

VALDRES
QUEEN OF THE VALLEYS

FOREWORD

In 1967 Valdres Samband decided to issue the primer, "Valdres, Queen of the Valleys." This was found desirable because the terrific growth in Samband membership of the previous five years had been among second and third generation Valdres Americans who had no first hand knowledge of Valdres. It was also made financially possible because of this growth.

A second edition, long since out-of-print, was published several years later and now, in the closing months of 1980, a third edition has been authorized.

Officers at this time are: Mrs. Ole (Hilda) Kringstad president, Selmer (Sam) Sorenson vice president, James R. Hendrickson secretary, Olaf R. Strand treasurer and directors Mrs. Roswald (Gertrude) Nearman, Mrs. Betty Thistlethwaite, Eindrude (Andy) Karlsgodt, Odd Muldbakken, Leland Pederson and Allan Skalet. Members of the Past Presidents Advisory Council are Ole J. Braaten, Mrs. Anna Berg, Arne Rosenlund, Joseph Haugen, G. B. Odegaard, Miss Clara Thorpe and Carl T. Narvestad. The latter, together with his wife Amy A. Narvestad edit the Samband's magazine "Budstikken."

Through the decades Valdres Samband published the magazine "Valdres Helsing" 1903-1910, "Samband" 1910-1917, the "Valdres Book" 1920, "Valdreser i Amerika" 1922. "Samband" was revived in about 1925 and published until 1935, and a 60th anniversary booklet published in 1959. In 1962 the "Valdres Samband Newsletter" appeared and continued until 1970 when the magazine "Budstikken" was launched and is now completing its 11th year. The biggest individual publishing effort of all was the 370 page book "Valdres Samband 1899-1974." A genealogical supplement to this book has just been authorized.

The last two decades Samband headquarters, including editorial offices and genealogical archives, have been at Granite Falls, Minnesota. At the present time Valdres Samband members are spread throughout about 40 states including Alaska and Hawaii. Others live in several provinces of Canada, in Sweden, England, Australia and Norway.

"Valdres, Queen of the Valleys" was written by the undersigned, serving on a committee which included Mrs. Anna Berg and Miss Clara Thorpe. Mrs. Lynn Balow read the proofs and Arnold and Mary Berg prepared the centerfold map and cover design.

Carl T. Narvestad
Granite Falls, Minnesota

1980

Valdres, "Queen of the Valleys"

Valdres, the "Queen of the Valleys," is an oblong basin in the heart of southern Norway. It starts on the southern slopes of the mighty Jotunheim Mountains, Norway's most imposing range, a region of ice-clad peaks, rocky massifs and dizzy chasms, famed in song and story as the home of giants, and slopes southeastward some eighty miles. It has a width of slightly more than thirty miles. It is bounded on the north and east by Gudbrandsdal and Land, on the southeast by Aadal, on the southwest by Hallingdal, and on the west by Sogn.

For more than two thousand years men have lived on the Scandinavian peninsula, but love of adventure turned the Vikings to the sea and long before 800 A.D. the colorful Viking ships with their fierce dragon's heads were seen on the seas in every direction. At first they explored and plundered wherever they went, but a marked increase in population made Norway crowded and the Vikings turned from piracy to colonization. In 911 the Norseman, Rolf, the son of Earl Ragnvold, conquered part of France and established the duchy of Normandy and married the daughter of King Charles of France. The men of Normandy became as skilled in battle as their Viking ancestors had been and took a lead in the Crusades. They conquered southern Italy and England. William the Conqueror was a descendant of Rolf. Norsemen overran and subdued much of Ireland and Scotland, invaded western Russia, and united the Slavs under Rurik.

Needing more room for their people they established colonies in Finland, Russia, Turkey, Greece, Palestine, Italy, Spain, France, England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, the Shetlands, Orkneys, Hebrides, Feroes, Iceland, Greenland, and Vinland. No wonder George Washington could claim that his ancestry traced back to Norsemen who settled in Yorkshire in 1030 or that William Jennings Bryan traced his ancestry to Norsemen who settled in Ireland.

Valdres was settled at an early date. In fact, no other large eastern Norwegian valley was settled as early as Valdres, probably because of all the trails between east and west Norway the oldest and best lay over Filefjell.

There were people in Vang, Valdres, during the last 300-400 years of the Stone Age, about 1800-1900 to 1500 B.C., but they were probably nomadic in character, trekking between the coast and the inland valleys. About 70 Stone Age relics have been found in Valdres and almost half of them in Vang. Stone arrowheads, axeheads, a Stone Age grindstone, and a flint knife are among the artifacts. Apparently these first people came from the west.

The Bronze Age in the north ran from about 1500 B.C. to 500 B.C. Valdres has a number of relics from this age showing that there were permanent settlers there at that time and that they did primitive farming and kept livestock. Bronze Age items are scarce as the materials were brought in from other countries but they do include axes, a scythe, and spear points. There are also a number of mounds of stone which are believed to be a part of burial customs from the Bronze Age.



View across Slidrefjorden (Slidre Lake) toward the Jotunheimen Mountains in the background. West Slidre

The oldest grave find from Roman times in Vang is of the fourth century. These graves often contained swords, shields, and spears. Some swords had been made in the Germanic parts of the Roman Empire and have Latin inscriptions.

The early Valdres people had discovered minor deposits of iron ore and developed the skills necessary to work it into useable articles. In fact, Valdres iron and steel were considered to be of high quality.

In Valdres, too, are the oldest runestones in Norway. The Einangstein dates from about 300-400 A.D. and the runestone at Vang church from about 1000 A.D.

The 2100 square miles of Valdres are divided into six herreder (townships): Vang, West Slidre, East Slidre, North Aurdal, South Aurdal, and Etnedal. The dominant physical feature of Valdres is the Begna River which has its source in Lake Utrovand, 3280 feet above sea level, and empties into Spirilen Lake, 535 feet above sea level. Portions of the river expand into long narrow lakes: Vangs-

mjøsen, 13 miles long; Slidre Fjord, 10 miles long; and Strande Fjord, 10 miles long. The total descent of the river takes place in less than 60 miles and includes mighty falls such as Lo-Foss, Fasl-Foss, and Storebro Foss.

Parts of the river are bordered by fertile bottomlands with beautiful settlements. Some portions, especially in the lower part, narrow into a gorge or canyon with steep banks rising to heights of a thousand or even two thousand feet. For the most part these are pine or fir forests.

