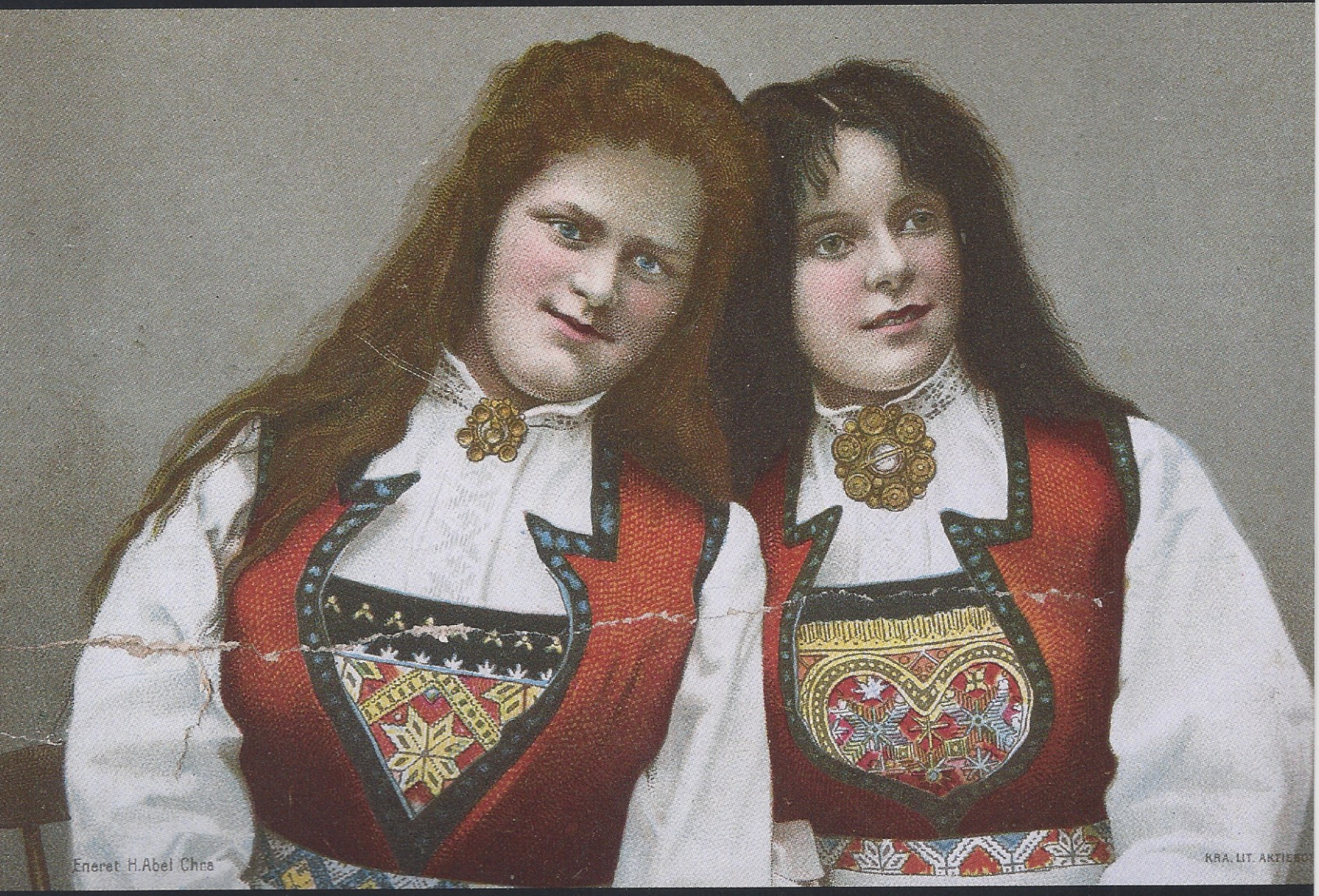

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Norwegian Folk Dress in America

Carol Huset Colburn

By the late nineteenth century the traditional use of distinctive dress among rural Norwegians was in rapid decline and among rural Norwegian immigrants in America virtually extinct. As the traditional use was passing, however, new patterns of use and new stylistic elements in the dress itself emerged. The direction taken was on the one hand toward what has come to be called the national costume, a type of dress that represents all of Norway, and on the other the "bunad," a standardized type of regional dress. Both were based on dress that had deep and subtle meaning in rural Norwegian society as described by Aagot Noss in the previous essay, but both became more two-dimensional in symbolic content and less defined in their use.

