

“Everyone is Norwegian on the Seventeenth of May”

The Celebration of May 17th in Seattle 1945-2009



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1 INTRODUCTION

People who did not expect that the Norwegian Constitution Day could be celebrated anywhere but back home in Norway, were pleasantly surprised. Those who have spent most their 17th of Mays here in America, were yet again glad to be Norwegian.¹

Around the 17th of May, everyone is a little norsk. May 17th is an all day commemoration of freedom, family and friends.²

This thesis examines the celebration of the Norwegian Constitution Day, May 17th in Seattle from 1945 to 2009. The event has been staged without interruption by Norwegian Americans since 1889 and has developed into being one of the major celebrations of 17th May outside Norway. In contrast to the rural Midwest, where immigration stagnated after the last large wave of migration in the 1920s, Seattle and other urban areas experienced an influx of new immigrants after the Second World War.³ The festival blossomed after 1945, which is the starting point of this thesis. At the same time, the rural celebrations across America were discontinued.⁴ Celebration of the Norwegian Constitution Day on such a large scale then became relatively unique to Seattle.⁵

In the earliest part of the period under investigation, Norwegian Americans instigated an indoor celebration consisting of a patriotic program, speeches and dinner, relevant primarily for the Norwegian American community. From the 1970s, a revived ethnic awareness caused celebration to widen and embrace more of the general American population, as ethnic pluralism gradually became characteristic of American public life. In 1974, the celebration of the Norwegian Constitution Day transferred to the Ballard area,⁶ where the main part of the festivity was the *parade*, which incorporated both Norwegian and American cultural elements. At first glance, it may seem that the celebration developed from an exclusive into a more inclusive event as American elements were added. The celebration

¹ *Washington Posten* May 25, 1951, page 2.

² *Western Viking* May 7, 1999, page 13.

³ Lovoll, Odd *The Promise of America*. Minneapolis 1999:334.

⁴ Lovoll, Odd "The Changing role of May 17th as a Key Symbol." in Hovland, Britt and Olaf Aagedal (eds.) *Nasjonaldagsfeiring i fleirkulturelle demokrati*. Århus.2001: 75.

⁵ Other large cities with a strong Norwegian American community have also maintained celebrations, such as New York (Brooklyn), Chicago and Minneapolis.

⁶ A neighborhood northwest of Seattle, annexed by Seattle in 1907. Many Scandinavians and Norwegians settled in the area of Ballard, and the area has been considered to be the Scandinavian part of Seattle. The settlement and development of Ballard is discussed in chapter 2.

seemed to become more Americanized but at the same time it was argued that the Norwegian aspects were as important as ever.

Approaches and Research Questions

The aim of this thesis may be summarized in the following research question:

- Why have Norwegian descendants in Seattle maintained the tradition of celebrating the Norwegian Constitution Day in America?

In order to address this, a number of underlying questions need to be posed:

- To what extent has the celebration been an expression of attachment to Norway and an ethnic nationalism?
- What concepts of the Norwegian and American nation and Norwegian ethnicity are expressed by the Norwegian Americans who celebrate the Norwegian Constitution Day?
- *How* have Norwegian and American national symbols been used and interpreted in the festival?
- What has been the function of the celebration?

The question will be outlined by looking at *how* the celebrations have been organized, and how they have been described and interpreted by celebrants. The first three sub questions are related to the celebration, whereas the fourth sub question and the main question describe overarching aspects of the celebration. The research question will be addressed at both a macro and a micro level. At the macro level, I will analyze *what* has been important to the principal ethnic forums involved, such as the local Norwegian American newspaper and the 17th of May Committee.

At the micro level, I will approach the celebration through an analysis of interviews and newspaper commentaries to understand what celebration means to different participants and how it functions to help foster and maintain an ethnic identity.⁷ In combining macro and micro analyses, the intention is to widen the perspectives and provide a deeper, more thorough understanding of continuity and change in the festival's *function* and *meaning*.

The approach in this thesis contains anthropological elements applied in an historical context; through the study of the *ritual*. Other key concepts are *symbols*, *nation* and *ethnicity*.⁸ The study of ritual and participating observation are more frequently employed in

⁷ A thorough discussion of the nation, nationalism and ethnicity will follow later in this chapter.

⁸ These concepts will be described and put into a theoretical framework later in this chapter.

anthropology, but as a supplementary method to analyzing an event from an historical point of view, they are very suitable.

This study covers several decades. There is little noticeable change from one year to another; changes can mostly be observed as trends over time. Because of this large degree of stability, it has been necessary to consider events over a long period of time. The process that I have investigated is not finished, and is still in development.

In this chapter I will consider previous research in the field and describe a theoretical framework for the approach used in this thesis.

Why Study National Celebrations beyond the Country of Origin?

In her MA thesis on the Norwegian Constitution Day, Gunhild Aaby argues that national celebrations lend themselves well to understanding a nation. Because the whole day of celebration revolves around nationality, perspectives and sentiments about the nation are most likely to be expressed on that day rather than any other occasion.⁹ The day is loaded with symbols and takes a recognized form. By investigating differences in time and place, it is possible to consider changing views of what the nation means and represents in an historical context.

I would suggest that this also could be applied for immigrant or ethnic minority public celebrations held in adopted lands.¹⁰ The celebration of Norwegian Constitution Day offers an arena in which the complex attitudes and sentiments of an immigrant community towards both the mother nation and the adopted country can be explored.

