

The Ager Newsletter

Waldemar Ager Museum

March-May 2019

Coming Events

Board meetings, Ager Museum,
Monday, March 18, April 15, and May
20, 9:30 a.m.

Conversations about Immigrant Identity:

Fri. March 22, Afternoon and Eve.

Sat. March 23, All Day.

Book Discussions—April 22, Ager's
Sons of the Old Country; **May 21**,
Ager's **On the Way to the Melting
Pot**; **June 17**, Ager's **Christ Before
Pilate**. See page 5 for further
information.

Scheduled and proposed classes:
See page 6.

**Ager tour and temperance event for
public history students. May 11.**
hours to be arranged. Admission \$5
for adults, \$2 for children

Syttende Mai Banquet—Details
forthcoming

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

Introduction to the First Conversation

by Timothy J. Hirsch

Welcome to the first "Conversations about Immigrant Identity" commemorating the 150th anniversary of Ager's birth as well as the 25th anniversary of the founding of this Ager Association. Thanks especially, to the Public Library, the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire, Mayo Health Systems, and the Wisconsin Humanities Council, for support of the series.

Through his newspaper, *Reform*, and his fiction, Waldemar Ager powerfully advocated for preservation of the best elements of Norwegian culture in America. For Ager, language was first among them. At every opportunity, he wrote or said, "Language is the soul of a people . . . songs, stories, prayers, jokes, recipes, proverbs . . . survive only if the Mother Tongue survives to carry these things in our hearts and minds."

The "Conversations" we have planned address questions constantly raised by Ager:

1. What does it mean to be an "American?"
2. Is a multicultural America a stronger America?
3. Is it essential to assimilate fully to be a true American?

Ager believed that the future strength and resilience of America depended on sustaining the best cultural contributions of all immigrant groups, not only Norwegians. Regrettably, his vision for a multicultural America conflicted with nativism movements during, before, and after, World War One.

Now, again, the United States confronts hostility toward immigration and cultural diversity.

Waldemar Ager's passion for an inclusive, multicultural America continues to be relevant. Early in our planning for these programs, we read in the *Leader Telegram* about efforts and concerns among Hmong educators about the loss of the Hmong language and the best elements of Hmong culture. The concerns they described almost identical to the one's described by Waldemar Ager. We knew we needed them to be part of this series. Bee Vue will introduce our three presenters. Mr. Vue . . .



President's Column

Greg Kocken
(kockeng@uwec.edu)

One of the most amazing things I have observed during my short time as your association's President is the willingness of our members to contribute to, volunteer in and support our organization. The generosity of our members and friends astonishes me, and it is just one of the reasons why I am proud to support and work with the Waldemar Ager Association.

A group of dedicated volunteers helps us with our programming, house maintenance, library development, yard sales, finances and special events. The time and effort of each of these volunteers is vital for the association to thrive and succeed. This year, a volunteer from among our membership has stepped forward to assist with lawn maintenance. This generous contribution is warmly appreciated. In the months ahead, once our long Wisconsin winter recedes, I will be putting out a call for volunteers to help with a spring yard clean-up.

The support of our members is important. I hope that you will consider how you can contribute to the association. We are always looking for volunteers to serve as docents. Serving as a docent can be a highly rewarding volunteer opportunity. During the occasions I serve as a docent I always feel a deep connection to the house's history. It provides me with an opportunity to share the Ager story and connect with members of our community.

I hope that you will consider how you could serve the Waldemar Ager Association this year. We always appreciate financial contributions that help support our mission, but we also appreciate the time and effort put in by volunteers. If you would like to learn more about how you can volunteer, or other ways you could support the association, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. Finally, I want to encourage all of you to attend some (or all) of the wonderful programming associated with Ager's 150th anniversary in the weeks ahead. A group of volunteers worked very

hard to pull together an impressive slate of speakers and programs. Our collaborations with other groups, such as the Eau Claire Chamber Orchestra, further enrich the experience. Tickets for the banquet on March 22nd are now on sale. You can contact any board member for information on purchasing tickets or go online to learn more about the programs and purchase tickets.—*Greg Kocken*

March: Ager's Birthday Month

If you have browsed through the booklet we sent all members a few weeks ago, you know that there are some very special events planned for Ager's birthday week end. Two of them, the banquet and the concert, require the purchase of a ticket.