The developments mentioned occurred primarily in Norway but were echoed among immigrants in America. To them, however, the national costume and the bunad became primarily something for public display, closely associated with meetings of national groups such as the Sons of Norway or the *bygdelag* (provincial Norwegian organizations) and, naturally, with dance and music groups or parades. While public uses also became important in Norway, a tradition in more intimate personal use also continued there, such as for baptism, confirmations, and weddings.

To understand the concept of a national costume, the type initially most common among the immigrants, and of the bunad, one must consider how they came into being. Radical changes in dress were taking place in Norway at the time of mass emigration. In most areas around 1860, there was still a clear distinction between urban dress and that of rural areas. Rural dress, both everyday and festive, was based on long local tradition while urban dress reflected the changing fashionable styles dominant in both Europe and America. The differences represented not only occupation and place of residence, but also the economic structure of the society concerned. Nearly all materials used in folk dress were produced locally within the group that wore it. Fashionable dress represented participation in the international marketplace for both goods and services. For the poorest people in both town and country, of course, neither full folk dress nor fashionable dress was financially within reach. What they wore day in and day out was plain, well-patched, utilitarian clothing of homemade fabric. This was slow in being replaced by inexpensive mass-produced material.

When national consciousness was rising in the nineteenth century after Norway had been under Danish and finally Swedish rule for over four hundred years, the Hardanger region with its deep blue fjords and snow-covered mountains became symbolic for all of Norway, to Norwegians and tourists alike. It was celebrated in poetry, song, painting, and theatrical tableaux. A part of its picturesqueness was its traditional folk costume in heraldic black, red, and white. In the decades leading up to independence in 1905, the wearing of this picturesque costume came to symbolize an allegiance to Norway as a nation rather than only to the region. Whereas it had evolved originally as a basic type of traditional dress that could be varied in detail subject to individual taste, once it came to be adopted as a national costume the type as such was frozen. It was, however, reproduced in materials of all qualities and worn by all who wished to show their national sentiment regardless of their origin. It continued to serve as a bunad for Hardanger, but since it is best known as a national costume it will here be dealt with apart from its regional association.

Fig. 26. Postcard from Norway illustrating national costume, Ca. 1890s. Color postcards of this kind could have been an inspiration to Norwegian Americans who made their own costumes. The decorative designs in the beadwork appear to be drawn on the photograph for clarity. Carol Huset Colburn, Cedar Falls, IA.

By the 1890s, the national costume was even available from stores in Oslo.[1] For many, it served a function similar to that which festive folk dress had served previously but with national rather than regional associations and without the same subtleties of meaning. Many young people received their first full national costume at their confirmation, and it was thereafter used as "best clothes" for significant family or public occasions. The national dress was also used by traditional dance and singing groups both when performing in Norway and in other countries when they appeared as cultural representatives of Norway. Perhaps its most debased use was as the uniform of waitresses and other servants in hotels and restaurants catering to tourists.

While national dress continued to be worn in these ways, another development in folk dress, the bunad, occurred. The bunad movement was founded by Hulda Garborg (1862–1934) in close conjunction with her work in preserving and reviving the folk dance at the turn of the century. She encouraged the use of folk dress based on that of regions other than Hardanger, resulting in a variety of costumes more or less faithfully based on earlier folk dress. Her ideas were disseminated through the travels and performances of her dance group and through the publication of books which gave instruction for making a variety of regional costumes. She published the first edition of *Norsk Klædebunad (Norwegian Folk Dress)* in 1903, including patterns. In 1917 a second edition appeared, this time including photographs of bunads and further embroidery patterns.[2] Her popularization of the bunad idea involved a simplification and modernization of folk dress for contemporary use.[3] One of the most identifiable and lasting changes she made was introducing a woolen cap with wool embroidery for the Halling costume.

While Hulda Garborg was the first to encourage the modern creation and use of bunads, others were also influential in the movement throughout the twentieth century. Klara Semb was a student of Hulda Garborg whose work continued until 1965. She encouraged more accurate reproduction of early regional types. A number of organizations, including *Landsnemnda for Bunadspørsmål* (The National Bunads Committee) and *Norges Husmorlag* (Norway's Homemakers' Society), have continued to encourage historical accuracy of materials and details, to the extent that a great many Norwegians now use bunads quite authentic to the province of their origin or of their present residence for family or other special occasions.[4] A most impressive display of bunad use occurs annually on May 17, the Norwegian Constitution Day. On this occasion the bunad is used for public parades, community festivals, and private parties, demonstrating pride both in the nation and in regions of origin.

Both of these major developments in Norwegian dress were echoed among Norwegian Americans, who, as demonstrated elsewhere in this volume, maintained an interest in their Norwegian heritage. The primary source for documenting Norwegian-American dress is photographs. Examples of Norwegian immigrant dress which have been preserved in families and museum collections also contribute to our knowledge. Of literary sources, letters and memoirs are the most important, but dress is generally taken too much for granted to be given extensive comment in writing.

