



Chicago Sons of Norway *Torske Klub*

Organized 1960



Remembering Alfred Newgard

by Robert Alsaker

I first met Alfred Newgard on a snowy, windy night at Norway Center in Logan Square. That was back in December 1973.

I went to Norway Center, then out of curiosity, because I had seen a sign earlier that week that said "Dinner, Friday night" while on the way home from picking up a lost order of Christmas cards from a printer somewhere on Fullerton Ave. That night it was freezing cold outside and not much warmer inside Norway Center, until I climbed the stairs, pulled back the curtains and stepped into that lovely, warm room with the magnificent roaring fireplace, the Peisestua.

However, no one was there. The room was deserted! I was the only person at Norway Center for dinner that evening!

Wandering back into the Bar, I met two people, Gina Hansen, the waitress that night and Alfred Newgard. I asked about Dinner. "Why sure," Alfred said. "What do you have?" He replied, "Meatballs... but they're Norwegian meatballs!" Later in the evening after dinner, Alfred introduced me to that most cherished part of our Norwegian heritage... Linie Aquavit! And thus began one of my most influential associations.

Alfred, who had been born in Hokksund, Norway had recently retired as a Tool and Die maker and was just starting as the volunteer Manager of Norway Center. He explained that Bjornstjerne Bjornson Lodge #97, Sons of Norway had purchased The Chicago Norske Klub in 1971. The Norske Klub, built it 1917, had declared bankruptcy because of a lawsuit brought against the organization by a laborer who had lost a finger in a fan while doing some repair work for the Klub. The Klub had let its liability insurance lapse and was forced into bankruptcy.

B.B. Lodge had purchased the Norske Klub for approximately \$ 75,000. They had taken out a \$35,000 mortgage on the property and had inherited about \$17,000 of debt in outstanding bonds from the now defunct Norske Klub. Principally, five families held the bonds: the Highlands, HARRS, Pedersens, Hansens and the Alterns. Interest on the bonds, I believe at 7%, had not been paid for at least 10 years. In addition, Norway Center was losing \$25,000 a year on operations and now had an accumulative operating deficit in excess of \$50,000 over and above the aforementioned liabilities.



Alfred Newgard. 1905 - 2002.



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After dinner and a couple of Aquavits, Alfred looked me straight in the eye and said, "You should get involved, we want to keep this place!"

A week or two later, Alfred introduced me to Irving Highland, our longtime former Torske Klub Boss, who had arranged the sale of the Norske Klub to B.B. Lodge. He stated that the bondholders were getting restless but.... he added, "If you take over B.B. Lodge and Alfred agrees to run the place, we'll keep our money in!" Wow, what a deal!! How could we refuse!! It was very difficult to say "no" to Irving Highland.

One of the first things we did was to change the B.B. Lodge meetings from Wednesday evenings to Fridays, which greatly increased attendance (read bar revenues). We aggressively pursued other Norwegian organizations to use and meet at Norway Center. An annual fundraising drive was started which brought in thousands of dollars over the years. We held Halloween costume parties, Christmas and Spring Bazaar's, New Year's Eve and Valentine's Day Parties. Cross country ski afternoons at Waveland Golf Course, then back to Norway Center for Birgit Gusfre's Lapskaus, were special treats.

In order to stop the cash flow hemorrhage, Alfred immediately put a sign on Norway Center, "Hall for Rent." Within a year Alfred was generating \$25,000 a year from weddings, cotillions (!) and other celebratory occasions. These rentals came from

the surrounding neighborhood and would occur mostly on weekends and last until 2 or 3am. Alfred would hire off-duty policeman and arrange Boulevard parking with the Shakespeare Station. Afterward, he and his son Bob, would clean up the mess left. Alfred did all this and was at every one of these events for the next 10 years. The revenues from these rentals covered Norway Center's fixed operating expenses.

Things did not always run smoothly at these parties. On occasions the surrounding neighbors became upset with the disorderly conduct of some of the partygoers. This resulted in several meetings with the local Aldermen that Alfred finessed with considerable charm.

Alfred instituted the Sunday afternoon Smorgasbord's that became a huge success and were profitable. He hired and paid the kitchen staff, waitresses, bartenders, musicians and other personal as needed. He bought all the food for these events, picked it up and hauled it into Norway Center himself.

Often, Alfred would sleep at Norway Center for a few hours after cleaning up from a "cotillion" the previous night, before getting up early in the morning to buy the food for Torske Klub. On Saturdays when Torske Klub met at Norway Center, Alfred was down at the Randolph Street market at 5 am buying potatoes and carrots. Then he would swing by Ericsson's in Andersonville to pick up fresh Torsk and bring it all back to Norway Center's kitchen. Barney Jacobsen would then prepare and cook the fish, have it upstairs on platters, wrapped in cloth napkins and ready to serve at 1pm. Throughout all of this, Alfred somehow never forgot to start soaking the yellow peas on Friday afternoons for our Ertesuppe!



Herremiddag, December 1981: Rob Alsaker, Alfred Newgard and Irving Highland (from left).

Over the years, Alfred hosted many distinguished events at Norway Center and often received compliments on both the operations and food from his appreciative guests. The Norwegian Consul General's Syttende Mai parties, Icelandic Consul's events and a myriad of other functions under Alfred's direction all contributed to the financial success of Norway Center. By 1982, Norway Center's operations had become so successful that the accumulative deficit had been eliminated and the mortgage retired. In addition, building improvements had been made (the oil- fired boiler was converted to gas) and other maintenance and re-decorating had been accomplished. Irving Gunderson painted the Peisestua ceiling; Reidar Rosenvinge painted the downstairs and held Saturday morning Rosemaling classes in the Ballroom.

It was a joyous Sunday afternoon indeed when at a Smorgesbrod, Alfred, Irving and I held a mortgage burning ceremony. The Champagne corks popped as Irv threw the burning mortgage papers into the fireplace. The Lodge held an appreciation party in honor of Alfred and recognized his many contributions. He retired shortly thereafter and I, because of increased work demands, retired as Lodge President and Board Chairman of Norway Center. When we left in 1984, Norway Center was free and clear.

Alfred, besides being a valued business partner became a warm and cherished friend. He shared his enthusiasm for cross-country skiing and his love for the outdoors. Golf was dear to his heart. When Torske Klub moved to SAC'S because of increasing problems with the new management of Norway Center, Alfred for years would drive up to our house and then I would drive us both to Torske Klub. This was always fun because during these trips we were able to solve all the world's problems and spend most of the time laughing about it.

We were both deeply disappointed when we learned that by 1988 Norway Center was again back in debt, this time so much so that it forced the sale of the building. Alfred and I never stopped talking about the fun we had had making it all work at Norway Center. It was a great experience for both of us.

Alfred Newgard was a wonderful, hard-working man who loved his adopted country but above all else loved his family, his grandchildren, his friends and Torske Klub. He will be greatly missed.



Founding Torske Klub Members and good friends: Barney Jacobsen, Alfred Newgard



Norway Center Mortgage Burning Ceremony: Irving Highland, Inge Hansen, Rob Alsaker.

