



PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

This is a short story of the Norwegian emigration to the United States, the reasons for leaving, the journey across the Atlantic, where they settled and how they adjusted to the New World.

It is also a story about those who returned to Norway, about American influence on Norwegian society and newcomers to our country.



Hans Storhaug

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

The Norwegian Emigration Center is hosting a permanent exhibition that was officially opened on July 4th 2000, in commemoration of the 175th Anniversary of Norwegian emigration to America. It gives a rough overview of the emigration from Norway, but since emigration was an experience shared by many countries, it has a European perspective. The exhibition is called *People on the Move*.



Norwegian emigrants at the Christiania harbor in 1903 waiting to board S/S Montebello bound for Hull, England. From Hull the emigrants took the train to Liverpool before making the Atlantic crossing on big transatlantic steamers.

Courtesy: Norsk Folkemuseum

More than Fifty Million People on the Move

The Great Migration is usually defined as the period between Antiquity and the Middle Ages. It makes more sense, though, to use this term to describe the hundred years between 1825 and 1925. Never in human history have so many people moved or been moved over such long distances. It was an unparalleled migration in size and probably also in significance.

From 1820 to 1925 close to 50 million people emigrated from Europe to other continents, mainly to distant overseas countries. Most of them had the United States as their first choice.

Being the great magnet, the United States attracted no less than 34 million Europeans. More than 5,9 million were Germans, 4,5 million came from Ireland. The Scandinavian countries counted more than 2,1 million. 860,000 of them came from Norway.

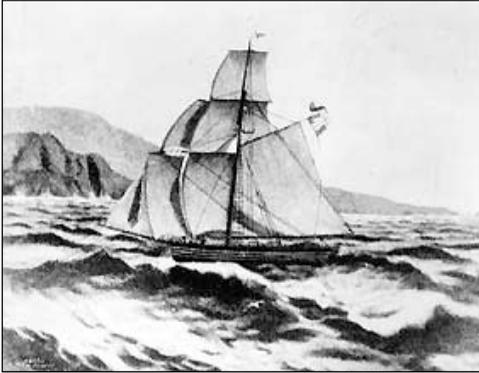
The majority of emigrants left Europe in the course of the seventy years from about 1846 to World War I.

Europeans Populated the World

Not all Europeans emigrated to America. Some took the long journey to Canada, or more exotic destinations like South America, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Others settled in Asian Russia.

In 1900 close to 33 percent of the world's population of 1,5 billion people were Europeans.

The Sloopers



The sloop "Restauration" sailed from Stavanger, July 4th 1825 with the first Norwegian emigrants. They made the transatlantic crossing in 98 days, anchoring the New York harbor on October 9.



The first Norwegian emigration to America was not economically motivated. The people leaving Stavanger on the sloop "Restauration" on July 4, 1825, were mostly farmers from the district of Rogaland with strong ties to the Quaker and Hauge movement. Both of were in opposition to the authorities, and disliked the powerful position of the Norwegian Lutheran State Church. They sought religious freedom and the right of lay people to preach the Word of God.

In 1821 the Stavanger Quakers had sent Cleng Peerson from Tysvær and Knud Olsen Eide to America to investigate conditions over there. Cleng Peerson returned to Norway alone in the summer of 1824 and reported favorably on his findings. He went back to prepare for the arrival of the Norwegian dissenters, and welcomed them as they arrived New York harbor on October 9, 1825.

In 1925 the descendants of the Sloopers, as these pioneers were called, formed the Norwegian Sloop Society of America.

The Battle for Bread



During the years following 1815 the population of Norway grew at a rate never before experienced. The mortality rate dropped, so more children reached maturity. From 1810 to 1865 the population of the country increased from 882,000 to 1,7 million.

Great numbers of children were born in the 1820s. When these children grew up and had to support themselves in the 1840s, they were forced to join the ranks of the unemployed until they could find some sort of job. There was “a battle for bread”. In the 1850s new flocks of children were born and entered the labor market as young adults in the 1870s and 1880s.