A studio photograph from 1907 of a family from Ål, Hallingdal, exemplifies the simultaneous use of regional folk dress, national costume, and fashionable dress in Norway at the time (Fig. 27). The photograph was taken in Oslo, just before the family's departure for America. The mother is in the folk dress of the Hallingdal region, where traditional folk dress continued in daily use until the 1950s. The daughters are wearing Hardanger folk dress, undoubtedly as national costumes. The father and the youngest son are wearing suits that are influenced by international fashionable men's wear but with rural Norwegian details in tailoring. The oldest son is wearing a suit which could not be distinguished from that of an American, an Englishman, or any other fashionable gentleman.

Although this photograph is from relatively late in the emigration period, the image can be seen as representative of families who emigrated during the height of the movement slightly earlier. All the types of clothing worn by the family came with the immigrants on their journey to the new land. Many brought a combination of folk dress, national costume, and fashionable dress in their immigrant trunks.

What happened to this Norwegian dress when the immigrants arrived in America? Some continued initially to wear it, as exemplified by the story of another family who arrived from Hallingdal in 1857. The family had been separated by unfortunate circumstances before emigrating. When the wife saw a man walking across the field to her, she recognized the *Hallingdrakt,* the distinctive dress of Hallingdal, and knew it would have to be her husband Lars.[5] This was a case of retention of the folk dress, at least for the trip across the ocean and westward into the Middle West. Conclusions drawn from extensive research are that he would not have worn his Halling dress for long.[6] If he couldn't afford anything else, he might have used various parts until they were worn out, and then recycled the materials for other purposes. If he could afford clothes more

Fig. 27. Family on their way to America in folk dress, national dress, and fashionable dress. Photograph taken in Oslo (Kristiania) in 1907. Photographer Nyblin. Ål Bygdearkiv, Norway.

in line with those of his American neighbors, he may have put his old clothes in the trunk to save for an unforeseen future.

Clothing from the old country is known occasionally to have been used to celebrate important events such as baptisms, confirmations, weddings, funerals, and holidays, where continuity between the old way of life and the new was desired. Documented instances are rare because most early photography occurred in studios, not in homes and churches. An immigrant letter, however, indicates that family clothing was sent from Norway for a baptism. Describing the dress of her little daughter Ellen to her family, Caja Munch wrote in 1857, "She has three red dresses about the same cut as the baptism robe that my dear Nanna sent her." In another reference to Ellen's clothing, Caja Munch wrote, "Rest assured that both Munch and I have exerted ourselves to keep her from catching a cold during this hard winter in such an airy house. She has completely worn out the scarf I got for my confirmation, who would have imagined that it would be used for this purpose?"[7] Attractive scarves were an important part of the new clothing traditionally worn by confirmants in Norway and, under normal circumstances, these scarves would have been kept for use as best clothing throughout the woman's life.

In letters written back home, recent immigrants were more likely to describe breaks in traditional patterns of use rather than continuation of the familiar. "Malta, Illinois. January 7, 1890. Around here there were many who went out and plowed on Christmas Day. Here where I work at least we kept the holiday. I am ashamed to admit it, yet it is true, that I went around in an old, worn, and dirty dress, and this is surely the first time in the 26 Christmases that I have lived that I have not washed myself or changed clothes. You must not be angry with me when you read

this. I could not help it, and it is so difficult to be among strangers."[8] This was written by Berta Serina Kingestad, a single woman who worked in other people's houses. What she misses is the custom in Norway of bathing for Christmas and donning one's best traditional garb. Berta's letters home reflect a strong interest in clothing, often referring to exchanges of scraps of fabric to help family members visualize each other's dress.

A railroad worker in Montana wrote of similar dismay over not being able to recognize Christmas with a change of clothing. "Warm Springs, Montana. December 25, 1890. Yes, tomorrow it's herring and old clothes again. That is to say, I have had my old clothes on all day today, too. Holidays here never last more than one day—and even that one is sad enough."[9]

In spite of the frustrations experienced by immigrants over American customs of dress, there is evidence in immigrant letters of these customs also being transferred back to Norway, thus speeding the transition away from folk traditions in dress even there. Berta Serina Kingestad again wrote home, this time in response to the news of the death of one of her sisters in Norway: "Malta, Illinois, February 14, 1890. When you write, you mustn't forget to tell me if you and Mother have black dresses; if not, I shall try to send you a little money when I get my wages here, so you can each get a dress. I will go to town as soon as the weather permits and buy one for myself. I have no black dresses now. I will enclose a little scrap of my collar and mourning band. That is what they use in this country, and you will get a scrap of my dress in my next letter if we live so long."[10] Berta in America is instructing her mother and sister in Norway on how to observe mourning within the constructs of fashionable dress, as the folk dress tradition in Norway generally lacked such a mourning tradition.

