

# The Ager Newsletter

Waldemar Ager Museum

November, December 2019, January 2020

## Coming Events

**Board Meetings**, Ager Museum,  
Monday, January 20, February 17,  
9:30 a.m.

**Book Club Discussion:**

Anu Partanen (Finnish), *The Nordic  
Theory of Everything*

Ager Museum, Wednesday,  
January 22, 6:30 p.m.

See more about Book Discussion on  
page 6.

**Open House:**

10 – 2, Saturdays, January 11 and  
25; 4 – 7, Wednesday, January 15

It's hoped that once a month, an  
Open House event will have a  
special, additional attraction, such  
as a rosemaking demonstration, a  
poetry reading, or story time for  
kids, etc.

**Program Committee meets in  
January. Watch for more calendar  
events in 2020.**

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www.agerhouse.org**

## Advent at the Ager Sunday,

### December 8, 1 – 4 p.m.

Drive by the Ager Museum any time between  
5 and 9 p.m. to see the lighted candles in the  
windows and the multi-colored lights on the  
Christmas tree in the bay window.

**On the 8<sup>th</sup>**, come for the treats: cheeses,  
crackers, herring, sandbakkels, rosettes.

**BUT WAIT!** There's lefse and rye bread, coffee,  
cider, and rømmegrøt. If you have a special  
holiday treat, bring it. The more variety, the  
better.

House tours, games in the basement, song,  
fiddle music, fellowship. Free of charge.

Best Wishes for the season  
and the new year!

**President's Column:  
Your Membership Matters!  
By Greg Kocken**

On a recent, quiet afternoon I had an opportunity to pause and think about all the amazing things our Association accomplished this past year. Our numerous programs, tours, events, and open houses helped to make for a very memorable 2019. Along the way I met so many important people that contribute to our organization's success. I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you for these contributions. Every hour spent volunteering, and every dollar donated, all adds up to what makes our organization successful. Without these contributions we would not be able to achieve our mission.

With 2020 just around the corner, I appeal to all of you to continue your contributions. We have an opportunity to build upon all our success in 2019 and position our organization to continue providing unique programming and opportunities that build and strengthen our community. Enclosed with this newsletter you will find our annual membership envelope. The envelope includes, above your name(s) on the address label, the most current year of membership on file in our records. Please consider renewing your membership and staying, or becoming, active with the Association.

I always welcome comments from our friends and members (you can connect with me at [kockeng@uwec.edu](mailto:kockeng@uwec.edu)) and look forward to meeting many new friends in 2020. Takk!

***Thanks Shall You Have***

**150<sup>th</sup> Celebration:** Thanks to all the volunteers.

**Docents:** Thanks for receiving visitors and giving tours

**Retiring Members of the Board:** Oscar Brandser, Florence Weise, keeper of neat records.

**Media:** Ella Fossum, for a decade as newsletter editor. Steve Loken, for his long service as web master. Mary Elworthy, for maintaining our Facebook presence.

**Classes:** Thanks to Patsy Vork, Mari Carlson, and Eldbjørg Tobin.

**Caretakers:** Brad and Kathryn Larson, lawn keepers. Oscar Brandser and Marty Zens, housekeepers.

**Program Committee:** A team of about 6 or 7 who arrange and conduct programs—and clean up afterward.

Thanks also for the continuing efforts of the members of the Board (see page 7).

## Then and Now: What It's All About



Waldemar Ager's typewriter sits at the rolltop desk he used in his study, his bookcases against the wall to his right, the picture of "Christ Before Pilate" above the rows of books.

The scene is a reminder of the reason the Ager Association exists. In preserving his house, sharing programs with the public, and encouraging reflection about the significance of immigrant cultures in Eau Claire, the Ager Association celebrates the impact a writer can have on his community.

The program at the Annual Meeting in September featured three historians of the Association. Tim Hirsch, Sue Nelson, and Ken Ziehr told us about the early years in the life of the Ager Association.