Tickets for the banquet are on sale now. The simplest way to get your ticket(s) is to go to agerhouse.org. In the **Upcoming Events**, Ager 150th Birthday Celebration box, click on **Learn more . . .**"

At the **Learn more** page, you will find the full calendar of events, and also a line specifically about **Banquet Tickets**, with a **THIS LINK** to click on to get you to the form that allows you to buy your ticket using a credit card. Even as I write this, there may be some modifications of the procedure to make it easier to navigate.

If that is not convenient for you, please buy your banquet ticket from one of the members of the planning committee. **Cost is \$27.**

Susan Avery 715 458 6301 mema@chibardun.net
Ella Fossum 262 554 601 ella_fossum@wi.rr.com
Robert Fossum 715 924 4111 robertfossum@gmail.com
Bob Gough 715 839 1096 robertgough10@gmail.com
Tim Hirsch 715 832 0410 hirschtj@uwec.edu
Greg Kocken 715 559 9873 kockeng@uwec.edu
Doug Pearson 715 834 5204 pearsoda@uwec.edu
Jane Pederson 715 832 6970 pedersjm@uwec.edu

Also, come to the Open House on the morning of March 23, the lecture that afternoon, the grave site remembrance event, and the Eau Claire Chamber Orchestra concert that evening (tickets available at pablocenter.org: Events & Tickets). Concert includes Norwegian composers. **Cost is \$29. Under 21 is free.**—*Doug Pearson*

Conversation 1:

Ager, Language and Culture

Speakers: Vue, Khoua, Moua

On Monday evening, February 11, in a break from heavy snow and bitter cold, the Ager Association kicked off its celebration of Waldemar Ager's 150th birthday at the L.E. Phillips Memorial Public Library.

Fifty-four people enjoyed the presentations by three sisters, Khoua Vang, Pa Sia Moua and True Vue. All educators in local Eau Claire schools. Like Waldemar Ager, who want to be sure that children of Norwegian immigrants were using their mother tongue, these Hmong immigrants are worried about the loss of the Hmong language and culture they are observing as they teach and interact with the younger generation of Hmong descendants.

To help us understand how hard it is to carry on linguistic and cultural traditions of Hmong life, Khoua Vang offered an overview of the complex Hmong history and various geographical relocations that have taken place over centuries. Vang reminded us that she joins many others in this tradition, having come to Eau Claire from Thailand, where her family was in a refugee camp before coming to Eau Claire, where she and her family have settled and become part of local life.

Pa Sia Moua addressed the cultural changes that have been taking place, especially in the past three Decades. While the family remains the center of cultural and linguistic continuity, some roles are beginning to change. For example, women have taken the opportunity to become well educated. Their success has given them some new respect and responsibility within family units but also beyond the home and the raising of children.

True Vue discussed the complexities of language continuity for Hmong speakers. Some ten dialects exist. It is common for speakers of one dialect not to be able to understand speakers of a different dialect. Added to this is the fact that Hmong is a tonal language. The same word can mean different things depending on the tone. Speakers of English get a rough of idea of this when we think of the way in which a parent can mean very different things depending on the tone used when speaking

a child's name. We all remember this phenomenon.

Conversation 2:

Immigrants in Eau Claire

Speaker: Brian Blakeley

On Thursday, February 28, 30 people attended the second of the events celebrating the 150th birthday of Waldemar Ager. For a change, it wasn't snowing. We gathered at the Eau Claire public library. Exhibits of Ager's work as a journalist and a writer of fiction were on tables at the front of the room. Coffee and cookies were on hand.