We have seen that even for people who wanted to maintain the old customs of dress in America it was difficult. However, new uses for traditional clothing evolved as a social and cultural life among Norwegians in America began to form. Norwegian-language theater presented one new possibility. Old traditional dress was brought out of the trunk or new garments modeled on them were reconstructed for the stage. Norwegian-American playwrights often used themes of assimilation, utilizing devices of rural dialect and dress to differentiate between the characters who followed the old ways and those who were adopting the new. Marcus Thrane (1817–1890), the early Norwegian social reformer who came to America as an exile, used such devices in plays performed during the 1860s–1870s by the *Norske Dramatiske Forening* in Chicago.[11] Theater continued to be a public forum where traditional Norwegian dress was used until the mid-twentieth century. Extant photographs of plays staged include some characters in retained folk dress, some in the national costume or bunad, some in fashionable dress. The clothing indicates the characters' orientation to their changing society, but for us it also indicates how the immigrants looked on dress and what their resources for the various types were.

If folk costumes were not available from the trunks of immigrants, the small *carte-de-visite* format photograph was enormously popular and served as a ready reference for Norwegian dress. In Norway, photographers were making their living creating images of folk life, with distinct regional costumes a primary subject. Marcus Selmer from Bergen made hand-colored full-length portraits of his subjects in representative regional dress in the 1860s and 1870s. These were widely distributed and made their way to America where they were kept in the albums of Norwegian-American families. For first generation immigrants, of course, memory was the most ready source for reconstructing traditional dress but the use of it is difficult to document.

By the 1890s, the wave of nationalism which swept Norway in the struggle for freedom that culminated in 1905 was also felt among Norwegian Americans, some of whom wanted to reveal their sentiments through dress. However, by this time few of them had original Norwegian clothing available. Photographs, postcards, and information brought back by tourists were again props to aid memory for recreating Norwegian dress, which now functioned purely as a symbol of national sentiments (Fig. 26).

The components for an American interpretation of Norwegian dress in the 1890s were a red vest, a white blouse with sleeves which often reflected fashionable 1890s leg-of-mutton sleeves, a floor-length dark skirt with colorful horizontal ribbons applied near the hem, and a white apron with an insert of geometric embroidery or lace and often a lace edging. Hair was worn down or in a loose braid. The decorative trim was made to simulate that on the original Hardanger costume but was simplified for easier production and often consisted of commercially available materials adapted to the purpose. Since there were few actual examples to copy, interpretations could become quite free. If original pieces were available from the old immigrant trunks, these were incorporated with those that were newly created (Fig. 28).

The political situation in Norway was not the only reason for a rise of interest in national dress. During the 1890s, round-trip travel between Norway and America became more frequent. The transition to steam had considerably shortened the journey and many immigrants were

Fig. 28. An 1890s portrait of two Norwegian-American women in Zumbrota, Minnesota, in Norwegian dress displaying family heirlooms from Norway. Anna Dyreson Homme on the left was a second-generation immigrant who appears to have created a costume by adding ribbon to her bodice and wearing a blouse with the then fashionable leg-of-mutton sleeves. Her un-identified companion is in quite authentic Hardanger or national dress but without the beaded belt. Rolland Falk, Covered Bridge Restaurant & Lounge, Zumbrota, MN.

now adequately established to afford it. Previously immigration had generally meant a one-way trip. Norwegian Americans were now again brought in direct contact with Norway and became more aware of dress being used there. Some tourists had cameras, resulting in photographs taken in the open countryside where vestiges of traditional folk dress could still be seen. Not all of these can be relied on as historic documents, especially not those by traveling professional photographers, because models could be dressed to suit the takers' wishes.[12] As sources for reconstructed costumes, of course, they have their own validity. The fact that photographs taken in Norway were subsequently used by Norwegian Americans to construct their own, perhaps nostalgic, view of their former homeland is shown in the work of Herbjørn Gausta, a Norwegian-American painter who in the 1890s traveled and photographed in his native Telemark and later used his photographs as the sources for paintings that became well known in the Norwegian-American community.[13]

The final separation of Norway and Sweden in 1905 was cause for celebration and for display of nationalism both in Norway and in America. During this first decade of the 20th century, many variations of Norwegian dress were created. These appear to have been worn primarily for public events where dress served the additional symbolic function of indicating solidarity among Norwegian Americans. The usual model was the national costume, but if particular ties had been maintained with a region other than Hardanger, or if pieces of family clothing from such an area had been saved, the costume could have another model. Many introduced headpieces, which had seldom been seen on 1890s photographs in America, indicating an attempt to be more true to the authentic use of folk dress. The easily adopted square cap was the most common type. It had precedent in the original Hardanger costume as the headdress of a young unmarried woman, but with the national costume it was also used by married women instead of the elaborately pleated matron's headdress. A photograph from Norway Day, Seattle, Washington, 1909 (Fig. 29) shows both these types as well as the traditional Hardanger wedding crown (worn with the additional wedding regalia) and a variety of other unusual headpieces.

