

## THE EARLY NORWEGIAN PRESS IN AMERICA\*

The history of the early Norwegian press in the United States and the related problem of the early political affiliations of the Scandinavians in the Northwest have received serious attention recently at the hands of several writers.<sup>1</sup> Handicapped by the absence of adequate files of the earlier newspapers of which they have written, these writers have, perhaps unavoidably, been guilty of many inaccuracies. One wonders not that errors have crept into their accounts, but rather that no earnest effort has been made to collect files of the newspapers in question and make them available for research in some centrally located depository.

Students of the Scandinavian element and its part in the history of the American West have utilized very slightly the newspapers and periodicals issued by the Scandinavian press in this country. Unquestionably, however, these materials

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<sup>1</sup> Particularly noteworthy is the careful article by Mr. Carl Hansen, "Pressen til Borgerkrigens slutning," in Johannes B. Wist, *Norsk-Amerikanernes Festskrift 1914*, 1-40 (Decorah, Iowa, 1914). Mr. Hansen presents a detailed study of the Norwegian press to the close of the Civil War. The same author issued two preliminary studies of the subject in 1907 and 1908, which may be found in *Symra*, 4: 25-44 (1908) and *Kvartalskrift*, 3:14-28 (January, 1907). Much of Mr. Hansen's information on the newspapers issued from 1847 to 1853 is derived from a sketch which appeared in *Emigranten* (Inmansville, Wisconsin) as early as May 20, 1853. Mr. Albert O. Barton contributes some significant new facts in his article "The Beginnings of the Norwegian Press in America," in Wisconsin Historical Society, *Proceedings*, 1916, pp. 186-212; also issued as separate number 174. An excellent general survey of the Norwegian press in America is given in Juul Dieserud, "Den norske presse i Amerika. En historisk Oversigt," in *Normands-Forbundet*, 5:153-176 (April, 1912). Wist in his article "Pressen efter borgerkrigen," in *Norsk-Amerikanernes Festskrift 1914*, 40-203, deals exhaustively with the history of the Norwegian-American press after the Civil War.

constitute the most important sources of information in existence on that particular phase of American history. It is not generally known, for example, that the Norwegian element in the United States has not been without a newspaper of its own, regularly issued, since 1847.<sup>2</sup> Most of the time since that date it has in fact possessed not one, but many; and in recent years, scores. Only in the forties and the fifties was the number limited to a handful. Thereafter the Norwegian press expanded with great rapidity, especially during the period of the great wave of immigration from the seventies onward. A complete bibliography of these newspapers and periodicals, covering the last seventy-three years, would include probably more than five hundred titles, and certainly more than four hundred.<sup>3</sup>

Comparatively few of the earlier newspapers have been preserved. Most of those that have escaped destruction are not at present very accessible. Although files of the later newspapers are not so difficult to find, there is no library where a student can use many of even the more important ones. This situation, coupled with a failure on the part of some writers to understand the historical value of newspapers, partly explains the absence of a comprehensive and accurate study of the Norwegian element in our population.

The purpose of the present brief paper is merely to call attention to the fact that files of some of the early Norwegian-American newspapers are in existence; to tell where these are and how complete they are; and incidentally to bring out some new facts which an examination of these files has revealed. The writer has urged, as a solution of the problem of the his-

<sup>2</sup> There were one or two brief intervals of a few weeks in the very early period when no newspapers were being published by Norwegian-Americans. But with these exceptions the general statement holds.

<sup>3</sup> The index of *Norsk-Amerikanernes Festschrift 1914*, contains the names of 394 Norwegian-American newspapers and periodicals, most of them Norwegian language publications. A considerable number of titles are omitted, however. In the book referred to no attempt is made to locate files of the newspapers mentioned.

torical records of the Scandinavians in the United States, the concentration of these materials in the library of the Minnesota Historical Society.<sup>4</sup> He takes the liberty to suggest that the particular materials referred to in this article, and similar records now rather inaccessible and in danger of destruction, might properly be entrusted to this society for permanent preservation.