The upper part, including Vangsmjøsen, is above the line of real timber. This part of the valley forms the most accessible gateway to Jotunheimen and has always been one of the principal passes for travel over the interior mountains between the east and west country. Here in the north are Europe's highest big lakes, Tyin and Bygdin, approximately 3600 feet above sea level.



View of Bygdisheim and Lake Bygdin in the Jotunheimen Mountains 3480 feet above sea level, one of Europe's highest big lakes. Tourist boats make regular trips and excellent hotels are available.

The Valdres valley is a part of Norway which possesses its own peculiar charm, a charm no visitor can resist. A great many roads lead to and through Valdres. From Oslo you can make your way via Hadeland, along the Randsfjord and the enchanting Land country, where the road from the Swedish border via Gjøvik joins it. Continuing through Dokka the road finally branches off to Torpa and Fagernes. Road and railway continue, climbing sharply to Tonsaasen. As we approach central Valdres over Tonsaasen, magnificent scenery

opens up—such as the deep and narrow Etnedal, which cuts its way like a furrow toward the Jotunheimen. The characteristic mountain silhouettes of Mellenes can be seen to the north, while to the east there is an endless vista of forested ridges. It is also possible to proceed along the road through the Etnedal and Steinset district to Fagernes. The other major road from the east runs via Hønefoss and Aadal. In this corner of Valdres, Hedalen lies concealed in the heart of vast tracts of forest full of the spirit of history and fairytale. Here, among other medieval relics, the old stave church was found, abandoned after the Black Death centuries before, overgrown with foliage. Here, too, Bruin the Bear still has his haunts in the Vassfaret district, the virginal tract of country between Hallingdal and Valdres.

The main road follows the Begna River through South Aurdal, a narrow winding valley full of charm. For mile upon mile, river and forest have it all their own way, backed by cliffs and hills which tactfully withdraw to reveal wide open country, dotted with prosperous farms. Driving through impressive Bagnskleiva Gorge, with its splendid views and the river below thundering through its chasm, we reach North Aurdal. Far below, at our feet, we can see the Aurdalfjord, before driving through Leira and arriving at the very center of Valdres, Fagernes, on Lake Strandefjord, where so many roads meet—the highway from Gol across the mountain moors of Sanderstølen; the new road across the Gausdal mountains from Lillehammer, passing through scenic stretches of mountains and lakes; and the mountain road across Valdresflya, undoubtedly one of the major tourist attractions in the country; and finally the road from the west across Filefjell and Tyin. Fagernes is an international tourist center with the Valdres Folk Museum as its chief attraction. This is situated in picturesque surroundings at Storøya, and presents a cross-section of local culture covering over a thousand years.

From Fagernes two parallel valleys strike off toward the Jotunheimen Range, to the right East Slidre, an open and inviting valley with trim farmsteads and inviting lakes spread out over the landscape. Through narrow Baatskaret Pass at the foot of precipitous Bitihorn the road runs to the mountain lake of Bygdin, where there is a daily motorboat trip well worth taking. The main valley—West Slidre—runs off to the left of Fagernes, and includes some of the most characteristic scenery in Valdres: open, friendly, farming country, sloping down to large majestic lakes and rolling hills in the foreground against a backdrop of snow-covered peaks. Relics of the past include the 700-year-old stone church at Ulnes, the runestone at Einang, the Slidre Church from the twelfth century, the lavishly carved stave churches at Hurum and Lomen, and Bronze Age barrows on numerous hilltops. The view from Einhussvingen, two and a half miles above Slidre Church, is renowned.

No Norwegian valley undergoes such a complete change as Valdres between Slidre and Vang. The change is highly dramatic; passing through the giant gates of Kvamskleiva one has the impression of entering fairyland itself. Vangsbygda has all the majestic



Fagernes, the principal town of Valdres, located in North Aurdal, is an international tourist center. The Valdres Folk Museum, bathing and fishing on Lake Strandefjord, wintertime skiing, colorful summer or winter scenery all are big attractions in the heart of Valdres.

and untamed beauty of the western fjords beneath its towering mountain tops. The Filefjell Road continues across the old mountain crossing past the ruins of the Church of St. Thomas, through narrow gorges and ravines to Laerdal. Below Høgeset with its silver-birch copses the renowned Tyin Road branches off and twists itself in magnificent curves down the face of Heirsnosi to Aardal. This road alone is a tourist attraction of note.

For the ski enthusiast Valdres is paradise. For mile on mile of smooth downhill running well within the reach of even the most sedate skier, Valdres excels. The mountains surrounding Tyin, Tyinholmen, Eidsbugaren, and Bygdin where the season starts at the end of February and lasts until the end of April offer this kind of skiing. For perfect spring skiing at altitudes of over 3000 feet the Valdres-Jotunheimen area is perfection. Resorts set in wooded valleys with extensive views of distant villages and farmsteads mantled in their winter coats, peaceful forest trails and easy access to the mountain slopes . . . this, too, is Valdres. Spots like Landaaen, Fossheim, Ryfoss, and Grindaheim are outstanding examples of this type of winter holiday.

Wide open moors and undulating country ideal for ski touring . . . this, again, is Valdres, offering resorts such as Danebu, Sander-



Vang in Valdres. Vang's church with Grindafjell (the Grinda Mountain) in the background and Vangsmjøsa in the foreground.

stølen, Hovda, Faar, and Vaset. Valdres also offers the "golden mean," country situated between the valleys and the Jotunheimen peaks with a fresh excursion to the mountains to make every day different. Well known winter sports resorts such as Nystove, Fjellstølen (Reinli), Beitostølen, Nøsen, and Skammestein are ideally situated in this varied and rewarding mountain country. With all this to offer no wonder both the fabled Jotuns or giants and the "nisser" chose Valdres for their home.

Churches and Christianity in Valdres

Like all ancient peoples the Valdres had their heathen gods and it wasn't until toward the fall of 1023 that Christianity was introduced to them.

During the five years King Olaf Trygvason ruled Norway, Christianity made much progress. Perhaps half of the population accepted his God, mostly along the coastal areas. The people did not feel the need of a Christian God but the kings of old commanded instead of persuaded so they accepted God rather than risk punishment at the hands of the king.

When Olaf Trygvason fell in the sea battle of Svolder in 1000 the Earls Erik and Svend took over rule of the country. They were not as active in promoting Christianity to all the people as was Olaf so many drifted back to the worship of the old heathen gods and Christianity did not penetrate farther into the country.

When Olaf Haraldson became king in 1015 he resumed the task of converting the heathen—by force if necessary. Toward the fall of 1023 King Olaf (St. Olaf or Olaf den Hellige) and a large group of armed men set sail over the Sognefjord. At Laerdal they went ashore and hastened to Valdres.

