

The Norwegian Emigrant Museum

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[Fellesraad Note: We have been given permission to publish this article along with its photos so that we all become more informed about this organization in the Hamar area.]

The Norwegian Emigrant Museum in Ottestad in Stange near Hamar is the only museum in Norway which focuses in its entirety on emigration from Norway to all parts of the world. In this respect the museum collects, conserves, interprets, and exhibits documentation about those who became immigrants in another country. The museum seeks to understand the general processes connected to the migration movement and relate not only to emigration but also to returned migration and immigration to Norway.

Origins of the museum

The idea to form an emigrant museum originates from the *Nordmanns-Forbundet's* (presently Norwegians Worldwide's) involvement in the 1914 centennial commemoration exhibit of the Norwegian constitution in the Frogner Park in Christiania. The organization had been organized seven years earlier with the aim to "encompass Norwegians wherever they might find themselves in the world." As a result, members of this organization came up with a vision to form an emigrant museum in Norway which could "...shed light over the life and working conditions of our fellow emigrated countrymen in foreign surroundings." Time went by, and in 1955 a log cabin was moved from Kindred, North Dakota to the Norwegian Folk Museum in Oslo. This cabin became the Norwegian Emigrant Museum. A combination of Norwegian-based and Norwegian American organizations were all instrumental in bringing the cabin to Norway. These included the Nordmanns-Forbundet, Sons of Norway, Bygdelagenes Fellesraad, and the Consul General of Norway in Minneapolis.



The building from Kindred, N.D.

The Norwegian Emigrant Museum has moved several times; in 1972 the museum moved to become a part of the Hedmarkmuseet in Hamar, presently the Domkirkeodden Museum. The museum later became a separate chapter and in 1988 became an independent unit. The museum moved to its present location at Ottestad

in 1996 following the flood the previous year. By this time, several buildings had been moved from the Midwest to the Norwegian Emigrant Museum. In 2010 the museum became consolidated as a chapter of Anno Museum which covers most museums in Hedmark County.



Overview of Norwegian Emigrant Museum

Presently eight buildings make up the outdoor museum, and all illustrate the immigrant experience. The buildings include a dwelling from Kindred, North Dakota; the Gunderson House from west central Minnesota, and the Norwegian Memorial Church from southeastern Minnesota; the Sacquitne barn, the grainary, and the Bjorgo/Ingvalson House from northeastern Iowa; and the Leet-Christopher schoolhouse from central South Dakota.



Students in the Leet-Christopher school house

The museum collections contains about 2.000 objects, including textiles and paintings which all are to be revised within a two-year period in addition to 20.000 photos, 9.000 America letters, church

records from 2.000 Norwegian American Lutheran congregations, audiovisual material, interviews, and private archives from various individuals and organizations. The collection also includes the archives of *Norwegians Worldwide* with a wide variety of clippings from Norwegian and foreign newspapers, minutes from chapters and forms from almost 1.000 Norwegian emigrants all over the world.

Children and youth are one of the target audiences of the Norwegian Emigrant Museum, and the museum offers several educational tours for pupils and students. Besides, the museum is located in a recreational area and inhabitants in the local community may join its activities. It also welcomes tours from Norway and the United States. In 2019 the museum organized Alaska Days and also a Fourth of July event for the first time, and every other year the museum takes part in a large dance event named *Dans på stien* (Dance on the Path). The museum also encourages scholars to use the archives, and they are welcome to stay in the museum apartment for a moderate price during their research period. In 2020 the museum will both host the triennial seminar of NAHA-Norway and will be involved in the International Sons of Norway Convention in Hamar.



Children in NAL Exhibit

A museum relevant in society

As the collection and interpretation of the Norwegian emigrant experience are core tasks of the Norwegian Emigrant Museum, it aims at serving their role both as a relevant and an active museum in society. First of all, the museum is focusing on creating awareness about

emigration from Norway as topic in a national, collective consciousness. In other words, the museum's mission as an objective interpreter of history knowledge is to exhibit a partly forgotten chapter of Norwegian emigration to new generations in Norway and in the USA. Second, the portrayal of the Norwegian immigrant experience in the United States and in other immigrant countries is highly relevant in the debate about contemporary immigration to Norway. There are several similar traits between the immigrant experience of Norwegians in the United States in the nineteenth century and from non-European countries today. The spread of this knowledge adds nuance to the contemporary immigration debate in Norway which, at times, is polarized.

The museum is secretariat for the Bicentennial commemoration of Norwegian emigration to the United States in 2025 and cooperates with Norwegian and Norwegian American organizations and institutions. By 2025 the museum staff both aims at refurbishing its administration building and integrating the entrance with the outdoor museum but also plans to establish a large, permanent exhibit about Norwegian emigration. In conjunction with the 2025 commemoration, the museum will organize activities with themes connected to Norwegian emigration history, returned migration, and immigration. It has also taken the initiative toward organizing a national writing contest in high school on the topic of emigration in cooperation with the Norwegian Historical Association and the Free Speech Foundation. The museum is also in touch with institutions with a national thematic focus including the Stiklestad kulturhistoriske senter and Eidsvoll 1814 in order to exchange valuable knowledge on national events.

International network

The Norwegian Emigrant museum cooperates with cultural and historical organizations and institutions in Norway and the United States. About 80 percent of the 900.000 – 1.000.000 Norwegian emigrants who left Norway after 1825 went to the United States, although a good number of them returned to Norway later. The United States is central in the museum outreach planning, and the museum aims at expanding its international network. In the summer of 2019, the Norwegian Emigrant Museum started an internship cooperation with Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. In September and October of 2019, the leadership of the Anno Museum travelled to key institutions in the country including Vesterheim Norwegian American Museum, the Norwegian-American Historical Association, and the Nordic Museum in order to strengthen the ties between these institutions and the Norwegian Emigrant Museum. Based on its mission statement, its activities, and network building, the museum will continue playing a relevant role in society.



Museum Tour Sacquitne Barn

For more information about the Norwegian Emigrant museum, check the following website:
<https://utvandremuseet.no/en>