As early as 1845 a prominent member of the pioneer Norwegian settlement at Muskego, Wisconsin, proposed that a Norwegian newspaper should be established in the community. Two years later *Nordlyset* (The Northern Light) began to be issued. Accounts of this publication, which served as the Norwegian organ of the Free Soil party, describing its nature and political influence, may be found elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Here attention is merely directed to the existence of a partial file of *Nordlyset* in the library of Luther Theological Seminary, in St. Anthony Park, St. Paul, Minnesota. An examination of this file, which is bound in a volume together with some other newspapers that will be mentioned below, shows that *Nordlyset* made its first appearance on July 29, 1847. The last number to be issued was dated May 18, 1850. There were at least 103 regular issues of the newspaper, in addition to a few extra numbers. The first editor, James D. Reymert,<sup>6</sup> dropped out at the

<sup>4</sup> A brief argument for this plan, prepared by the writer, appears under the title "The Historical Records of the Scandinavians in America," in MINNESOTA HISTORY BULLETIN, 2: 413-418.

<sup>5</sup> See Hansen, in *Norsk-Amerikanernes Festschrift 1914*, 10-12. The newspaper was first printed in Even Heg's log cabin, later in James D. Reymert's house, and finally at Racine, Wisconsin.

<sup>6</sup> For information concerning Reymert see Barton, in Wisconsin Historical Society, *Proceedings*, 1916, p. 194. To the account there given might be added the interesting fact that Reymert was identified with the early American press of northern Wisconsin. For two months in 1857 he edited the *North Star* (Hudson, Wisconsin), and in December, 1860, together with Junius A. Bartlett, he founded the *St. Croixian*, later known as the *Polk County Press*. Ada T. Griswold, *Annotated Catalogue of Newspaper Files in the Library of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin*, 339, 411 (Madison, 1911).

end of the year 1848, and *Nordlyset* then appeared under the management of Heg and Company. The press was sold late in the fall of 1849 and was moved from Muskego to Racine, Wisconsin. The last ten issues appeared there, edited by Knud Langeland.<sup>7</sup> These ten issues appeared between March 9 and May 18, 1850. For a period of over three months in the winter of 1849-50 publication was suspended. The file of *Nordlyset* in the possession of Luther Theological Seminary is by no means complete. It comprises twenty-six regular and two extra numbers of volume one, and forty-one regular numbers of volume two.<sup>8</sup> These sixty-nine issues of the first Norwegian newspaper published in America are extremely valuable as an historical source. *Nordlyset* is the rarest of all the early Norwegian-American newspapers. So far as the writer's knowledge goes, the file at St. Anthony Park is unique.

<sup>7</sup> Langeland played a very prominent part in the development of the Norwegian-American press, becoming eventually the editor of the powerful *Skandinaven* of Chicago. He published in 1889, at Chicago, his book *Nordmaendene i Amerika; nogle optegnelser om de norskes udvandring til Amerika*.

<sup>8</sup> Of volume 1, twenty-eight numbers are present and twenty-five missing. A fragment of number 1 (July 29, 1847), a badly damaged copy of number 14 (November 4), and a fragment of number 17 (November 26) are not in the book referred to, but are kept in envelopes. Bound in the book are: a perfect copy of number 1; number 20 (January 6, 1848); numbers 23-37 (January 27-May 4) with the exception of numbers 26, 30, 31, 34, and 35; numbers 38-40 (May 11-25) each incomplete; numbers 41-44 (June 1-22); extra number (July 20); number 45 (July 27); numbers 48-51 (August 17-September 7); extra number (September 14). Of volume 2, forty-one numbers are present and eleven missing. Those included in the file are: numbers 3, 4 (October 19, 26, 1848); number 5 (November 2) incomplete; numbers 6-11 (November 9-December 14); numbers 14-20 (January 4-February 15, 1849); numbers 22-25 (March 8-March 29); numbers 26, 28 (April 12, 26); numbers 29, 30 (May 10, 17); numbers 32, 33 (June 7, 28); number 34 (July 19); number 35 (August 2); numbers 36-38 (October 4, 11, 25); number 39 (November 8); numbers 42-47 (March 9-April 13, 1850); numbers 50-52 (May 4-18). The State Historical Society of Wisconsin possesses one number only of *Nordlyset*, and this happens to be an issue not included in the above collection—that for September 9, 1847, number 6 of volume 1.