Olaf's zeal for Christianizing was well known and his visit no surprise. His errand was well known as was the punishment he meted out to those who resisted accepting a new God.

The king did not dare risk deep penetration into Valdres for he knew the fighting qualities of the Valdres. He hoped to be able to meet small groups where his force would be the stronger and that the Valdres, thus divided, would be converted to Christianity.

He stopped at Øye on the shores of the upper end of Vangsmjøsa and immediately commandeered all boats. He then sent out word that court (ting) would be held at Vennisland, a small isolated area on the north shore of Vangsmjøsa. The usual means of communication in ancient Norway was by use of "budstikken," a piece of wood with a message or command carved thereon. This was passed from man to man so each would get the message and should a man fail to pass it on, the gods would surely punish him. Therefore, King Olaf sent out a "tingstikke" summoning the people of little Vennisland to court that he might rule on their grievances while the real purpose was to impose Christianity upon them.

The Valdres saw through his pretext of holding court and changed the king's "Tingstikke" to a "haerør," a call to arms, and ordered all men to gather armed for war.

King Olaf had proclaimed the site for the court to be the shores of Vangsmjøsa. He did not trust the Valdres and wanted to have his back to the waters where he could retreat to boats if necessary.



Øye in Vang, Valdres. Vangsmjøsa is in the foreground.

When the day of court arrived he and his men rowed ashore. He was not met by the few people residing in Vennisland but by armed men from all of Valdres. Nevertheless, he opened court and then began to speak about Christianity. Immediately there arose a furor as men began to shout and beat upon their shields with axes and swords.

Eventually an old Valdres came forward and addressed the king: "We have sharp swords and heavy axes; strong arms and wise heads and all will be your faithful supporters if you rule us according to the country's laws and customs and permit us to live and believe as our dear forefathers did before us. But if you try to take away from us that which we cherish most or try to force upon us that which we do not want to receive then we will defend ourselves and meet you sword against sword and we shall find out who is the stronger."

The mob received this speech with cheers and beat upon their shields. Thus confronted the king let the matter drop and held court.

Court usually lasted several days and most of those assembled planned to remain until it ended. Only those living nearby could go home as distance was too great. Then, too, those on the other side of Vangsmjøsa would have had to go around the lake to get home as the king had all the boats.

At the end of the day the king and his men boarded the boats and rowed away. When night fell he sent out soldiers to burn scattered homes.

When fires lit the night skies in all directions, alarm spread among the Valdreses. They knew the king was wreaking vengeance on them because they thwarted the spread of Christianity. Now he was burning their homes; soon he would be killing their women and children. Now it was evident why he had commandeered all the boats and why he had set court in an isolated site. While the men were at court their homes were without protection. The king refused to fight them where they were assembled but he took his revenge on their homes. Perhaps, they reasoned, they should give in and accept this strange God.

In the morning when the king arrived to hold court, individuals, and later groups, came to agree to accept his God. The king did not trust the Valdres entirely, however, and took some as hostages to guarantee his safe retreat. He did remain some time to baptize and to make arrangements for building churches and installing priests and teachers.

It seems that this was the last mass refusal to accept Olaf's God. Arnold Jareskald wrote, "King Olaf burned Valdres homes, punished people who incurred his wrath and strong men who refused to bow met the gallows."

After leaving Vang, Olaf used the boats to visit Slidre and Aurdal but always stayed near water where he could retreat to boats if necessary.

The early churches were of the "stav" or stave type. Experts have tried in vain to discover their origin. Possibly they developed from the old heathen "hov" or sacrificial temple. Crouched between mountains they stood like scaly monsters, the same dragon's heads which adorned the prow of the Viking ships now decorated these ancient churches.

The stav-church consists of a frame of upright pillars made of tree trunks bound by beams and girders which have been hewn rectangular in section. Upright hewn planks or staves are fitted as panels into grooves in the upright timbers to complete the walls. The whole frame centers about a system of round massive wooden columns which bear the main roof and tower structures and afford attachment of subsidiary framework and roof sections. The exterior roof angles and other points were decorated with carved dragon's heads and other fantastic designs. The doors were framed in beautifully carved scroll patterns in which the dragon forms the main theme. The framework of the interior is open with crossbeams and arches decoratively finished. These black stave churches were constructed with a technique which in many respects was far in advance of its age.

The paneled walls of the main part of the building were surrounded by a narrow cloister with its covering forming the lowest section of the roof slopes. This sectional construction gave the building a rough pyramidal outline with gables and roof sections rising one above the other and terminating in a lighthouse-like tower. Exposed surfaces were treated with hot tar to preserve the timber. This gave a pleasing soft dark brown effect. These structures were without



Reinli Stav-church in South Aurdal, Valdres. This church was first mentioned in records in 1327 but is much older. It is believed to stand on the site of an old pagan temple. Of all stav-churches in Valdres it best exemplifies the original appearance.

heating apparatus and windows but had small openings which were fitted with blocks which could be removed to let in a little light. The cloister was used as a place in which to leave weapons. One type of stav-church has been given the name Valdres-type. It was four-columned and is always referred to as the Valdres-type. St. Olaf is said to have built churches in Valdres but they have long since disappeared without record. At one time some 900 stav-churches were in Norway. Now perhaps 30 remain, more or less perfectly restored. Valdres is fortunate to have several of these.

One of the old stav-churches was located in Filefjell in a small glen called Smedalen. This was the St. Thomas Church, said to have been named after Thomas Beckett, Archbishop of Canterbury. It was built in the Roman era. Here an annual meeting was held once a year on July 2. People not only from Valdres but also from Sogn, Hallingdal, Laerdal, and Aadal gathered there. Eventually it became a time for drinking, fighting, horse trading, and general debauchery and so the church was torn down in 1808. The altar cloth from St. Thomas is found in Hurums Church while the bell was installed in the newly restored Øye Church in 1965. One of the bells was lost crossing Smedalen waters and this incident led to the composition of the old Hardanger violin "laat," "The Church Bells of St. Thomas on Filefjell."

The ancient stav-church at Vang was a four-columned one known to have been built sometime before 1319, probably shortly after 1200. It became too small for the congregation and was replaced by a new church in 1839. The old Vang Church was seen by a traveling artist, John Dahl, who was born in Bergen and became an art professor at an academy in Dresden, Germany. He felt that an architectural masterpiece like Vangs should not be destroyed and persuaded King Frederick Wilhelm IV of Germany to purchase it. In 1841 a German architect came to supervise the dismantling. All wooden art work was transported by wagon to Laerdal, by ship to Hamburg, by rail to Berlin and later to the Oder River, and by boat to Silesia where it was re-erected and is still known by the name Vangs. It was a church of the purest Valdres type and richly ornamented. At one time two shields hung in the church, one belonging to Sigvatt paa Leirhol.