Agriculture was the primary industry in Norway at that time. The dramatic growth in population demanded that available land had to be exploited as much as possible. During the first half of the nineteenth century agricultural production and the production in the fishing, shipping and lumber industries, increased greatly, but not sufficient to keep everyone above minimum subsistence level.

This is why 78,000 Norwegians emigrated to America between 1825 and 1865 hoping to make their fortunes.

America Fever

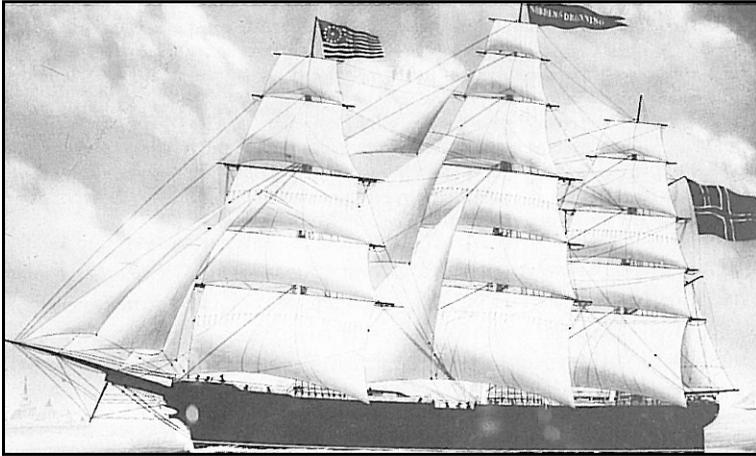


From 1836 emigration from Norway became a yearly phenomenon. That summer two brigs, *Den norske Klippe* and *Norden*, sailed from Stavanger with a total of 167 people. From 1843 on more than 1000 Norwegians emigrated every year.

“America letters,” communications back home from emigrated kin, former neighbors, and acquaintances, were the most common source of information about America. Famed writers like Gjert Gregoriussen Hovland, who emigrated in 1831 and settled in Kendall, told of equality and opportunity in America and gave advice and guidance. There were also guidebooks and personal visits by emigrated countrymen, such as Knud Andersen Slogvig. He served as leader on the brig *Norden* that sailed from Stavanger in 1836. The “America fever” as people called the urge to go to America, was spread by such literature and by the pressures from emigrated kin and friends to join them in America.

The migration moved north from Stavanger along the coast and inland to the upland communities. Most of them came from the inner fjord districts of western Norway and the central mountain districts. They were mainly farmers who had sold their small land holdings to finance their trip and younger sons of independent farmers unable to continue in familiar pursuits. In the 1850s and later, cotters and members of the lower classes in rural society joined the movement overseas. The emigrants were mainly family groups intending to find a permanent home in America.

On Brigs and Barks



Nordens Dronning built in the USA in 1856. In 1871 she left Stavanger with 398 emigrants on board. Courtesy: Stavanger Maritime Museum

Most parties of emigrants after 1836 crossed the Atlantic on Norwegian brigs and barks. Kristiania (Oslo), Bergen and Stavanger became the most important ports of departure. Some went to the New World via Gothenburg on Swedish or American ships that transported iron, and others left from Le Havre in France.

During the 1840s Norwegian emigrant shipping companies came into existence. The repeal of the British Navigation Acts in 1849 permitted Norwegian ships to transport emigrants to Quebec and lumber from there back to Great Britain.

Almost all immigrants toward the end of the 1840s had landed in New York, but between 1850 and 1865 most went by Norwegian sailing ships to Quebec and from there to the United States. Between 1854 and 1865 90 percent of all Norwegian emigrants took this route. The voyage across was long, lasting two months or more depending on weather and wind, and strenuous, with unsanitary conditions, illness, and often several deaths during the crossing.