The same volume that contains the issues of *Nordlyset* brings to light the fact, hitherto unknown, that Langeland's *Democraten*, begun at Racine, June 8, 1850, was not the second Norwegian newspaper to be published in America. It was in fact the third. A newspaper called *Democraten*, published and edited by James D. Reymert, and put out at Norway, Racine County, Wisconsin, was being issued in the spring of 1848, more than two years before Langeland's *Democraten* began to appear. Reymert's paper of this name, Democratic in politics, was offered to subscribers for three months at twenty-five cents. Only one number is included in the collection at Luther Theological Seminary, the issue of April 27, 1848.

Bound with the newspapers in the volume referred to is an extremely interesting little pamphlet written by an anonymous member of the Free Soil party in Illinois. Its title, in translation, is *Slavery Causes Hard Times*. The four pages of the pamphlet are packed with statistics and arguments showing the economic fallacies involved in the slavery system and the menace of that system to free labor; the date of issuance is 1848.<sup>9</sup>

*Democraten* (The Democrat),<sup>10</sup> established by Langeland at Racine in June, 1850, did not disappear after six months, as some writers have asserted. The volume at Luther Theological Seminary includes forty-eight numbers of this newspaper. The dates of the first and last issues are June 8, 1850, and October 29, 1851. At least fifty numbers of volume 1 were put out, and all but five of the numbers of that volume are preserved at St. Anthony Park. The first forty-seven numbers were published at Racine, Wisconsin, the last issue to appear there being volume 1, number 47, May 3, 1851.

<sup>9</sup> The Norwegian title is *Slaveriet foraarsager haarde tider*. It is signed: "En sandheds forkynder." Its origin is indicated in the following words: "Forfattet af et medlem af Friheds partiet i Illinois; trykt og uddeelt paa bekostning af flere Norske."

<sup>10</sup> Note the spelling *Democraten*. The letter *c*, not *k*, is used.

Number 48 is dated June 18, 1851, Janesville, Wisconsin. The volume at Luther Theological Seminary contains six of the numbers issued at Janesville, three of these representing volume 2 of the paper. The writer knows of no other file of *Democraten* in existence.<sup>11</sup>

*Democraten* supported the political principles of the Democratic party, and carried on a spirited controversy with a rival called *De Norskes Ven* (The Friend of the Norwegians), which began to appear under the editorship of Ole Torgersen at Madison, Wisconsin, in the summer of 1850. *De Norskes Ven* supported the Whig party; it was short-lived and seems to have exerted very little influence upon the political views of the Norwegian-Americans. The Whig party held few attractions for the foreign element in the Northwest. The Norwegians were strongly attracted by the name and traditions of the Democratic party, but were deeply anti-slavery in their views, as is illustrated by the support given to the Free Soil party and later to the Republican party. Two numbers of *De Norskes Ven* are preserved in the volume at Luther Theological Seminary, and these two, numbers 22 and 24, for January 14 and 28, 1851, complete the volume.<sup>12</sup>

Many rare files of old newspapers, often obtainable nowhere else, may be found in the vaults of present-day newspaper offices. Most newspapers have preserved files of their own issues. Often a newspaper of the present represents mergers or coalitions of several rival papers, and, where such a process

<sup>11</sup>A complete list of the numbers of *Democraten* in the file referred to follows. Volume 1: numbers 1-21 (June 8-October 26, 1850) with the exception of numbers 15 and 20; number 22 (November 3); numbers 23-39 (November 9-December 21) with the exception of number 26; numbers 30-47 (January 4-May 3, 1851) with the exception of numbers 33 and 38; numbers 48-50 (June 18, 25, July 17) each badly torn. Volume 2: number 1 (August 4, 1851) torn and incomplete; extra number (September 18) incomplete; extra number (October 29).