When Professor A. A. Veblen, for many years president of Valdres Samband, wrote, "The Valdris Book" in 1920 he stated that the old Øye Stav-church, built before 1358, was taken down in 1735 and thus was lost to posterity. More than 200 years after its dismantling workmen had to tunnel under the present Øye Church to repair the deteriorating foundation. There they discovered much old timber. Investigation showed that it was the major portion of the old stav-church and that it could be restored. A committee was appointed to arrange for restoration and in the summer of 1965 the stav-church was dedicated. Present at the dedication was a former president of Valdres Samband, Miss Clara Thorpe, and many church and public dignitaries. The bell which originally hung in St. Thomas now has a new home in the Øye Stav-church.



Bruflat church in Etnedal.

The old Hurum Stav-church standing on the site of the old manor seat and stronghold Kvidin (Kvien) was saved from destruction because it was large enough to accommodate the congregation but the exterior has undergone changes.

Four miles below Hurum is the church of Lome in West Slidre. Although modernized somewhat it contains some of the best scroll-work woodcarving to be found.

Of all the stav-churches in Valdres the one at Reinli in South Aurdal best exemplifies the original external appearance in that the closed cloister still remains.

Hedalen Stav-church in the same parish still has much of its ancient ornamentation. Tradition has it that the Hedalen bygd was completely depopulated by the Black Death about 1350 and that the existence of the church had been forgotten until it was discovered by a hunter whose arrow missed the bird he aimed at and made a noise as it hit the church bell. The church has a badly dilapidated bear skin said to be the hide of a she-bear which had her den in the chancel of the rediscovered church.



View of Ulnes, North Aurdal. The waters are Strandefjord.

The two churches at Slidre and Ulnes are unique because they are of stone. They were built before 1200 and in Roman Catholic times the West Slidre church was a bishop's church or cathedral and had a chime of 12 bells tuned so hymns could be played. Church bells were much venerated in old Norway and in addition to calling people to worship they were also used to "ring in" festivals such as Christmas, to mobilize people for war, or as a call to fight forest fires.

A week-long meeting of the Norden "Klokkekonferans" in West Slidre in 1966 was attended by learned men from all Scandinavian countries. Subjects discussed included traditions, use, chimes, age, and construction of the church bells. The organization, headed by the Danish professor Aksel Andersen, is working to preserve the manual ringing of bells as against the electric bells. The conference visited Hedalen, Begnadalen, and Reinli where they tried the bells and also visited the old stav-church at Lomen, the cathedral in West Slidre, the Øye Stav-church, and the site of the old St. Thomas Church.

At Slidre a Swedish preacher, a Danish organist, and a Norse head of a museum assisted Slidre's bell ringer in ringing the four 1200 A.D. bells. One of the highest authorities on Scandinavian bells, Lars-Magnus Holmback of Sweden, says that it is a rare occurrence to find four early Middle Age bells hanging in the same bell tower. The only such church in the whole world is probably at Slidre.

Ole Christian Nauen of Tønsberg has cast at least 27 of the bells found in Valdres. He rates one of the bells in Hedalen as being among the most beautifully toned bells he has heard and the bell ringer in Hedalen as being among the most expert. He also remarked on the number of bells in some churches: Slidre with six and Hedalen with five.

Eventually churches were built at Øye, Vang, and Hurum in Vang; Lomen, Slidre, and Røn in West Slidre; Hegge, Volbu, and Rogne in East Slidre; Skrautval, Ulnes, Strand, and Aurdal in North Aurdal; Nordre Etnedal and Bruflat in Etnedal; Bagn, Reinli, Begnadal, and Hedalen in South Aurdal.

Christianity made much progress in Valdres and when Norsemen migrated to America perhaps no such small settlement furnished more pastors for the Scandinavian settlements in the midwest than did Valdres.

Knights and Nobility among Our Ancestors in Valdres

A Norwegian genealogist made the statement that all Norwegians are descendants of kings. If a person can trace his ancestry back far enough that may well be true, for there was a time before Norway was united into one kingdom that it was divided into many small kingdoms. After it was united there were many kings whose reigns were short. Some of the kings were quite prolific. Harald, the Fair-haired, had several wives and fathered 20 sons in addition to a number of daughters.

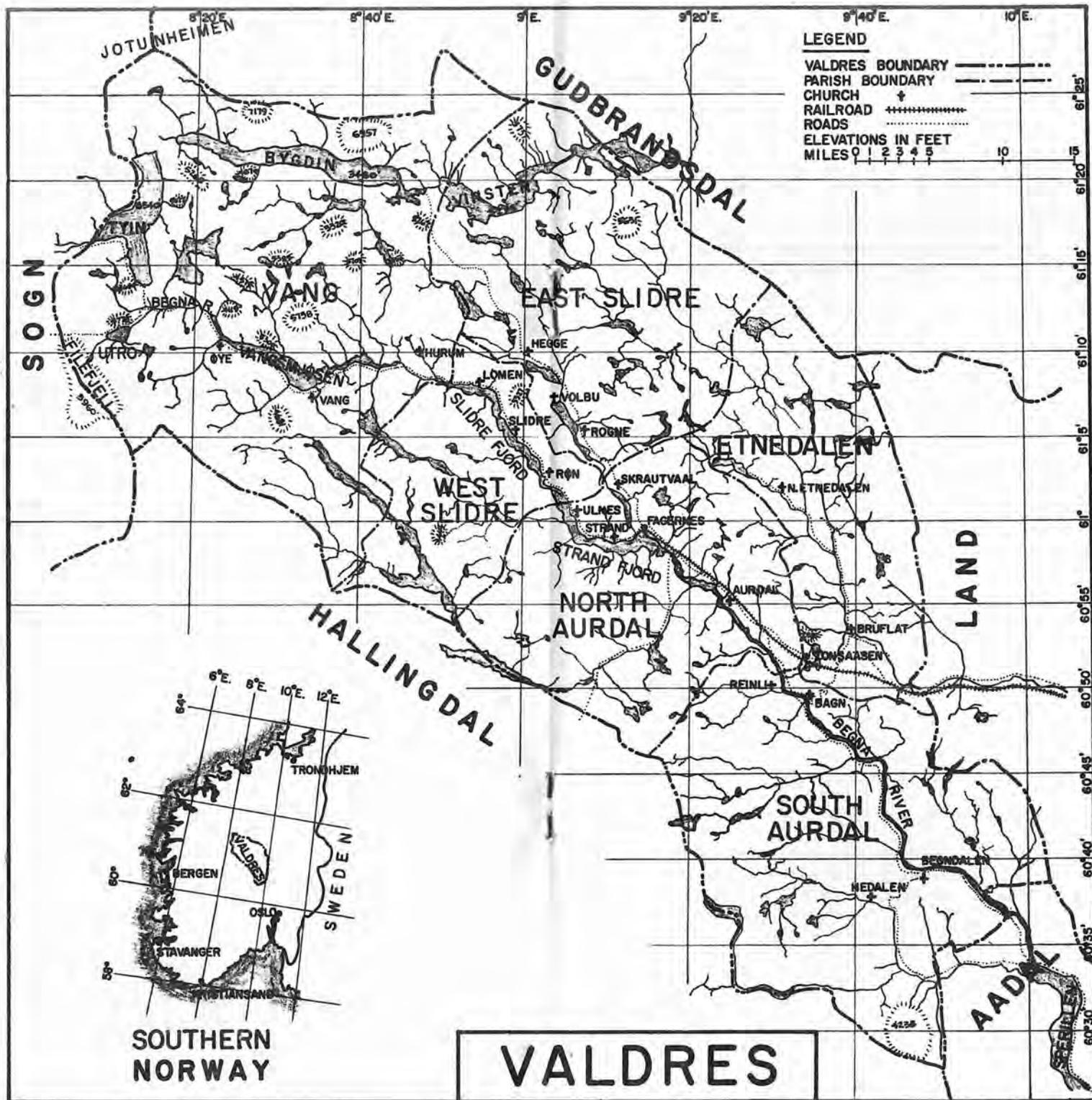
There are instances of royal families and knights in Valdres. Perhaps of greatest interest is the saga of Gyda, the maiden who inspired a man to unite the country, which is mentioned in Snorre's "Heimskringla," perhaps the earliest written reference to Valdres.