Hirsch revealed the work it took to form an association that would provide credibility in the efforts to save the house—and then to move it to a new location. And he also sketched in the details concerning the City Council's provision of a site for the house.



Ziehr provided the details about the architectural modifications that were necessary to obtain status as a historic house while also providing access for visitors. Like Tim, Ken was also on hand for much of the renovation that happened in the late 90s.



Nelson discussed interior and exterior renovation. Restoring the house meant refinishing details of the exterior—the carving, the window features, the porches. Making the house look correct for its era on the inside required attention to carpet, paint, wallpaper, carving and trim.



# Challenges: Access and Renewal

## Access

For a museum to stay alive and vital to its community, it must find new ways to invent itself, new ways to show the public that they haven't seen everything—yet. Visitors have to come through that front door. When they do, they expect something new. First-time guests experience that. Repeat visitors need to see change.

But we literally have an **access problem** at the front door. Although the stairs and handrails to the front entry are currently in serviceable condition, the side structures are melting away. The posts, now two decades old at least, will also soon fail. The Board considers the restoration of the front steps and surrounding decorative and structural members its highest priority item in a list of restorations and upgrades that have been identified in recent years. Safety is the principal issue; maintaining the inviting look of the house is also essential.

More than two decades ago, there were among the founders of the organization people who had the experience, talent, and tools to do the restoration work. Today, that is not the case. The organization will need to find contractors to assess the task and offer bids to complete the project. You can help with the funding for this very important project and for other items on our list. President Kocken has suggested a plan. Here it is.

## Renewal

### **\$25 for 25 Years (or 25 years x \$25?)**

2019 was a year of great significance for the Waldemar Ager Association! Thanks to support from donors, sponsors, and the Wisconsin Humanities Council we celebrated the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Waldemar Ager's birth through a series of programs and unique events. These events, including a banquet in March attended by over 100 friends, helped us to raise our organization's profile and reach new audiences. In 2019, our Association also celebrated 25 years of making an impact within the communities we serve. During our annual meeting in September we heard from a panel of distinguished guests who were there, 25 years ago, when the Ager family home was saved, and the Waldemar Ager Association born.

As we look forward to our next 25 years, I am asking all of you to consider giving an additional gift to support our next quarter century of impact. Accompanying the annual membership envelope with this newsletter is a special request appearing within the membership selections portion of the envelope. I ask that you consider giving an additional \$25 (or other amount) to celebrate our 25<sup>th</sup> year! These additional funds, as highlighted in the bookmark slip inside the envelope, will help us to address some existing needs that will propel our organization into the next quarter century. These funds, for example, will help us address the significant carpentry work needed to repair the house's front porch, and meet the changing needs of our organization by modernizing our meeting space in the lower level with adequate seating, tables, and technology. Please consider supporting your organization with an additional gift this year. If you have any questions or would like to learn about other ways you could support the Waldemar Ager Association, please do not hesitate to reach out and contact me. Thank you. *Greg Kocken* (kockeng@uwec.edu).

## Restorative Work, A Short History

Take a look at the photos below. These pictures from 1997 show the process of renewing the front entry to the house (the back entry is another story, and there are photos for that too).



First, the posts and the deck work. Then the ledger board and prep for the staircase.



Then the structure for the staircase, including the inside trim boards and their design to echo the design in the spindles of the railing surrounding the entry porch.

□

**Book Review**  
**by Library Committee Member**  
**Bob Gough**

Kathleen Stokker. *Folklore Fights the Nazis: Humor in Occupied Norway, 1940-1945*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997. Pp. 273 (paper).

*Can You Tell Me How Hitler Resembles a Dog? Hitler Lifts His Arm and a Dog Lifts His Hind Leg*

War is not funny. But humor can be a weapon. In film, during World War II Americans appreciated the dark satire of Charlie Chaplin in *The Great Dictator* (second-best reviewed film of 1940 behind only *The Philadelphia Story*) and Jack Benny in *To Be Or Not To Be* (second-best reviewed film of 1942 behind only *Casablanca*). In *Folklore Fights the Nazis*, published in hardback in 1995 and recently acquired for the Ager House library, Kathleen Stokker, now Professor Emeritus of Scandinavian Studies at Luther College, unpacks the meaning of humor in a nation that was occupied by its enemy during these years.