<sup>12</sup>A brief account of *De Norskes Ven* is given by Hansen, in *Norsk-Amerikanernes Festschrift 1914*, 13.

has taken place, frequently files of the merged paper are transferred. Some newspaper editors are glad to allow their files to be used by historical students, though very few students appear to recognize the possibilities of such depositories. Often these files are not readily accessible, however, and perhaps more often they are ill cared for, with the result that the newspapers become torn or otherwise damaged, if not destroyed. The *Minneapolis Tidende*, the leading Norwegian daily in the Northwest, possesses partial files of three of the important ante bellum Norwegian-American newspapers: *Den Norske Amerikaner*, *Nordstjernen*, and *Emigranten*. All three of these papers are ancestors of the present *Minneapolis Tidende*. On the whole these files are more valuable historically than those at Luther Theological Seminary, and, like the latter, they are, so far as is known, unique. Through the courtesy of Mr. Carl Hansen, one of the editors of the *Tidende*, the writer was permitted to examine and make lists of the materials kept in the *Tidende* vaults. The results of this examination are here presented, together with brief data concerning the three newspapers under discussion.<sup>13</sup>

*Den Norske Amerikaner: Et Blad for Folket* (The Norwegian-American: A Newspaper for the People) was established at Madison, Wisconsin, about the month of January, 1855, by Elias Stangeland. It appeared weekly, and was issued up to May 27, 1857. The editorial management was soon taken over by Charles M. Reese, a former editor of *Emigranten*, and on April 18, 1857, the name was modified to *Den Norske Amerikaner: Et National Demokratisk Blad* (A National Democratic Newspaper) and the Scandinavian Democratic Press Association assumed financial responsibility for

<sup>13</sup> For a general account of the part played by *Den Norske Amerikaner*, *Nordstjernen*, and *Emigranten* in the history of the Norwegian-American press, see Hansen, in *Norsk-Amerikanernes Festskrift 1914*, 17-40. In preparing his article Mr. Hansen made use of the files kept by the *Tidende*. See also Barton, in Wisconsin Historical Society, *Proceedings*, 1916, pp. 200-208.

the undertaking.<sup>14</sup> The newspaper was belligerently Democratic in policy. Persistent attacks were made on *Emigranten* in its editorial columns, for *Emigranten*, though Democratic in name, supported the new Republican party and stood firmly on a radical antislavery—not merely anti-extension—basis. *Den Norske Amerikaner* bitterly charged that the Know-Nothing element had gained the upper hand in the Wisconsin Republican organization and that Norwegian-Americans should therefore shun that party. *Emigranten* was attacked, furthermore, on the ground that it was virtually a church organ, and also because it had given publicity to an immigration scandal in which Stangeland was involved. The *Minneapolis Tidende* possesses an incomplete file of the two volumes of *Den Norske Amerikaner*. A few years ago, unfortunately, a member of the *Tidende* staff, in search for material of historical interest, went through volume 1 armed with a pair of scissors and clipped out such items, articles, or pages as seemed of value to him. These clippings are presumably now preserved, in scattered form, in the editorial "morgue"—but they can never be assembled again, and the damage to the volume is irreparable. Number 42 of volume 1 is the first whole number in the file, and from that point on the issues have almost but not quite escaped the merciless shears. A merely casual examination suffices to show that *Den Norske Amerikaner* contains a wealth of unused material on the political, social, and economic situation in the Northwest in the decade of 1850-60—especially with reference to the Scandinavian element.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Hansen, in *Norsk-Amerikanernes Festskrift 1914*, 23-26.

<sup>15</sup> A list of the numbers of *Den Norske Amerikaner* in possession of the *Minneapolis Tidende* follows. Every issue up to number 42 has been mutilated; in some cases the numbers, and in others the dates, cannot be ascertained. Volume 1: issue dating before January 26, 1855; issue of January 26, 1855; number 6 (February 2); issue of March 2; numbers 12-14 (March 21-April 4); numbers 15-18; numbers 19, 20 (May 19, 26); numbers 21, 22; number 23 (July 7); numbers 24, 25; number 26 (July