On Steamships

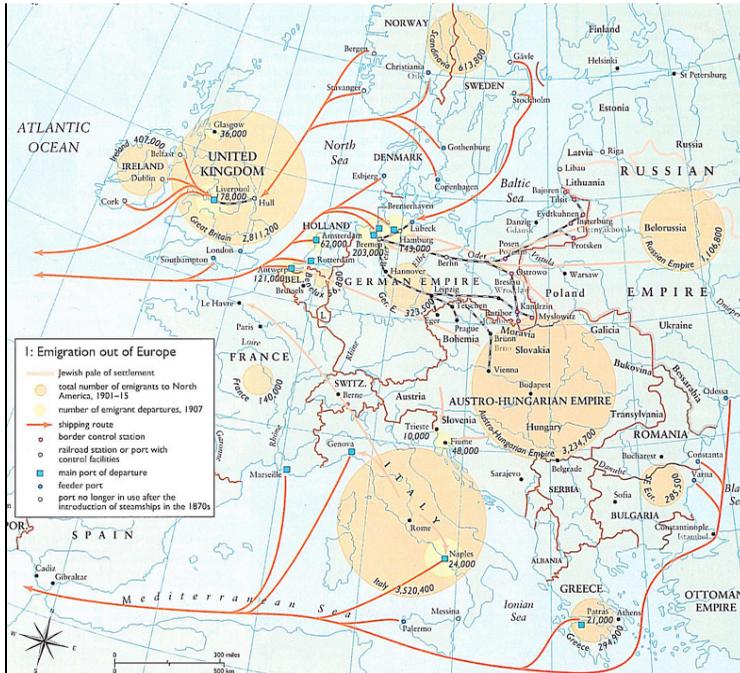


From the end of the 1860s steamships replaced sailing ships in the emigration traffic. It was a revolution that made mass emigration possible. The steamships were much faster than the sailing ships, and the steamship lines offered regular departures and arrivals, and included meals in the price of the ticket. During the fifty years after 1865, nearly 677,000 Norwegians emigrated.



Norwegians crossed the Atlantic in three massive waves: 1866-1873, 1879-1893 and 1900-1914. From 1879 to 1883 an average of 21,000 people left every year. That was almost as many people as there lived in Trondhjem, Norway's third largest city, in 1875.

European Emigration Routes



Source: Helen Hornbeck Tanner, Ed. *The Settling of North America*. 1995

As steamships took to the seas and rail networks extended across the continent, migrants flooded out of Europe to North America. Many emigrants to North America came from the agricultural heartland's of Central Europe, far from any sea. In the earlier part of the 19th century they faced a long, hard journey even before they reached their port of embarkation. They traveled on foot or by cart to river ports.

The beginnings of the railroads in the 1830s eased the journey across Europe somewhat. By the end of the century an efficient railroad network carried migrants from the agricultural regions inland to the major northern ports of Bremen, Bremerhaven, Hamburg and Liverpool, or the southern port of Naples.

Arrival of the “Restauration”



October 9th, 1825 marks the beginning of the Norwegian immigration to America. That date the thirty – nine ton sloop ”Restauration” from Stavanger arrived in the port of New York. Some Norwegians

had been there before. Leif Eirikson at the end of the first millenium. Those who had joined in the Dutch New Amsterdam venture in the seventeenth century; and other individuals who had made the crossing earlier before 1825.

“Restauration” carried fifty-two passengers, but on the arrival they were fifty-three. During the 98 days long voyage, on Sept. 2, Margaret Allen was born. She was the daughter of the leader of the expedition, Lars Larsen Geilane and his wife Martha, both from Stavanger.



Lars Larsen



Martha Gregoriana Larsen



Margaret Allen Atwater

New York - The Irish City

The Irish community in New York can be dated to 1798, and in 1810 the city's first Irish newspaper, the Shamrock or Hiberian Chronicle appeared. In 1814 the Irish Emigrant Society opened to offer assistance to the newly arrived. Emigration from Ireland to New York grew steadily through the 1820s and in the 1830s more than 200,000 Irish landed. The potato famine of 1845 pushed these figures to new highs. In 1847 roughly 53,000 arrived in New York, reaching its peak in 1851 with 163,000 immigrants.