Gyda was the beautiful daughter of King Erik of Hordaland. Her father sent her to the great nobleman who lived on Kvien (also written Kvie and earlier, Kvidin) that she might be reared and trained as a princess.

Harald, the Fair-haired, was a minor king at that time. He had heard of the beautiful Gyda and sent some of his knights to her with his proposal. The haughty maiden rejected the proposal saying that she thought it queer that no one was man enough to unite the country into one kingdom and only if Harald did so would she consent to become his queen. The knights returned with her message and suggested that they take her by force but Harald accepted her challenge and took a vow not to cut or comb his hair until the day he united Norway. A decade of warfare passed before he had defeated or driven the other kings out of the country but in 872 the country was united. He then had his hair cut and sent knights to Gyda to remind her of her promise. They were married and she bore him five sons: Aalor, Frode, Rørek, Sigtryg, and Thorgils. Princes of this line are known to have married and settled in Valdres. A memorial stone for Gyda is found at Kvien near the Hurum Church.

Kvien was the home of many great men of old. In the battle of Hjørungavaag in 986 a Baron Gissur of Valdres (and apparently from Kvien) was killed. The baron commanded the left wing of the army at the side of Earl Haakon. He is said to have been more gaudily dressed than his chief and may have been killed by an arrow intended for his superior.

At the time of King Magnus Erlingsson the highly respected Baron Elling lived in Kvien. At the same time there lived one Baard Guttormson on Rein. He was a brother of William the Conqueror of Normandy and England. Baard's first wife was Cecelia, a sister of King Sverre. She bore a son, Ing Baardson. Baard's second wife



was Ragnhild, daughter of Elling paa Kvien. With her he had a number of children: Skule, Guttorm, Sigurd, Aasulv, and Ingebjørg. Skule became an earl and a duke. Skule's daughter, Magrethe, married Haakon Haakonson and they were the ancestors of a line of royalty that was to follow.

Sverre ruled at the beginning of the 13th century and was followed by Ing Baardson from 1204-1217. Some historians feel that one of Norway's gréatest tragedies resulted when Skule was bypassed in favor of Haakon to be king. They feel that the Valdres boy, Skule, was more talented and showed himself a better leader and could have avoided the civil war. Skule was killed at Elgesaeter monastery in 1240.

Baard Guttormson, Cecelia, Skule, and Ing Baardson are all buried at the Cathedral in Trondhjem (Domkirke) along with such notables as King Olaf (St. Olaf or Olaf den Hellige), and other kings.

When William the Conqueror who was of Norse ancestry invaded England in 1066 he had the support not only of Earl Tostig, of Northumberland, a brother of King Harold of England, but also of Norwegians under King Harald Haardraade who was killed at the Battle of Stanford Bridge. Earl Tostig was also killed in that battle but with their support William conquered and became king of England.

After the death of Earl Tostig and King Harald Haardraade, Skule and Ketil, sons of Earl Tostig accompanied Olav Kyrre, successor to the throne, to Norway. Skule remained in the royal court and was considered a foster son. Ketil was sent to Halogoland where he made a good marriage and had many honored descendants. Tradition has it that his descendants came to Valdres. It is known that Paal Eriksen, district judge, revenue officer, king's standard bearer, treasurer, chancellor, and a mighty knight, and his uncle, Dugal Ruhirdson, last of the minor kings on Suderørne, were descendants of Earl Tostig and Ketil and had themselves descendants spread throughout much of Valdres. They were noblemen who owned much land and held various government offices. Paal Eriksen was given Stor-Kvale by Haakon V and a descendant of Paal, Audun Guttormson, a noble lord who served as district judge and revenue officer and was a signer of the peace treaty in Copenhagen in 1309 lived on Stor-Kvale in the early 1300's. Undoubtedly many Valdres Samband members trace their ancestry back to these noblemen.

Sigvatt av Leirhol was a knight, chancellor, revenue officer, and a mighty chieftain living in Vang at the time of Haakon V. He had a son, Thorberg, who was also a revenue officer and a judge. Sigvatt's shield hung for centuries in the old Vang church. A riddar hus (knight's house) still stands on Leirhol.

Knights are known to have lived at Berge and Søndrol in addition to knight William Eriksen paa Høynin of West Slidre.

One of the outstanding families of old Valdres was the Losna family which also was related to Paal Eriksen. They had large

holdings in Valdres and in 1450 Erlend Eindrideson of that family received Valdres from Kristian I as security for a loan. The loan was later repaid but the family still owned much property in Valdres.