Historian Brian Blakeley began his talk by discussing the waves of immigration and the ethnic settlement of the city in the 19th century. He cited census data and other information about the political/social arrangements of the city, noting that the then 6th ward, where Ager lived, included many people connected to the First Norwegian Lutheran Church. The church, with Ager's interest and support, would eventually establish Luther Hospital.

Blakeley went on to note that the established subscription list for *Reform* and other printing business helped Ager continue to make ends meet until his death in 1941. But many things were changing in Eau Claire. The use of the "mother tongue" was diminishing among all ethnic groups. As English supplanted Norwegian, even in the churches, and as WWI came along, the Germans and the Norwegians experienced even more pressure to embrace Americanism. It did not help that Ager expressed some sympathy for the Germans at the start of the war. And, after the war, Ager objected to aggressive efforts to blend the ethnicity out of immigrants. History shows, however, that Ager was pushing against a force he couldn't overcome. English was spoken everywhere, and, in 1939, only two years away from his death, another war tested him. At first against it, Ager accepted it when Russia invaded Finland.

See picture page for more information on these conversations. —Doug Pearson

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 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 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

Program Schedule:

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

Recognition of historian/author/professor

Odd Lovoll

7:30 p.m.

Women in Ager's Writing

ecWIT

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

Other Events Celebrating the Legacy of Waldemar Ager

Ager Association Book Club—Open to All

Book Discussions

APRIL 22

Ager's Sons of the Old Country

Discussion Leader: Ella Fossum

MAY 21

Ager's On the Way to the Melting Pot

Discussion Leader: Tim Hirsch

JUNE 17

Ager's Christ Before Pilate

Discussion Leader: Jane Pederson

ALL THREE DISCUSSIONS AT 6:30 P.M.

AT THE AGER MUSEUM

All three books available at the public library and for sale at the Ager Museum

**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.

Tickets to the ECCO concert on Saturday at the Pablo Center at 7:30 p.m. are \$29 and may be purchased at the door. Anyone under 21 is free.

Also in early June, a workshop on doing research in the Norwegian language newspaper *Reform*.

Scheduled Class: Spring 2019

Advanced Norwegian: \$80 for members of the Ager Association; \$85 nonmembers
Taught by Eldbjorg Tobin, at the Ager Museum, 514 W. Madison Street

Thursdays from 5 – 6:15 p.m.
March 21, 28; April 4, 11, 18, 25; May 2, 9.

Proposed Classes: Spring 2019

We need 6 registrations for each of the classes listed below. If you haven't tried rosemaling, this is a great opportunity. If you want to be able to converse at the dinner table, order from a menu, the lunch class is for you. We may get to conversation at the hotel, asking directions, getting help with your genealogy task. But lunch and language a great way to do two good things at once.

Rosemaling for Beginner and Experienced

Beginner: \$80 for members of the Ager Association; \$85 nonmembers

Taught by Patsy Vork,

Wednesdays from 5 – 8 p.m.
April 3, 10, 17, 24

Lunch and Language: Norwegian to get things done. \$60 for members of Ager Association; \$65, nonmembers.

Offering a class for beginners and those with a little experience. Scandinavian lunch (provided) and conversation (you do the talking—in Norwegian) every Monday in April—noon to 1. You get help/instruction from Mari Carlson.

Five Mondays: April 1, 8, 15, 22, 29. Noon to 1 p.m.

Even if you aren't interested in a class this spring, please help us by encouraging your friends to take one of our classes. They are FUN!

NOTE: **Registration forms** are at agerhouse.org. Click on **Events**. Then click on **Classes**. Send form and check to Ager Association, PO Box 1742, Eau Claire, WI 54702-1742. **OR**, contact Doug Pearson: pearsoda@uwec.edu or 715 834 5204.

FROM THE AGER LIBRARY

World Light

By Halldor Laxness

Translated by Magnus Magnusson, 1969,
Originally pub. 1937 in Icelandic
598 p.