While most Irish moved on almost immediately, those who stayed contributed to a demographic revolution in the nation's largest city. In 1830 not more than 240,000 people lived in New York. Twenty years later, in 1850, the population had grown to nearly 700,000. In 1855 New York's Irish-born population counted 175,000 representing 28 percent of the city's population.

In the 1830s the Norwegian community in New York barely existed. Hundred years later, in 1930, 72,915 people were classed as Norwegians. New York had then grown to a city of more than 2 million inhabitants.

Statue of Liberty

*"Give me your tired, your poor,
your huddled
masses yearning to
breathe free, The
wretched refuse of
your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-
tossed, to me: I lift my lamp beside the golden door".*



These lines from Emma Lazarus' poem "The New Colossus" are written on a bronze tablet fixed to the pedestal of the statue. The poem has become a credo for thousands of immigrants coming to America.

The Statue of Liberty is a symbol of freedom and independence. She was unveiled on October 28, 1886, ten years after America's centennial. She was then the tallest structure in New York, 305 feet high, covered with copper from the Vigsnes mines at Karmøy, Norway.

Ellis Island - Island of Hope – Island of Tears

Over 12 million men, women and children entered the United States through Ellis Island, the nation 's chief gateway during the years 1892 to 1954. The first one to arrive was Annie Moore, a fifteen-year-old girl from County Cork in Ireland.



Not all immigrants had to pass through Ellis Island. Those with enough money to travel first or second class were quickly examined on board ship by a doctor and an immigration officer and could land without further ado.

The immigrants who went to Ellis Island were those who traveled third class or steerage, which in fact meant below the water line, in vast dormitories without windows and little ventilation or lighting. Here they underwent a medical examination. Contagious diseases like trachoma, favus and tuberculosis meant automatic expulsion. The emigrants who passed this examination were questioned by an inspector and an interpreter. The inspector had about two minutes in which to decide whether or not the emigrant had a right to enter the United States. He made his decision after asking a series of twenty-nine questions. If the new arrival answered satisfactory, the inspector would stamp his papers and let him leave, after wishing him "Welcome to America". Only two percent of all emigrants were turned away.

The Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924 limited immigration from any nation to two percent of its representation in the 1890 census. When it closed on November 19, 1954 the Norwegian sailor Arne Peterson was the last to leave.

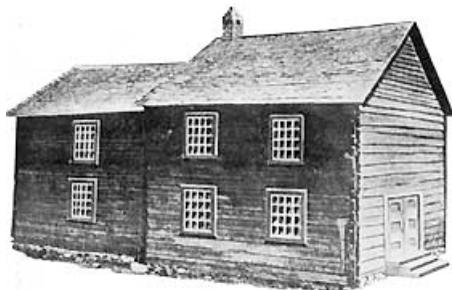
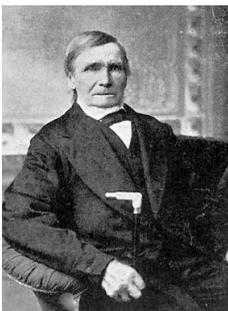
Pioneer settlements.

Only the skipper of the "Restauration", Lars Olsen Helland from Stavanger and Peder Eriksen Meland from Bergen, remained in New York. No one knows what became of them. The rest of the group followed Cleng Peerson to the Kendall settlement, near the city of Rochester in the State of New York, which was the first Norwegian settlement in America.



Guided by Cleng Peerson, the Sloopers started their westward movement, and settled in the Fox River in Illinois, about seventy miles southwest of Chicago. Here the

second Norwegian settlement was founded. Most of the 167 emigrants who came over on the two ships *Norden* and *Den norske klippe* in 1836, made their way to the Fox River settlement. In 1850 the area counted 1252 people and during the next decade the number exceeded 3,200. In the 1840s Wisconsin became the main region of Norwegian settlements and remained the center of Norwegian – American activity until the Civil War (1862- 65). Ole Nattestad was the first Norwegian settler in Wisconsin, and Muskego was the most famous Norwegian settlement in the state.