In St. Olaf's reign, a King Snorre of Valdres attended a cabinet meeting held at Randsfjord in 1015.

H. J. Stabel, pastor in South Aurdal was a member of the Eidsvold constitutional convention; G. P. Harbitz, pastor in Slidre 1839-1852 became president of the Storting (Parliament).

One of the early Vikings in Iceland was Reyna-Bjorn, from Røyne, East Slidre, Valdres.

Art and Handicrafts in Valdres

Perhaps the oldest relics showing the skills Vikings had developed in fabricating ornamental as well as useful articles of wood, metal, or fibers are found in prehistoric graves at a time when burial customs encouraged that the dead be buried with a variety of items they could use in the life that was to come.

The most famous of these burial finds discovered in Norway was the Oseberg ship. In this lavishly carved Viking ship dating from about 250 A.D., a queen had been buried with her bondswomen, domestic animals, precious weavings, rich carvings, a sleigh, a cart, and everything a person of her rank would need. In Valdres there have been graves found with swords, shields, and personal items. The early Valdres had discovered minute deposits of iron and had developed the skills necessary to process the ore and make wanted items. Later silversmiths learned to make jewelry and ornamental items but wood was a more popular medium with which to work.

The old stav-church with its carved dragon's heads adorning the peaks of roof gables, the door portals of entwined dragons, richly carved and sometimes painted, were familiar in Valdres.

The reliquary casket from the 13th century St. Thomas Church, now in the historical museum at Bergen, is of wood covered with gilt copper plates. Formed like a miniature stav-church with animal heads on the gables, the sides are richly decorated with figures and designs in relief. The Juvkam skrinet from about 1200 A.D. and the church chair from Sørhus Chapel, North Aurdal, are at the University museum.

Much of the work on the stav-churches was that of local peasants and they also made use of their skills at home as they sat by the fireside during the long winters. Chests, chairs, cupboards, utensils, ale bowls, and the more elaborate "øl krus" were among the things they made and they were decorated by carving or rose-maling. Chests made for the Valdres going to America were of a type with a rounded cover. They were reinforced with metal bands and had heavy iron handles and big handmade locks. Some were decorated with rose-maling either externally or internally. Rose-maling was also used in houses and furniture in addition to utensils.

Ola Hermundson Juvkam of Bagn, a student of Per Aadnes, was a well known rose-maler working about 1770 to 1800. Simon Erlandson Skaro, Bagn, was both rose-maler and woodcarver and much of his work is still to be found in Etnedal and Land. "Strandemaalaren" Ola Strand, Øylo, Vang, painted from 1840 until 1860 when he went to America. "Kvammen" or Erik Navrud from Reinli, Gullik Knutson Hovdaet, Lomen, 1830-40; Knut Skoren, Vestre Slidre, about 1860, and Torstein Engen, Hegge, about 1840-60, were all outstanding rose-malerer. In addition members of many households were gifted amateurs at the art.

Among woodcarvers Sjugurd Kviteberg, Etnedal, fashioned many fine pieces in Etnedal and North Aurdal, and Erland Knutson Landsend, Hedalen, born on Lundo, Bagn, made clocks which played hymns and also made organs.

Perhaps the two most outstanding artists of Valdres were Arne Berger, whose oil paintings are found throughout the United States, and Ole Henriksen Fladager of North Aurdal, the famous sculptor, in whose memory the Valdres Historical Society raised a monument in 1922.

Small deposits of meerschaum found in the mountains of Valdres were used for pipe bowls. One type familiar in Valdres had a bowl with roughly shaped facial features and a hinged cover. It had a birch pipestem a foot and a half long.

Wool was carded and spun, dyed, and then knitted or woven to make cloth and clothing. Weaving must have been done at an early date. There were precious weavings buried in the Oseberg ship. An altar cloth in Lomen Church dates from about 1300. In the Valdres Folkemuseum is an exhibit of old weaving including a valuable "jomfruteppe" from Alvstad in East Slidre and an equally rare "heilagtrekongersteppe" from Leirhol in Vang.

The Valdres people had a liking for music. In the long winter evenings the Jew's harp, the langleik, and the violin sounded in every part of the valley. Most popular was the violin, both the four-stringed and the rarer eight-stringed Hardanger type. The violin was an instrument of the evil one but that didn't deter young men from learning to play it or their brothers and sisters from whirling around the floor to its tunes.

Most gards had their own violinists but the most famous of all was Jørn Nilson Hilme who was born in Ulnes, Valdres, in 1778. He was an expert carpenter, cabinetmaker, and violin maker but it is for his music that he is remembered. He not only played the violin but composed many outstanding pieces of folk music. His influence was felt not only in Valdres but in Hallingdal, Sogn, and as far away as Telemark, Numedal, and Voss. Valdres folk tunes have influenced such famous composers as Storm, Grieg, and Svendsen.

Although Jørn Hilme has been dead more than a century he is not forgotten. In 1960 the Jørn Hilme memorial by the Valdres sculptor, Gunnar Rørhus, was unveiled at the Valdres Folkemuseum and each summer the violinists from Valdres and neighboring communities vie for supremacy at the Jørn Hilme Stevne.



Monument to the memory of Jørn Hilde, the master fiddler, erected at the Valdres Folkemuseum, Fagernes, in 1960.



Gjendesheim, Jotunheimen.

There was a man in Garli who had a violin called "Garli Stuten" which Jørn wanted very much but the man wouldn't part with it. One of Jørn's friends, Ola Kristenson, said he would get it for him if Jørn would play for him whenever he desired. Jørn promised to do this and Kristenson took the violin from its owner and gave it to Jørn. After his death Jørn's son, Trond, had it; then his grandson, Jørn, who sold it to Fingar Opheim who brought it to America with another well known violin, "Belja." Eventually the Valdres Samband violinist, Jøger Quale, obtained "Garli Stuten," "Belja," and a Tronde violin, "Børka" and presented them to the Valdres Folkemuseum.

The Valdres Migration to America

There have been two main periods of migration from Norway. The first was at the time the Vikings were colonizing the world. This resulted in lessening the pressure of a growing population. The Black Death about 1340-50 which depopulated entire areas accomplished the same thing. The second large migration occurred in the 19th century when again the country's population had increased.

There is some doubt as to who was the first Valdres to come to America but the honor may belong to Endre Endreson Rudi (Røe) from Hørisbygden in Vang. Born at Røe, he first moved to Voss where he married Anna Aslagsdatter Kjednes. He migrated to Chicago, Illinois, with his family in 1839.