Norwegian-American *bygdelag* organizations, consisting of people from specific regions in Norway, used dress as an identifying symbol as early as the first decade of the new century. The *bygdelag* movement had begun in the 1890s but gained greater momentum after the turn of the century. Yearbooks intended for both American and Norwegian subscribers included photographs of immigrants from the district with which the organization was concerned. By the 1910s, these included immigrants in bunads as well as in national dress, echoing the beginning use of bunads in Norway and reflecting the regional emphasis within these organizations themselves. The bygdelags sponsored trips to visit the old country, and they often invited Norwegian guests to their gatherings. These generally made their public appearances in festive Norwegian dress. Thus the exchange of information concerning both the national costume and the bunads became very direct.

During the early decades of the 20th century the *bygdelag* blossomed, with massive annual gatherings of enthusiastic participants. The 1911 *Hallingstevne*, a meeting of the organization made up of immigrants from Hallingdal, held in Brooten, Minnesota, provides an excellent example of how costumes were used at these gatherings. The three-day event attracted 6,000 people from many parts of the United States.[14] The *Hallinglag* was known for its spirited meetings, as opposed to the more pious nature of some regional gatherings; thus there was ample opportunity for the wearing of Norwegian dress. The programs included plays, tableaux, dancing, and, of course, traditional food. A photograph of dancers in costume at the event includes very traditional Hallingdal festive dress and the national costume (Fig. 30). The kitchen workers, who also posed for the photographer, give a wonderful example of how the immigrants interpreted everyday Hallingdal dress (Fig. 31).

The *Hallinglag* was not the only one that featured traditions in dress from the home region at its meetings. Thor Ohme in writing about the first meeting of the *Hardangerlag* in 1911 says, "Next came the bridal party led by the toastmaster, fiddler, bride and groom; followed by about 50 people in Hardanger bunads . . . Everybody enjoys seeing the colorful costumes and I admire the ladies

Fig. 29. Group photo taken on Norway Day, Alaska Yukon Exposition. University of Washington, Seattle, 1909. The fact that approximately all 100 central figures are in Norwegian dress and that some have ribbons indicate that this might have been a costume competition. Most relate to the national costume, but tremendous variety is revealed. The prominence of a central bride and groom indicates that a wedding may have been the theme. Nordic Heritage Museum, Seattle, WA.

Fig. 30. Folk dancers at the annual meeting of an organization of immigrants from Hallingdal at Brooten, MN, June 22–24, 1911. The group includes both immigrants and visitors from Norway. The couple on the left are in the Hardanger costume, here probably representing the specific region of origin rather than Norway in general. Costumes from Hallingdal representing several types and periods in time are worn by the two other couples. John and Joyce Bohmer, Brooten, MN.

who keep up their bunads and proudly wear them."[15] The *Hardangerlag,* of course, was especially fortunate because the costume for its region had become the national costume that had long been widely used and was readily available.

As indicated by the quotation from Ohme, a distinctive feature of the *Hardangerlag* annual meetings was the celebration of a wedding, either a mock or an actual one, carried out in traditional Hardanger manner and with traditional dress. The bridal costume included an elaborate crown as well as other decorative elements and accessories reminiscent of the traditional wedding dress in the Hardanger region of Norway. The *Hardangerlag* organization owned this fanciful costume, which was altered throughout the years. It appeared in several photographs from the

Fig. 31. Kitchen workers wearing interpretations of festive and everyday Hallingdal folk dress at *Hallingstevne* at Brooten, MN, June 22–24, 1911. Plaid fabric and a bibbed apron on the woman in the center recall the everyday folk dress which was still being worn at this time in the district of Hallingdal. John and Joyce Bohmer, Brooten, MN.

1920s and 1930s, indicating the importance of the wedding to the Hardanger *bygdelag* (Fig. 32). It now is part of the collection at Vesterheim, the Norwegian-American Museum, in Decorah, Iowa, having been worn by many brides and having been the focus of many gatherings (120).