Technological revolution

Until 1850 most of the immigrants came to New York. They traveled up the Hudson River by boat, through the Erie Canal and across the Great Lakes to cities like Chicago and Milwaukee. From the 1850s it was possible to travel to Chicago by train from New York and from 1856 directly from Quebec to Detroit. A technological revolution on water and land had opened North America to the rest of the world. Most important was the canals and the railroad system.



Going West: The Canal Era

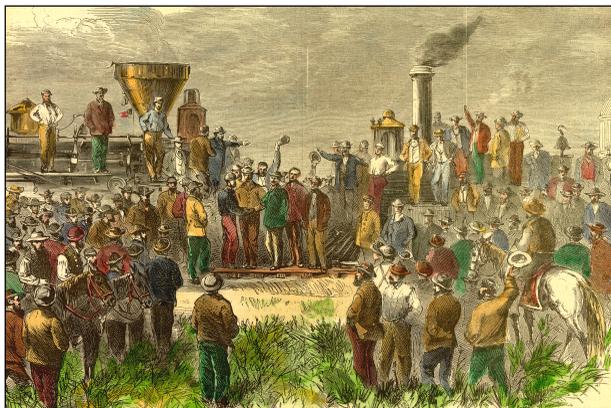
The building of the Erie Canal started in 1817 and was completed in 1825. Thousands of immigrants, mainly Irishmen, were employed in digging in the canal. It was 363 miles (584 kilometers) long, and connected Albany, the capitol of New York State on the Hudson River, to Buffalo by Lake Erie. The canal opened a waterway between the Midwest and New York and cut travel time by almost 70 percent and transportation costs by 90 percent.

Canal fever spread rapidly throughout the country, but struck most heavily in Pennsylvania and Ohio. It became possible to move people and goods from Buffalo or Albany to Philadelphia or Pittsburg or Baltimore by boat. Ohio built several canals that linked Lake Erie with the Ohio River, connecting ports in Upper Canada as well as the U. S. with the Ohio – Mississippi River route to New Orleans.

The canal boats were pulled by horses until they were replaced by steamboats that could power up their way upstream against river currents. The trade westward on steamboats and with the rest of the world on sailing ships, made New York the shipping center of the U.S., and one of the most prosperous cities in the world. It also became the first choice for immigrants wanting to go west, like Cleng Peerson and his group.

Going West: The Railroads

The Canals were soon replaced by railroads. The two first railroads in the U.S. started in operation in 1826, only one year after the Erie Canal was opened. By 1840 the total trackage in America was nearly 3000 miles, almost twice the miles of tracks that could be found in all of Europe. By 1860 railroads in America were still concentrated east of the Mississippi River.



"Completion of the Pacific Railroad" from Harper's Weekly Newspaper of June 5, 1869. Courtesy *Central Pacific Railroad Photographic History Museum*, © 2007, CPRR.org

Railroads made land travel over North America easier and faster. In 1880 the Northern Pacific crossed border into Montana from the southern

part of North Dakota. Ten years later the

Great Northern built a line across the northern part of the state. The completion of the transcontinental railroads also opened the Pacific Northwest for newcomers. In 1869 the Central Pacific reached San Francisco, in 1882 the Southern Route connected New Orleans to Los Angeles and in 1883 Northern Pacific had its line completed both to Puget Sound and to Portland. Between 1885 and 1915 three transcontinental lines connected the East coast of Canada to the West.

The most rural population



Since the mid 1800s, most Norwegian-Americans settled in the mid western states, especially in Minnesota, Wisconsin, North and South Dakota, Iowa and Illinois.

The Homestead Act of 1862 , which gave every American citizen 160 acres of government land, and the ending of the Civil War in 1865 , increased the

interest of new land and opened up most of Minnesota for Scandinavian settlement. In 1870 the Scandinavians had overtaken the Germans to become the largest foreign-born element in Minnesota 's population. The Norwegians were definitely the most numerous group among the Scandinavians in 1870, and in 1875 84,000 first and second generation Norwegians lived in that state. In 1990 757,212 people in Minnesota claimed Norwegian ancestry.