According to Stokker, humor worked to “declare principle, educate, encourage solidarity, break down isolation, and raise morale.” For example, Norwegian humor was particularly noted for quick-witted putdowns which served to deflate the initially victorious Nazis and their notions of Aryan racial superiority. Stokker relates the tale of a Bergen street urchin who was caught reading the London *Times*. A German officer angrily demanded to know who has given it to him. The boy responded

with contempt, “No one gave it to me. I subscribe.”

Stokker argues that humor was more than a *means* of resistance in wartime Norway. She believes that actually it was essential in *creating the spirit* to resist. Refuting the idea that all Norwegians immediately organized heroically against the Nazis and their Quisling government in Norway, she believes that defeatism was widespread in 1940. With the help of humor that created popular cohesion through shared jokes that showed German weaknesses, resistance to the occupation only *gradually developed* over time.

As anyone who has taught history and tried to enliven her lectures with historical jokes knows, humor often does not travel well across time, place, and language to audiences for which it was not originally intended. For 21<sup>st</sup>-century Americans, the humor Stokker analyzes is not side-splitting, Ole and Lena-type jokes. Stokker does an excellent job, however, in contextualizing the material she discusses and explaining its significance in wartime Norway. *Folklore Fights the Nazis* is a good read for anyone interested in Norwegian history, World War II, or the social significance of folklore.

**Book Discussion at the Ager Museum**

Discussions following the January 22 event will be at 6:30 on the third Wednesday of every other month:

March 18, May 20, July 15, September 16, November 18.

The book for March is Arnaldur INDRÍÐASON (Icelandic), *Outrage*.

Attend any and all discussions. Bring a friend.

**The Ager Association  
2020 Board of Directors**

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**Items for next newsletter must be received by February 17, 2020. Visit our website [Agerhouse.org](http://Agerhouse.org) to view the digital version of the newsletter and also find out more about the organization.**

**If you have a story or an idea you would like to share, please contact us. We would like to hear from you.**  
—Doug Pearson ([pearsoda@uwec.edu](mailto:pearsoda@uwec.edu))

## Members and Friends

### New Members

Audrey Brunzlik  
Vickie O'Meara

### Contributions

**Borgny Ager**—in memory of Jeanette Fredrickson and in honor of Louise Koxlien.

**Helen and Norb Wurtzel**

## Classes

### Rosemaling

In the fall, Patsy Vork taught a class of new and continuing rosemalers. Look for another opportunity this spring or summer.

## Language

### Advanced Norwegian

Eldbjørg Tobin continued to offer a course in Advanced Norwegian. A small group of students are working their way through Stokker's textbook for the study of Norwegian. (Stokker is also the author of other books about Norwegian life and culture. Bob Gough has reviewed one of her books elsewhere in this issue.)

### Beginning and Functional Norwegian

This year look for new opportunities to learn functional Norwegian for genealogical study, for games and song, for travel, or other topics. If you have an idea for a Norwegian-language course, contact Mari Carlson ([mlcarlson1@usfamily.net](mailto:mlcarlson1@usfamily.net)).

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**Docents Needed:** A small group of docents initiated the regular open house schedule at the Ager Museum in January 2016. The number of docents increased over the course of the year and remained steady for nearly two years, but lately, the number has dwindled.

**We now need more docents.** We hope you will become a docent volunteer.

Here is the regular schedule for open house at the Ager Museum: **2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Saturdays of the month from 10-2 & 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesdays of the month from 4 -7.** Contact Doug Pearson (715 834 5204) or write [pearsoda@uwec.edu](mailto:pearsoda@uwec.edu).

The Waldemar Ager Association  
P.O. Box 1742  
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# Advent at the Ager

514 W. Madison Street, Eau Claire, Wisconsin

**Sunday, December 8, from 1 to 4**  
**Food, Fun, and Fiddle Music**