The Hardanger bride has long held an important place in the Norwegian imagination. In the Hardanger romanticism of the mid-19th century, the wedding is the major event, celebrated in poetry, song, painting, and tableaux. The crowned bride is the central figure. The ritual wedding of the *Hardangerlag* is only one immigrant manifestation of this Norwegian lore. A Norwegian-American photograph from 1915 documents that even the authentically dressed Hardanger bride doll, popular in Norway at least since the 1890s, was also cherished in America at a rather early date (Fig. 33).

In 1914, the first of several large Norwegian-American celebrations was planned. The occasion was the centennial of the signing of the Norwegian constitution. The recognition was not concentrated in one location as it would be for the next comparable occasion eleven years later, but divided among Norwegian-American communities all over the country. This provided a most appropriate opportunity for a public display of costume. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported that there were 5,000 participants in the parade there.[16] Photographs in Ingrid Semmingsen's book *Veien Mot Vest (The Way to the West)* show a children's parade, and a parade of dance groups in folk dress of varied design, most based on the national costume but also prominently featuring the man's costume of Telemark.[17] The women's and children's costumes reflect the influence of fashionable dress with skirts and aprons shorter in length than those seen in previous decades (Fig. 34).

Norwegian Americans in Minnesota celebrated the centennial with two processions crossing between Minneapolis and St. Paul; "Thousands of people lined the parade routes; the many colorful peasant costumes (bunader) made a great impression."[18] At this celebration so much enthusiasm for artifacts pertaining to Norway was generated that a proposal was discussed by *bygdelag* representatives to found a museum including "documents, domestic handicraft, clothing and costumes" in Minneapolis.[19] The proposal never was carried out as discussed, probably because a museum—ultimately to become Vesterheim—already existed at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. World War I was also about to begin, which rapidly changed national feeling concerning the display of ethnic origins. The anti-foreign sentiment

Fig. 32. Photograph from Ca. 1920 of wedding party at which the *Hardangerlag* bridal costume was worn. It had been made in 1912 by an immigrant in Hills, Minnesota, and was used for actual or mock weddings at the organization's annual meetings. All the women in the photograph wore the square cap of unmarried women as was often done in America, regardless of marital state. The Norwegian American Historical Association, Northfield, MN.

Fig. 33. Portrait of mother and child from Stoughton, Wisconsin, 1915. Prominence of the Hardanger bride in Norwegian and Norwegian-American romantic thought is evident from the doll in this picture. The mother's dress has a completeness and authenticity, even to the matron's headdress, that indicates it may represent true Hardanger folk tradition rather than being a national costume. Vesterheim, Norwegian-American Museum Archive, A. V. Eklund Collection.

served to censor dress as well as language. *Bygdelag* meetings continued to be held, but they were more subdued than before the war and were more a celebration of patriotism than of ethnic cultural life.

After the war, during the 1920s, there was a resurgence of interest in the *bygdelag* meetings and in ethnic origins in general. At a 1926 Halling reunion in Spring Grove, Minnesota, the cartoonist P. J. Rosendahl captured the spirit of the Halling costume in motion on dancers better than still photographs at the time could have done (Fig. 35). The men of Hallingdal were known for their use of knives, which are everywhere present, and for a dance which involved kicking a hat off a pole. Clearly, participants again donned their folk dress, which added enjoyment to the dancing, a regular activity at the meetings. Odd Lovoll's study of the *bygdelag* movement reports that in the 1920s the *bygdelag* organized displays of the handicraft of the old world, and gave prizes for the finest costumes.[20] Banquet-style photographs from *bygdelag* meetings of the time indicate the prominence of dress at these gatherings. A photograph of the *Vosselag* is typical, showing that if only a few of those attending the meeting were in costume they were usually placed in the front row or in the center of the photograph, as if to verify the authenticity of the group (Fig. 36).

Again in the 1920s a large-scale celebration became the focus of attention: the 1925 centennial celebration of the arrival in New York of the first organized shipload of immigrants from Norway. An exhibit portraying the heritage and development of the Norwegians in America through the century was planned. Families were asked to send examples of weaving, costume, jewelry, wood carving, and china either made in Norway or having Norwegian designs made by the Americans of Norwegian descent. The resulting catalog of exhibits is extensive, listing many costumes, such as that contributed by Mrs. B. Amundsen of Rochester, Minnesota, in the category of Arts, Crafts, Relics and Curios: "Hardanger Costume in Seven Pieces—Cap, Apron, Waist, Skirt, Belt, Beaded Vestee, Vest."[21] Throughout the catalog of the exhibit, English was used for items of Norwegian dress which do not necessarily have direct American counterparts. The use of this terminology makes it clear that the organizers of this exhibition began to have the wider American public rather than only their fellow Norwegians in mind. It was also intended for a new generation of Norwegian Americans, for whom the Norwegian language was losing its familiarity.

