling Lag.

Sincerely,
A.Kåre Hellum

We've included Hellum's sketch of a "Limber pine" (2011)



To Docent or not To Docent?

Open House at the Ager Museum

A small group of Ager members has been greeting and giving tours to visitors at the Ager Museum since our first regularly scheduled opening in January of 2016. We invite more members to help with this important activity. Training and red vests are provided.

The house is open every second and fourth Saturday of the month from 10 – 2, and the third Wednesday, from 4 – 7.

If you can help, please contact Doug Pearson (pearsoda@uwec.edu or 715 834 5204).

**The Ager Association
2018 Board of Directors**

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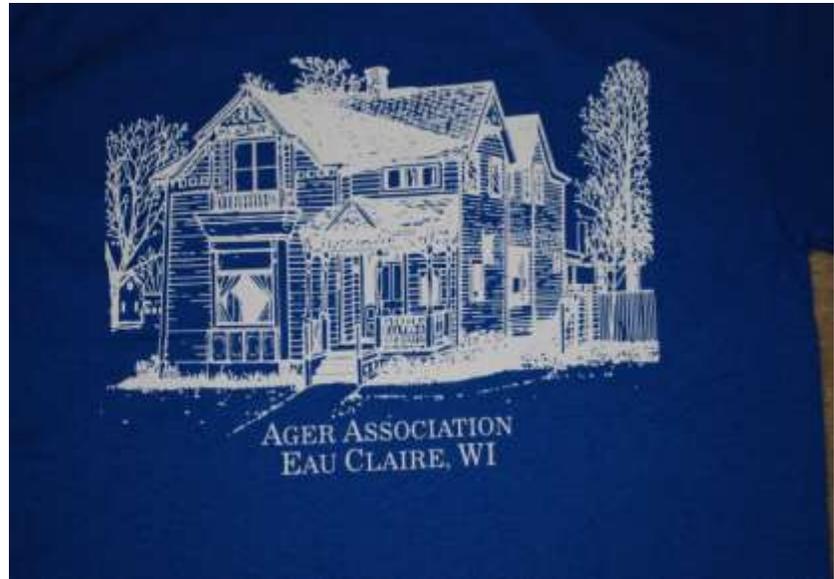
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**Items for next newsletter must be
received by Aug. 17, 2018.**

**Visit our website Agerhouse.org to
view the newsletter in color and
much more.**

**New Members, Contributions, Memorials and Honorariums will be
included in the next newsletter.**

**Introducing the Ager House Logo... Now available in red or blue t-
shirts with the logo on the front. The sizes are S,M,L & XL. The
price is \$10.00.—Florence Weise**



**Fourth Annual Nordic Camp for Kids
(ages 7-12)**

Registration is open for this year's day
camp. Camp runs for four days from
9-12:15 each day, July 30-August 2,
2018. Cost this year: \$35 per camper.
Games, language, geography, carving,
hiking, singing, rosemaling.

Registration forms at:

www.agerhouse.org.

Doug Pearson (pearsoda@uwec.edu or
715.834.5204)

Ager Museum, 514 W. Madison St.

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



The Ager Association is sponsoring a **SPRING YARD SALE** on **Thursday June 7, 2018, 8 am–5 pm. PLEASE** check your homes for suitable items and plan to donate. Scandinavian items are especially desired but gently used or new items of any kind will be accepted for resale.

Please contact **Mary Elworthy**, 715.379.7491, by phone or text to arrange drop off/pick up OR deliver to the Ager Museum, 514 W Madison St., Eau Claire, ONLY during scheduled **Open House** times listed below.

June Open Houses: Saturdays, 3/10 and 3/24, 10-2; Wednesday, 3/21: 4-7
July Open Houses: Saturdays, 4/14 and 4/28, 10-2; Wednesday, 4/18: 4-7
Aug. Open Houses: Saturdays, 5/12 and 5/26, 10-2; Wednesday, 3/21: 4-7



Children from the Montessori School Marching Past Ager Museum on Syttende Mai 2018



Syttende Mai
Banquet 2018
May 17, 2018
Best Western
Plus, Eau
Claire

Left: Mistress
Of
Ceremonies
Robin Fossum

Middle: Guest
Speaker Greg
Aaseng

Below: Two
Beautiful
bunads and c.
150 guests!



Photos by Deb
Jarvar