In 1843 he was followed by Gull Guttormson, "Gull Valdres" as he was called at Rock Prairie, Wisconsin, where he was the only Valdres at the time. He had moved from Hedalen, Valdres, to Modum where he heard of the new world and came to America.

In 1847 Nels Hanson Fjeld of Etnedalen came to America and in 1849 Syver Gaarder and family and others making a group of 13 came to Rock Prairie.

Perhaps Steffen Olsen (Kubakken) Helle was responsible for the real beginning of mass migration to America. Isolated from the outside world as Valdres was in the interior of Norway it had little direct information until Steffen went to America in 1846 and revisited Valdres in 1848 bringing a report of the wonders that were America. Within the next few years many went to America.

It was still winter and good sleighing the 17th of April, 1850, when one group left Valdres. As soon as they got over Filefjell, sleighs had to be exchanged for carts to travel to Laerdalsøren. Here they remained for a couple of days before sailing by boat to Bergen. There the weather was spring-like and the grass showed green.

John Anderson Østrem had visited Bergen during the winter and had booked passage for the group on a new brig, "Ørnen." Upon arrival at Bergen they found the ship still under construction and had to wait two or three weeks for its completion. Finally completed, and loaded, the ship lifted anchor and sailed. Tears filled Valdres eyes as they lined the ship's rail casting a last look at the rugged mountainous Norwegian coast.

Soon the wind increased and with it the waves. Many became seasick. During the night a terrific storm blew up and most of those not used to the sea thought they would sink. Women moaned, cried, prayed, or sang hymns. Trunks, boxes, and other cargo were torn loose from their fastenings and slid back and forth from one side of the ship to the other. They survived this storm and were to

sail through still another before they reached New York about July 2, 1850. One of the group died en route and was buried at sea.

From New York to Albany they traveled on a steamboat. From Albany to Buffalo by canal boat pulled by two horses. From Buffalo to Manitowoc, Wisconsin, they again traveled by steamboat.

Pilgrims from Norway had to furnish their own food and bed clothes for the entire journey. Foodstuffs usually consisted of butter, flatbrød, gammelost, dried beef, meal, "sour primost," and salt fish. The "sour primost" resembled primost but was made of sour milk and was mighty potent. This was soaked in water until it dissolved and was used as a substitute for milk in making graut (it wasn't a tasty dish).

Graut and sour primost water were the daily staple food when conditions were such that cooking could be done. Cooking facilities for perhaps a hundred people consisted of a fireplace with room for four kettles or pots. On occasion they tried to prepare a delicacy and this would usually be smør-graut. Salt was watered out of butter and the butter was used to make a graut which resembled rømmegraut. Toward the end of the overland journey many of the food chests were getting low and there was little money with which to buy food.

Immigrants also had tools and implements along for use in the new world. Blacksmith tools, carpenter tools, harness, dismantled carts, furniture, or a mill were common properties to have along.

Steffen Olsen "Kubakke" Helle was back to Norway three times. When he returned to America the last time with a group of Valdreses the boat on which they were crossing Lake Erie collided with another and 68 Valdreses drowned.

The first good-sized colony of Valdreses in America was in Manitowoc County, Wisconsin, with the town, Valdres, in its center. As time progressed this area furnished Valdreses to start other colonies of predominantly Valdres population. Blue Mounds and Black Earth in Dane County, Wisconsin, were settled. Winnesheck County, Iowa; Rock, Lyon, Swift, Pope, Goodhue, and Renville counties in Minnesota all had strong Valdres settlements. North and South Dakota and Nebraska too had Valdres settlements while Valdreses were found scattered in all states as well as Canada.

The Valdres Samband

It was on February 2, 1899, that a letter written by Thomas Lajord, a Minneapolis Valdres, was published in the Norwegian language newspaper, "Nordvesten," suggesting that the Valdres immigrants living in Minneapolis and St. Paul should "get together for an evening of fun." That was followed by a letter signed "Otter-tail County Valdres," proposing that it should be open to all Valdreses wherever they lived.

After more discussion, an arrangements committee consisting of I. T. Ellingboe, Thomas Lajord, and Chr. Brandt called for a picnic in Minnehaha Park, Minneapolis, on the 25th of June, 1899.

This first Valdres stevne was a success; about 800 Valdres gathered on a sunny Sunday for a picnic dinner and a program of songs, music, and speeches. A committee consisting of Lajord, L. O. Wilson, and Chr. Brandt was named to arrange a similar meeting the following year.

The second meeting took place September 9, 1900, also in Minnehaha Park.

The first reunion of Valdreses was referred to in press reports and otherwise as a "Valdresstevne." The word "stevne" means a prearranged meeting or gathering and has since become the standard name used in referring to all bygdelag reunions.

In 1901 the stevne was held in Como Park, St. Paul, September 8. The committee in charge included Dr. J. S. Johnson, chairman; Lajord, K. K. Rudie, Ole Jorgens, and L. O. Wilson. Rudie was unable to attend and Chr. Brandt took his place. Some two or three thousand people attended this meeting. A proposal was made that a permanent organization of Valdresmen should be formed to arrange these meetings. This was unanimously approved and a committee was named to write a constitution and to serve as officers of the organization until the next stevne. Prof. A. A. Veblen served as chairman of the committee and Dr. J. S. Johnson as its secretary. Others on the committee were Thomas Lajord, Helge Boe, Harold Thorson, Gudmund K. Norsving, and Haldor Boen.

This committee chose the name Valdres Samband for the organization and wrote a constitution which was adopted at the meeting August 31, 1902, in Como Park. A five-man "styre" consisting of A. A. Veblen, president; Thomas Lajord, vice president; Dr. J. S. Johnson, secretary-treasurer; Christopher J. Heen and Pastor O. L. Kirkeberg, directors, was elected.

Thus the first formal organization of a bygdelag became a reality. The American bygdelag is a society composed of natives from a particular area in Norway and their descendants in this country. It came into being as a social organization to promote friendship and acquaintances of people with similar geographic background.

It has since expanded its purpose to include the collection of historical, genealogical, and biographical data pertaining to its people and to keep alive the customs, culture, and traditions of their forefathers. An associate membership has been created to permit persons other than Valdres to become members.

The Valdres Samband is universally acknowledged to be the oldest bygdelag in America founded in 1899 and it was not until nearly eight years later that another bygdelag was organized. Eventually some 40 different lags were organized.

A new feature of the third Valdres stevne was the introduction of the Valdres Gjestebø, an idea of Dr. Johnson, who supervised the project. This was held in Mozart Hall, St. Paul, and was a big success. The hall was filled to the last place. This banquet, given the name Valdres Gjestebø, was the first of a long series held in connection with the Valdres stevne. Even as the first one featured Norwegian foods so, too, do the banquets 60 years later.

Sites of the Valdres stevne have been: Minneapolis, St. Paul, Glenwood, Starbuck, Fergus Falls, Dennison, Fargo, N.D., Sacred Heart, Benson, Barrett, Albert Lea, Brookings, S.D., Granite Falls, Montevideo, and this coming year Cottonwood.

Those who have served as president of the Samband are: Prof. A. A. Veblen, A. M. Sundheim, J. E. Haugen, C. M. Roan, R. N. Qualley, Olaf Hellie, Ole J. Braaten, Clara Thorpe, Arne Rosenlund, Joseph Haugen, and Mrs. Arne Berg.

As secretary-treasurer we have had: Dr. J. S. Johnson, A. M. Sundheim, A. A. Hall, Olaf Rudi, O. A. Hain, Rev. Helge Hoverstad, N. A. Kirkeberg, Edwin Odegaard, Mrs. J. O. Quale, Ole J. Braaten, Mrs. Celia Ormestad-Roang, Mrs. Arne Berg, and Carl T. Narvestad.

To keep members better informed of its activities the Valdres Samband published its first report of the 1902 stevne in a 36-page booklet "Beretninger og rapporter." In 1903 it was followed by "Valdres Helsing," a quarterly of from 32 to 48 pages of which 30 issues totaling 1280 pages were published. In 1909 this became a monthly called "Samband." This was published until 1917 when difficulties in connection with World War I caused it to be suspended. It had a total of 4538 pages.

It was revived in the late 20's as a quarterly and continued until 1935. In addition two books were published. "The Valdres Book" by A. A. Veblen, written in English, is an authoritative work on the bygdelag movement and of the Valdres Samband. It contains 303 pages and was published in 1920. In 1922 A. M. Sundheim wrote the 222-page book, "Valdriser i Amerika." Nearly 8000 pages were printed recording data about the Valdres immigration, pioneers, leaders, and the bygdelag movement up to this time.

The 60th anniversary of Valdres Samband in 1959 was the occasion of the publication of a souvenir booklet of 36 pages and was followed in 1962 by the decision to publish a mimeographed newsletter, "Valdres Samband Newsletter" edited by the secretary, Carl T. Narvestad. Published twice a year it has served to keep members informed of activities of the Samband and of its individual members.

The program of the first stevne included speeches, music, and songs and this custom has been retained through the years.

Even as the violin was featured at the first stevne so, too, it is featured today. The rare eight-stringed Hardanger violin is Norway's national folk instrument and Valdres Samband has tried to keep this alive in America. Perhaps the last time as many as seven Hardanger violinists have been assembled on one program in America was at the Samband's 1952 stevne at Starbuck when Anund Roheim, Great Falls, Montana; Stener Odden, Hazel Run, Minnesota; J. O. Quale, St. Paul, Minnesota; Gunnar Odden, Granite Falls, Minnesota; Gullik Kvale, Camrose, Alberta, Canada; Kittel Kittelson, Park River, Minnesota; and Mrs. Andrea Quisling, Madison, Wisconsin, played.

Other violinists who have often appeared include Oscar Hamrey, Kolbein Ornes, and the young Valdresman, Nils Lee.

And along with old Norwegian music go the equally old folk dances. The Valdres spring dans performed by some of our talented members has survived. In addition the Valdres stevne has featured the talented Norrona Leikarring. While this group is not strictly Valdres a large percentage of the dancers are Valdres and are Samband members. Paul Paulson has furnished their music with his accordion. The group, clad in colorful, authentic Norse costumes, is a popular feature of the program as they whirl through the old dances with the greatest precision, grace, and rhythm.

Less emphasis is placed on long speeches now than was true when the Samband was first organized. Instead, instrumental and vocal musical numbers, dances, humorous or dramatic dialect readings and novelty numbers provide a variety program which appeals to members with varied tastes.

For several decades the prediction has been made that the day of the bygdelaag is nearing its end and yet as this is written Valdres Samband has a bigger membership than it has enjoyed for many years. The Samband extends an invitation to anyone interested in the country, the customs, and the culture of their forefathers to become a member of Valdres Samband and enjoy fellowship with others who have similar interests and to help preserve the music, songs, and dances which are a part of our heritage from "gamle Norge." Persons not Valdres may become associate members.



Visitors at the Valdres Folkemuseum are treated to music on the Hardanger violin and an exhibition of old folk dances. Performers wear costumes of Valdres origin.



Fossheim, Røn, West Slidre, Valdres.



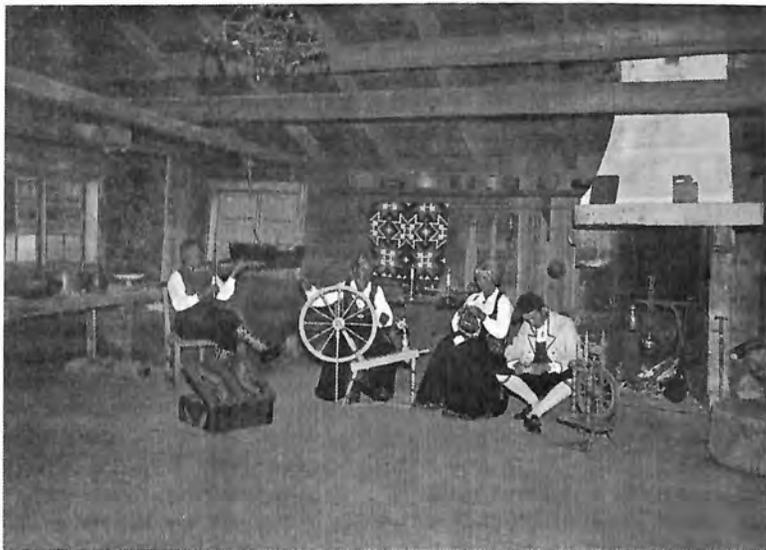
Bagn in South Aurdal showing the Begna River. The mountain in the background is Langeberget.



View near Eidsburgarden in the heart of the Jotunheimen Mountains.



Heggenes, East Slidre, Valdres.



Interior of Skattebustogo at the Valdres Folk Museum. One of the outstanding museums in Norway, the museum shows the way of life in Valdres in the centuries past.



At the Valdres Folkemuseum visitors can see life as it was lived on the "seter" or "støl". These were outfarms to which cows and goats were taken in the spring or summer to utilize the grass. The herdgirl did the milking and made butter and cheese.

Tribune, Granite Falls, Minn., U.S.A.