Norwegian dress also figured in other aspects of the centennial festivities. Tableaux of significant events in the history of Norwegian Americans and dance performances

Fig. 34. May 17 parade in Chicago, 1914. Young immigrant folk dancers in parade celebrating 100 years of Norway's constitution. The bunads are based on folk dress from Hardanger and Telemark. Norwegian Emigrant Museum, Hamar, Norway.

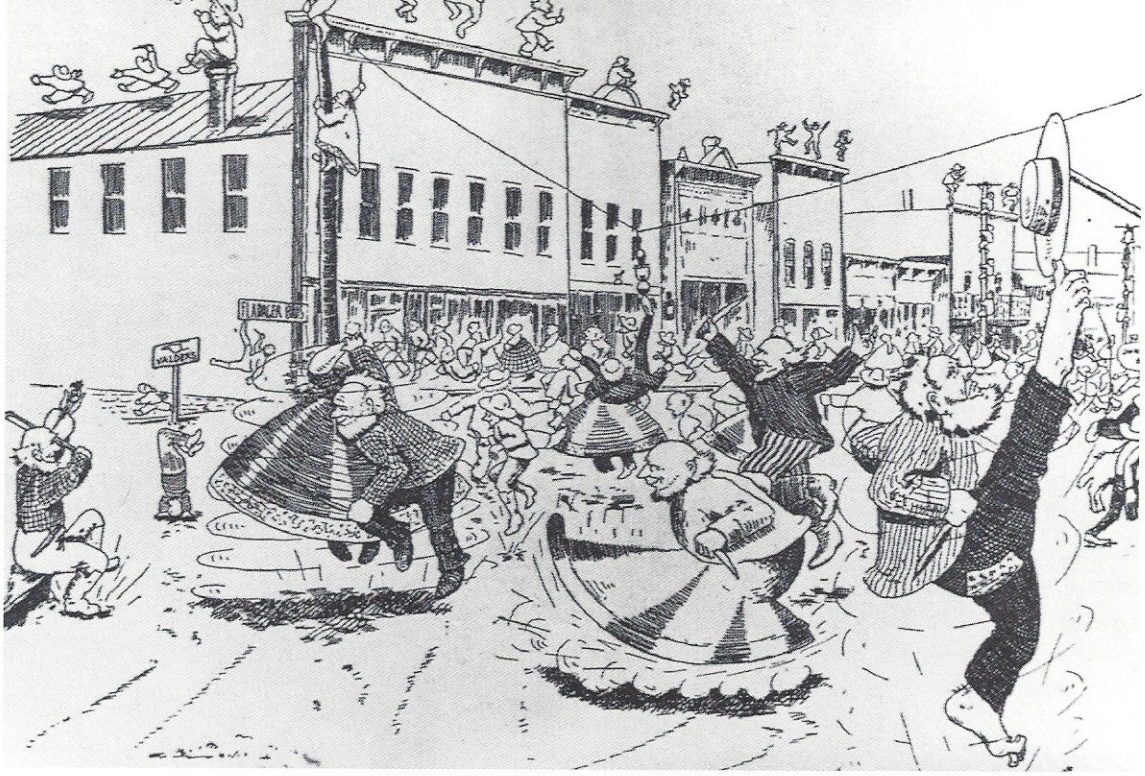

Fig. 35. Cartoon by P. J. Rosendahl in *Aarbok for Telelaget*, 1926. "A Hallinglag in Spring Grove, Minnesota." Famous for his cartoons in the Norwegian language newspaper *Decorah Posten*, Rosendahl saw the humor of his fellow immigrants' behavior in an American context. The colorful band at the bottom of the women's skirts, the knives in the hands of the men, and the acrobatic nature of the dance were enough to identify these people as from Hallingdal to the artist's immigrant audience. Norwegian American Historical Association, Northfield, MN.

Fig. 36. Detail of group photograph of *Vosselaget* Ca. 1927. Folk dress in Voss was near that of neighboring Hardanger. The prevalence of the proper matrons' headdresses and their contrast to the fashionable hats is striking here. The elaborate flat bridal headdress of Voss worn by the central figure indicates that wedding romanticism also played a part in this organization as it did in the *Hardangerlag.* Norwegian American Historical Association. Northfield, MN.

all required some version of Norwegian dress. Tableaux listed in the program include "Landing of Leif Eriksson, the discoverer of America, in the year 1000," which photographs indicate was done in Viking-age dress, and "Arrival of first immigrants from Norway in New York, in the year 1825."[22] No photographs of this tableau have been uncovered, but the costuming was undoubtedly quite fanciful. Photographs of the dancers at the event indicated that the costumes were of recent origin, conforming in shape with the 1920s tubular silhouette instead of the hourglass silhouette of turn-of-the-century bunads. There were at least two distinct types of Norwegian dress used by the dance group: the 1920s version of the national costume, and the bunad of West Telemark.