In Halldor Laxness' tragicomedy *World Light*, poet Olafur Karason stars as a hapless artist at odds with the world. Loosely based on the real-life folk poet Magnus Hjaltason Magnusson, Laxness' tale goes beyond fictionalized biography to geo-political satire, romance, and philosophy, all set in desolate Icelandic outposts.

The first of four sections or "books" in *World Light* depicts Olafur, an orphan, in the home of a farm family who hopes for free labor by taking him in, but instead gets a daydreamer prone to illness, due to their chronic mistreatment. In book two, Olafur is sent away to burden some other remote parish. This is the funniest book in the sequence. Petur Prihross, manager of the Regeneration Company, he later re-names the Psychic Research Society, and Orn Ulfar, a Labor activist, vie with seances, free giveaways and protests to lead the village of Svidinsvik.

These two men represent the warring nations of the 1930s, when the book was written. In the third book, Olafur's tender loyalty is divided between these men, as well as his intended, Jarprudur, with whom he has a sickly daughter. In book four, Jarprudur and Olafur marry, much to his chagrin, and move to Bervik. Olafur is fired from teaching in the town school after he gets into bed with a student. The focus turns from drama far from Olafur's insulated scope, to his own drama. He spends time in jail and finally, on the boat ride home after his sentence, meets the girl of his dreams. They both die, receding into the sun.

There is no central arc to the novel. Like Olafur, it meanders, twisting and turning according to coincidence and fate. There is no central arc to the novel. Like Olafur, it meanders, twisting and turning according to coincidence and fate. *World Light* celebrates individual autonomy, regardless of the cost.—*Mari Carlson*

**The Ager Association
2019 Board of Directors**

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KOCKENG@uwec.edu

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**Items for next newsletter must be received
by May 20, 2019**

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

**If you have a story or an idea you would like
to share with us, please contact us. We
would love to hear from you.—Ella Fossum**

Members and Friends: Transitions

Yvonne Hillestad—Longtime member and dear friend

Donations

Debra Jarvar—In memory of Yvonne Hillestad
Norb Wurtzel—In memory of Yvonne Hillestad
Frank Derge
Gordon D. Thorpe
Doug Pearson
Linda McClelland—Sesquicentennial Program

A note about Yvonne Hillestad and Betty Larson

In the past few months we have lost two great friends of the Ager Association, Yvonne Hillestad and Betty Larson. Yvonne helped out at the Ager House for many years while her husband Stan served as Treasurer of the Association. Betty and Ray Larson were also familiar members.

Both Yvonne and Betty graduated from the Luther Hospital School of Nursing in the class of 1953. While they raised their families, Yvonne practiced nursing for many years in the dermatology field, and Betty worked as a volunteer at Luther Hospital and on other health-related issues.

Both women will be remembered for their kindness, their intelligence and their genuine concern for the welfare of others.—EF

Docent News from Doug Pearson: We again request volunteers for our regular Ager Museum open house days. 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 4th Saturdays, 4 – 7 on 3rd Wednesdays.

If you haven't 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 becoming a docent or by promoting our regular open days. 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

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



The Final Word from Greg Kocken

Thank you for your on-going support of the Waldemar Ager Association. If you have any questions, or would like to learn more about how you can support the association, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Sincerely,

Greg Kocken
President, Waldemar Ager Association

Celebrating Waldemar Ager's 150th Birthday



Conversation 1: “On the Way to the Melting Pot—Then and Now: Waldemar Ager and Hmong History and Culture.”

Pictured above: Presenters capture attention of audience .

Left: l. to r. Khoua Vang, Pa Sia Moua and True Vue.

Conversation 2: “Immigrants in Eau Claire.” Presenter: Brian Blakeley
Blakeley’s 45-minute talk was an abridgement of a much longer article he had written in preparation for this presentation. He printed copies of the longer version and made them available at the end of the talk. The full-length document will soon be available at our website: agerhouse.org.—*Doug Pearson*