Norwegians in America were deeply attached to the soil and farming. They were the most rural of all the major immigrant groups. In 1900 close to half of all Norwegian-born breadwinners worked in farming, either as owners of farms or farm workers. Farming in America was totally unlike farming in Norway, but the Norwegian farmers did well and often out produced the "Yankees". Some set up plow repair shops and factories for farm machinery and implements. Tobacco growing became a Norwegian-American specialty in Wisconsin.





Many Norwegians also settled on the West Coast, particularly in the state of Washington. Fishermen from Rogaland and Sunnmøre caught cod, herring and salmon off the West Coast and Alaska. Around 1900 they controlled the halibut fishing fleets, which were 95 percent Norwegian at that time. Many Norwegians also worked in the forestry industry, as lumber-jacks, in sawmills or as loggers, in the big forests in the state of Oregon and Washington.

Norwegians in the cities:

Only a quarter of the 336,985 Norwegian born persons in America lived in cities with more than 25,000 inhabitants in 1900. This was the lowest percentage for any European immigrant group. Clusters of Norwegians were found in Milwaukee, Superior and Madison in Wisconsin, in Duluth in Minnesota, in Grand Forks and Fargo in North Dakota and in Sioux Falls in South Dakota.



Most of the Norwegians resided in the big cities like Chicago, Minneapolis and New York. By 1900 41,551 first and second generation Norwegians lived in Chicago, rising to 47,235 in 1920. Chicago then was the third largest “Norwegian city” in the world, after Oslo and Bergen. Greater New York only counted 11,387 Norwegians in 1900, rising to 62,915 in 1930, most of

them in Brooklyn. New York had then surpassed Chicago, which had 55,948 Norwegians, and was the most urban center of Norwegians outside Norway. Even with a smaller Norwegian population than

Chicago and New York, Minneapolis eventually became the new “Norwegian – American capital” because of its location at the center of the Norwegian population in the Upper Midwest.

Jobs

Many Norwegians found work in the building trades and construction. Some became famous for their works on skyscrapers, bridges, tunnels and subways, like Gunvald Aus from Haugesund and Kort Berle from Halden, who designed the Woolworth building in New York. Some became carpenters and tailors. In Chicago Norwegians played a significant part in shipping in the Great Lakes as seamen, captains and shipbuilders. Many women worked as seamstresses and dressmakers, but most of them were engaged in domestic occupations.

Proudness



The proudness of “Norwegian America” reached its peak between 1895 and 1925. Large Norwegian-speaking groups, both in the cities and in the countryside, organized into a wide variety of associations and groups. In the countryside, bygdelags, groups based on regional affiliations, were formed in 1899, while lots of voluntary associations

appeared in the cities. Temperance lodges, choral groups, sports clubs, folk dance groups, religious societies, as well as political and trade unions attracted lots of Norwegians. Many of these groups included the protection of the Norwegian language, traditions and customs in their constitutions, like Sons of Norway, established in 1895.

The Norwegian patriotism reached its peak in 1925 when thousands of Norwegian – Americans gathered in Minneapolis and St. Paul, to celebrate and commemorate the centennial of the sailing of the sloop “Restauration”. Today, the 17th of May, Norway’s Constitution Day, is the most important festival and the foremost symbolic expression of Norwegian-American culture.

Returned emigrants



From 1900 to 1930 probably as many as four million European immigrants permanently returned home from America, one-fourth or more of the total immigration into the United States.

For Norwegians, Swedes and Danes together the return rate from 1899 to 1924 was 15.4 percent. The rate varied a lot: 22 percent of the Finns returned; 13.7 Germans; and only 8.9 of the Irish. Immigrants from east and south Europe had a higher return rate: Poles, 33 percent; Italians 45.6.

The 1920 Norwegian census found nearly 50,000 former residents of the United States back home in Norway. Three-fourths of them had lived from two to nine years in the U.S. The vast majority returned to the rural areas from where they had originally emigrated. A total of 155,000 Norwegians came back between 1891 and 1940.

Many of the returnees had sent remittances and money orders back home, preparing for their return. Large sums of money found its way from America to Norway, contributing to the lives of many poor Norwegian farmers or to the building of small communities.