The 1930s saw the gradual decline of *bygdelag* activity, although not the end. The interest in domestic arts and handicrafts in the 1930s prolonged the practice of the needle arts necessary for producing the national costume and bunads. Serious collectors such as Martha Brye brought fine examples of Norwegian handicraft to America.[23] Descending from a Hallingdal family, she purchased a bunad of Hulda Garborg type from that area when traveling in Norway. She wore it for a professional photograph about 1927 and for special events, including the Brye family centennial celebration. She also wore it when exhibiting her collection of Norwegian folk art or speaking to church and college groups about Norwegian culture.

World War II in the 1940s brought another reaction against the visible display of ethnic origin in America; however, because of Norway's occupation by Germany, Norwegian heritage was not as censored as that of some other nations. Photographs from the 1940s of guides at Little Norway, Blue Mounds, Wisconsin, indicate the continued use of dress there to reinforce the Norwegian identity of this private museum in the eyes of visitors. The man's costume is an interesting blend of romantic notions relating to European heritage (Fig. 37). The basic form is not Norwegian, but reflects German-Swiss dress, probably because of the strength of these nationalities in the surrounding area of Wisconsin. Just as Norwegian-American fiddling became mixed with the Irish and the Swiss, dress has in this case revealed the same flexibility.

In the decades since World War II, use of the national costume has declined but use of the bunad has increased in America. Norwegian dress is seen primarily in the public forums of *bygdelag* meetings, Sons of Norway meetings, and community festivals that celebrate America's immigrant heritage. The Sons of Norway organization, which was begun in 1895 as a mutual-support organization, has become international and is accessible to Norwegians on both sides of the Atlantic. The wearing of costumes to special Sons of Norway functions is now a common practice.

The 1960s and 1970s again introduced a period of increased travel with the availability of inexpensive charter flights sponsored by ethnic organizations. Second, third, and fourth generation Norwegian Americans made their first visits to Norway, went to family farms, and learned about the early folk dress and bunads worn in the districts of their origin. The result was a resurgence of interest in bunads that signified regional background and in compliance with sanctioned models. The time of fanciful reconstructions of traditional Norwegian folk dress is disappearing. For Norwegian Americans who do not know what region in Norway their ancestors came from, the na-

Fig. 37. Guide at Little Norway in a free interpretation of Norwegian dress that incorporates Swiss and German characteristics drawn from the strong presence of people with these backgrounds in the area. The mixing is more typical in other areas of immigrant culture, such as folk music, than in dress. Blue Mounds, Wisconsin, August, 1942. Photographer: Arthur Rothstein for U. S. Office of War Information. Library of Congress, Neg. number LC–USW 3–6418.

tional costume is still the obvious choice. But even here there is greater concern than in the past with having it relate as much as possible to the original folk dress of Hardanger from which it derived.

The number of Norwegian Americans who own full regional or national regalia is undoubtedly now greater than ever before, but it is still small compared to those who display their ethnic origin through wearing a quality Norwegian sweater or simply a *sølje,* the brooch that is a basic part of the bunad in most regions. For today's casual lifestyle in America, these are easier to adopt than the entire formal national costume or bunad. Even a sweat shirt with silk-screened rosemaling or a T-shirt with a humorous quip such as "You can always tell a Norwegian but you can't tell him much" will suffice to give the wearer a feeling of kinship with a group and distinctiveness from people outside it.

As has been the case since immigration, regardless of what form it takes, Norwegian Americans derive a sense of connection with their ultimate place of origin through symbolic dress. Dress also conveys a sense of pride in their ancestry and of solidarity with other Norwegian Americans. These are very public things whether exhibited within or outside the group, something that has typified the use of Norwegian dress among the immigrants from an early point. The association with rites of passage relating to the individual—such as baptism, confirmation and marriage—that it retains to a degree in Norway has all but disappeared on this side of the Atlantic.

1. Kjersti Skavhaug, *Norwegian Bunads* (Oslo, 1982), 17.
2. Hulda Garborg, *Norsk Klædebunad* (Kristiania, 1903 and 1917).
3. Aagot Noss, *Nærbilete av ein Draktskikk* (Oslo, 1993), 295.
4. Skavhaug, *Norwegian Bunads,* 9–12.
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CAROL COLBURN is Associate Professor, Theater Costume Design, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa.