

## PREFACE

### LITTLE NORWAY AND THE NORWAY PAVILION

Little Norway has always been a part of my consciousness, it seems. My parents took me there when I was a boy and the impression I came away with was that it was an enchanted place. I can recall so many details from that first visit, the secluded valley, the cozy cottages, the bed in which Ole Bull slept, the meandering stream, the cold water of the spring, and, of course, the Norway Building with all its treasure boxes and carved faces of the Norwegian kings. Dad took slides of the visit, which no doubt reinforced my memory, and I was permitted to buy a souvenir in the gift shop which thereafter stood on our knicknack shelf at home.

Now after some forty years and many visits later, Little Norway still captures my imagination and I marvel at the beauty of Nissedahle (Little Norway) and the lovely Norway pavilion in its perfect setting. I wonder at the elegance of the concept which created this magical kingdom.

As an adult I have learned to appreciate more fully the buildings with their furnishings as part of the material culture of the Norwegian-Americans and am impressed, naturally, at its being the largest Norwegian-American collection in private hands. The lovely objects clearly were gathered with appreciation for their history and intrinsic beauty. What fun Isak Dahle must have had in recognizing the worth of these things and buying them for his dream home. What pleasure he must have felt when he acquired the Norway Pavilion as the jewel of Nissedahle.

Several years ago the Chicago History Committee of the Norwegian-American Historical Association was formed to collect material about the Norwegian Colony in Chicago. Through my work as chairman I quickly learned that the members of the Chicago Colony took pride in Little Norway and especially the Norway Building from the 1893 Columbian Exposition. They were immensely satisfied that the "Norwegian stave church" from the Chicago Fair was being preserved at Mt. Horeb. Soon I found that Little Norway's founder, Isak Dahle, had been a member of the Chicago Norske Klub, and he had used his contacts in Chicago to enrich the collections at Little Norway. For example, the work of some of Chicago's best-known Norwegian artists, Christian Abrahamsen, Emil Bjørn, and Ben Blessum, found their way into his collection. Abrahamsen was commissioned to do a portrait of Isak's mother Anne; a set of charming watercolors of elves (*nisse*) by Bjørn came to hang in the Norway

Building and a painting of a Norwegian peasant by Blessum was hung in the entrance building. Another well-known Chicagoan, Ida Sannes, an artist with needle and thread who was best known in the Colony for creating the first costumes of the dance group Leikarringen "Heimhug," designed curtains for many of the buildings.

On trips to Little Norway in these later years, I have had the good fortune to become acquainted with Thea and Asher Hobson, Marcie Winner and now Scott Winner, curators of Little Norway for more than half of its existence, and I am more impressed at the dedication they have had to Isak Dahle's vision of sharing his beautiful things with the public. In quite a remarkable way they have given of their time and resources to ensure the objects in the collection were well cared for.

The most recent evidence of the loving care they have given is the 1992 restoration of the Norwegian pavilion's exterior. Its warm, light brown finish must be very close to how it looked when it was a new building in Chicago's Jackson Park in 1893. Its charm is undeniable and one can well understand why visitors to the Fair frequented it often and used it as a meeting place. Although we are told it was popular with Americans of all ethnic backgrounds, one can easily imagine proud Norwegian parents bringing their American born children there to see a building something like the stave churches they remembered from their youths in Norway.

Over four decades ago my visit to Little Norway one summer Sunday afternoon awakened my imagination and deepened my appreciation for my own background. I know my own experience must be multiplied by thousands and thousands who have visited since the opening in the 1930s. Today Little Norway continues to have a teaching mission, not only for Norwegian-Americans but for all Americans.

This carefully researched and well-written volume on the history of the Norway Pavilion and Little Norway should do much to continue Isak Dahle's dream.

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April 27, 1992