Scandinavian Money Order Receipt	
	<p>NO. SEE THAT THE ADDRESS IS CORRECT</p> <p>No. L 51901</p> <p>Received of <u>John A. Jensen</u></p> <p><u>Security</u> Dollars</p> <p>for remittance to <u>Mr. Peter Johansen</u></p> <p><u>Norway</u></p> <p>Pay. M. <u>100</u> Kroner</p> <p>\$ <u>27.00</u></p>
	<p>Not good for more than 100 dollars or 100 Finnish Mark or 100 Kroner.</p> <p>Make payable in the name of the person for whom it is issued.</p> <p>August 31, 1911</p> <p>White Star Line AGENT</p>

The reasons for going back were many: Most of the Norwegians who went home had achieved their goals in the U.S., and put their savings into farming - buying new machines, land, some even investing in local businesses. Some complained that Norwegian farming was fifty years behind, and tried to move agriculture ahead.

Some returned emigrants came home with a broken health. Hard work and long days in the U.S. had a high price. Many Italians returned suffering from tuberculosis. Others lost fingers, arms, legs, eyes, etc., in industrial accidents. A common reason for return was homesickness. Others went home because they rejected the United States, particularly those returning in the years following the First World War, when native-born Americans scorned anyone who was not at least 100 percent American.

Queen of the Atlantic Ocean – Stavangerfjord



Most of the Norwegians made their return crossing with *Kristianiafjord*, *Bergensfjord* or *Stavangerfjord* that belonged to The Norwegian – American Line. Making her maiden voyage in 1913, *Kristianiafjord* was the first ship in operation, but *Stavangerfjord* soon became the most popular. Often called the "Queen of the Atlantic Ocean", she transported more than 640,000 passengers from 1918 to 1964. When *Stavangerfjord* called the port of Stavanger, the city welcomed her with music and cheerful people waiting to reunite with their loved ones.

American Influence



The remigrants brought change in many forms: New words, "American houses" - new-style houses of brick rather than wood, fancy clothes, as well as ideologies and philosophies. Many of those

returning to Europe also displayed an openness that shook off the old and helped transform the peasant world. Remigration contributed to a mingling of cultures which encouraged change as well as helping bring a gradual integration of the cultures of Europe and America.

But there was also a direct influence. In 1896 the first public movie performance took place in the United States. Eight years later, in 1904, the first movie theater opened in Oslo. By 1914 there were more than 150 cinemas in all of Norway. Half of the films shown in Norway were by then American. The America appearing in many of these films had an immense and worldwide appeal. It was largely built on the Wild West, Buffalo Bill, and Nick Carter image that was already familiar from the mass literature. The films, the music and entertainment industry had a massive impact on the cultural development in Europe and Norway.



Today American brands and symbols have become part of our daily life and environment.

Norway Today



The ebb and flow of migration can be explained by an interplay of domestic and international economic circumstances. Economic growth and prosperity in postwar Norway and new national quota systems in the 1960s in the United States reduced overseas migration from Norway. Not more than 49,500 Norwegians emigrated to the United States between 1946 and 1978.

Today the trend has turned: emigration has been replaced by immigration. At the end of 1999 Norway had 4,478,500 residents. Its population grew by 33,000 or 0.7 per cent, in 1999. This is the biggest population increase since the first half of the 1950s and was fuelled by the large immigration surplus of 19,300 persons. The immigrants today count 260,700 persons or 5.9 per cent of the total population. The Swedes are the largest immigrant group with 22,400 persons. Totally 20 per cent of the immigrants in Norway come from the Nordic countries. People from the Third World make up more than half of the immigrants. Most of the immigrants live in Oslo, the capitol of Norway, followed by Bergen and Stavanger.

Sources (texts and photos)

Cover picture: “Restoration in open sea” Oil on canvas.
Terje Berg Larsen 2000.

Odd S. Lovoll: *The Promise of America*

Steinar Bryn: *Amerika bilete*

Norsk Folkemuseum

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