*Nordstjernen: Et National Demokratisk Blad* (The North Star: A National Democratic Newspaper) edited by Charles M. Reese, and supported by the Scandinavian Democratic Press Association, succeeded *Den Norske Amerikaner*. Its first issue appeared at Madison, Wisconsin, June 10, 1857. Its avowed policy was to "tear the mask from Black Republicanism." It continued the attacks of *Den Norske Amerikaner* upon *Emigranten*, which now boldly proclaimed as its motto: "No Slavery for Black or White." *Nordstjernen* supported the Fugitive Slave Law and criticized severely the hostile attitude of *Emigranten* toward the enforcement of that act. So warm did the controversy become that in the fall of 1857 an effort was made to arrange a public debate between the two editors. *Nordstjernen* gained little support from the Norwegian element in its political stand, however, and after a half year it began to appear irregularly. Hans Borchenius became its editor after about a year, and the paper continued to be issued, at irregular intervals, according to Hansen, until 1860, when it was bought by the editor of *Emigranten* and united with the latter publication.<sup>16</sup> The truth is that *Nordstjernen* was advocating a cause that could not win the sympathy of the Norwegian element in Wisconsin. The Norwegians were rapidly joining the Republican ranks and could not be induced to give their support in the late fifties to any political movement that did not take a firm antislavery stand.<sup>17</sup>

28); issues from July 28 to November 17, represented by ten pages of advertisements; numbers 36-38; numbers 42-52 (January 5-March 15, 1856) with the exception of numbers 44, 46, and 51. Volume 2: number 1; (March 29, 1856) mutilated; numbers 2-19 (April 5-August 2) with the exception of number 9; numbers 21-35 (September 20-December 27) with the exception of numbers 22 and 33; numbers 36-39 (January 3-24, 1857); numbers 40, 41 (February 7, 21); number 43 (March 7); numbers 46-48 (April 4, 18, 25); number 49 (May 2); numbers 50-52 (May 13-27).

<sup>16</sup> Hansen, in *Norsk-Amerikanernes Festskrift 1914*, 28.

<sup>17</sup> The *Minneapolis Tidende* possesses the following numbers of *Nordstjernen*. Volume 1: numbers 1-18 (June 10-October 7, 1857) with the

The most important of all the early Norwegian newspapers in the United States was *Emigranten* (The Emigrant). This is true not merely because it outlived its rivals—it was, in fact, issued regularly from 1852 to 1868—but also because, as a Republican organ, it reflected accurately the views of the great majority of the Norwegians in the Northwest. It was, moreover, very ably edited, and its news policy was comprehensive. It may rightly be regarded as a newspaper for the Scandinavian element in the entire Northwest. *Emigranten* was founded in January, 1852, by the Scandinavian Printing Association, an organization composed mainly of Norwegian Lutheran clergymen in Wisconsin who desired a political organ in addition to the church publication which they had established in March, 1851.<sup>18</sup> The first editor was the Reverend Claus L. Clausen, one of the leading pioneer preachers in the West.<sup>19</sup> The paper appeared weekly and was first published near Inmansville, Rock County, Wisconsin. It was announced that the general policy of the paper would be democratic, but this did not mean that it would necessarily support the Democratic party. Rather it would assume an independent attitude and would support good men irrespective of party affiliation. In general, however, the paper did support the Democratic party from 1852 to 1854. Clausen withdrew on August 27, 1852, and was succeeded by Charles M. Reese, who held the position until 1854. He was followed by Knud J. Fleischer,

exception of numbers 8, 11, and 16; numbers 19–21 (October 11, 21, 28); number 22 (December 19); numbers 23, 24 (January 16, 27, 1858); number 25 (February 13); number 26 (March 20); extra number (May 27). In the issue of February 13, 1858, the editor comes out for Douglas for president in 1860.

<sup>18</sup> This church paper was called *Maanedstidende for den norsk-evangelisk lutherske kirke i Amerika*. Edited by the Reverend Claus L. Clausen and the Reverend Hans A. Stub, it appeared monthly at Inmansville, Rock County, Wisconsin.

<sup>19</sup> See Svein Strand, "Pastor C. L. Clausen," in *Symra*, 9: 204–223 (1913).

who edited the paper from 1854 to 1857. Though *Emigranten* exhibited a temporary leaning toward the decadent Whig party in 1854,<sup>20</sup> it soon became definitely Republican in its views. It was removed to Madison, Wisconsin, in the spring of 1857, and C. Fr. Solberg became its editor.<sup>21</sup> He edited the paper from 1857 to 1868, with some temporary absences, as for example when he went to the South with the Fifteenth Wisconsin Infantry as a war correspondent. In 1860 Solberg consolidated *Nordstjernen* with *Emigranten*. In 1868 *Emigranten*, in turn, was consolidated with *Faedrelandet* and was moved to La Crosse, Wisconsin, the name of the new paper being *Faedrelandet og Emigranten*. This latter paper was eventually consolidated with the *Minneapolis Tidende*—now a very powerful daily and weekly with a large circulation.

The religious, political, social, and economic tendencies of the Norwegians—and, in fact, of the Scandinavians generally—in the decade preceding the Civil War, and the nature of the Scandinavian attitude toward and participation in the Civil War, are faithfully reflected in the columns of *Emigranten* during these periods. *Emigranten* is a source of first importance not only for the light it throws upon the history of the Scandinavians in the United States but also for its materials on Wisconsin political and economic development, the progress of the Northwest, and many other factors entering into the history of the United States from 1852 to 1868. It is not within the scope of this article to present a detailed account of this newspaper, its policies, and its influence.<sup>22</sup> Attention is here called to the existence of files of *Emigranten*, now kept in Minneapolis, covering eight years of its existence. Files for these years are not accessible elsewhere. They are therefore perhaps almost as unique and valuable as would be an elabo-

<sup>20</sup> Barton, in Wisconsin Historical Society, *Proceedings*, 1916, p. 201.

<sup>21</sup> Hansen, in *Norsk-Amerikanernes Festskrift 1914*, 28.

<sup>22</sup> Such an account by Hansen may be found in *Norsk-Amerikanernes Festskrift 1914*, 15-40.

rate manuscript diary covering the same period and viewing the important (and unimportant) questions of the day from the standpoint of a foreign-born citizen living in a western state.

The files of *Emigranten* in the possession of the *Minneapolis Tidende* do not, unfortunately, include any of the first five volumes published at Inmansville during the years 1852-57. But they do include issues covering the period from June 3, 1857, to December 25, 1865, with the exception of one number in June, 1858, all the numbers of the year 1861, and thirteen numbers of the volume for 1863.<sup>23</sup> The years 1857 and 1859 are represented by two complete volumes each. For 1862 there are three complete volumes; and for 1864 and 1865, six. The State Historical Society of Wisconsin owns one volume of *Emigranten* (volume 10), and this volume—for 1860—is not included in the *Tidende* collection. All in all we can now locate files of *Emigranten* from 1857 through 1865 with the exception of only fourteen issues.

Though the chief value of the newspapers discussed in this paper is in connection with the history of the Scandinavian and particularly the Norwegian element in our population, yet the student familiar with the Scandinavian languages would find, upon examining sources of this kind, much material upon other phases of American history. That historical documents of this kind may eventually be centralized at the Minnesota

<sup>23</sup> The *Tidende* possesses two files of volume 6, numbers 1-30 (June 3-December 23, 1857) published at Madison; one file of volume 7, numbers 1-52 (January 6-December 27, 1858) except number 23, June 9; two files of volume 8, numbers 1-52 (January 7-December 26, 1859); one file of volume 9, numbers 1-52 (January 2-December 24, 1860); three files practically complete of volume 11, numbers 1-52 (January 6-December 29, 1862); one incomplete file of volume 12, numbers 14-52 (April 6-December 28, 1863)—the first thirteen numbers were originally included in the volume but were later torn out, with the exception of a fragment of the issue of March 23; six files of volume 13, numbers 1-52 (January 4-December 26, 1864); and six files of volume 14, numbers 1-52 (January 2-December 25, 1865).

Historical Society building, thus augmenting the Scandinavian collection already deposited in that place, is earnestly to be hoped by students interested in the problem of the population elements in the history of the Northwest.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Since the foregoing article was written, the publishers of the *Minneapolis Tidende*, the T. Guldbrandsen Publishing Company, have presented to the Minnesota Historical Society volumes of *Emigranten* covering the years 1857 (June–December), 1859, 1862, 1864, and 1865.



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