Given that the Norwegian Constitution celebration has had a long and uninterrupted history in Seattle, it offers to be a suitable arena for researching Norwegian Americans' concepts of nationhood and ethnicity. The *symbols* and how the immigrant or ethnic group chooses to celebrate could be expected to demonstrate which aspects of the country of origin and destination that the community values most.

Why Norwegian Americans in Seattle?

The long and continuous celebration of May 17th in Seattle, as well as the possibility to acquire primary sources on the celebration, contributed to the choice of Seattle as the scene of analysis. Norwegian migration to Seattle is as old as the city; and the Norwegian community has been notable since the late 1800s.¹¹ The state of Washington ranks fourth in the number of

⁹ Aaby, Gunhild *Kampen om Nasjonaldøgnet*. Universitetet i Oslo 1997.

¹⁰ A discussion of the terms *immigrant* and *ethnic* will follow later in this chapter.

¹¹ The history of migration to Seattle is discussed in chapter 2.

people of Norwegian ancestry.¹² The presences of Norwegian American institutions have been strong. Since 1889, the newspaper *Washington Posten*, continued as *Western Viking* in 1961 and *Norwegian American Weekly* in 2006, have been published. The celebration of the Norwegian Constitution Day was also initially arranged in 1889. The *Scandinavian Department* of the *University of Washington* have existed since 1909, and the *Nordic Heritage Museum* was founded in 1982.¹³ Despite a continuous presence of Norwegian American institutions, not much historical material is written. On the other hand, these institutions have produced a large amount of primary sources that could be applied in the writing of an historical thesis.

The period from 1945 to 2009 was chosen as I expected 1945 to be a peak of ethnic sentiment due to the liberation of Norway in 1945. I chose to end the thesis in 2009, which made it possible to attend a celebration, and include participating observation and interviews.

An Historical Outline of Norwegian May 17th

The celebration of May 17 has been dealt with as part of broader historical studies, but has less frequently been at a focus.¹⁴ Immigrants' national celebration of country of origin has been analyzed to an even lesser extent.

In Norway, the traditional emphasis has been on the celebration as part of nation building, in which the nation decides which aspects of its culture are central to its identity. Following the creation of the Norwegian Constitution in 1814, nation building has been central in the development of a Norwegian national history; nation building has both been a

¹² Washington ranked number four after North Dakota, Minnesota and Wisconsin according to the 1990 Census. See Lovoll 1999: 305.

¹³ *The Nordic Heritage Museum Journal*, founded in 2005, publishes articles that highlight different aspects of the Nordic population in Seattle, which have provided interesting background information for this thesis. Of particular interest for this thesis is Knudsen, Alf. "Male Chorus Singing" in *Nordic Heritage Museum Historic Journal*. Winter/Spring 2007. Vol 3. No 3. Pp 41-63, Kvamme, Olaf. "Nordic Language Churches during Washington's Territorial Period" in *Nordic Heritage Museum Historic Journal*. Spring/Summer 2005. Vol.1 No 1. Pp. 21-38 and Westerberg, Norm. "A Profile of Nordic Americans. In the Light of US Census Numbers" in *Nordic Heritage Museum Historic Journal*. Winter 2006. Vol 2. No 1.

¹⁴ Three master theses on national celebrations have been written at the University of Oslo prior to 2010. Aaby:1997 as well as Bjørgen, Hildegunn *17.mai feiring som politisk redskap? En studie av nasjonaldagsfeiringen i Kristiania 1879-1905*. KULT skriftserie. Oslo 1997 and Thorsen, Arve. *Tuflåt. To nasjonaldager. Et komparativt nasjonalismebarometer*. KULT Skriftserie. Oslo 1997. The interdisciplinary collection of articles *Nasjonaldagsfeiring i fleirkulturelle demokrati* approaches national celebrations in multicultural environments. See Hovland, Britt Marie and Olaf Aagedal. (eds) *Nasjonaldagsfeiring i fleirkulturelle demokrati*. Århus 2001.

topic for historical research, and at the same time the writing of history has also contributed to building a national identity.¹⁵

One of the main ideas in nation building is to strengthen the sense of belonging to a national community. Through the celebration of May 17th, which has been an annual phenomenon since the late 1820s, a national identity has been communicated.¹⁶

The Norwegian Constitution Day has been an arena to express the political dimension of the nation, with full independence in 1905 triggering celebrations both in Norway and Norwegian America.¹⁷ There has been a debate in Norway as to whether immigrants can join the celebrations, and to what extent. When the Constitution Day was initially declared an official holiday in 1947 in Norway, the aim was that the children's parade should include all children who attended Norwegian schools. This debate peaked in the 1983, after *Sagene* School experienced racial threats for including the second generation immigrants in the parade.¹⁸ The choice of Rubina Rana as leader of the 17th of May committee in Oslo in 1999 was also symbolic of immigrants' participation in the larger Norwegian community.¹⁹ Since 2008, there has been some controversy about whether to include other national flags in the celebration. These aspects illustrate that the debate is both historical and current.

An Historical Outline of the Focus of Migration History

Migration has been a continuous phenomenon in the United States for centuries and the development of immigrant communities has been characteristic of American life. Since the 1970s, Norway itself has been a country of net immigration rather than emigration.

Migration history has traditionally focused on immigration through the lenses of the country of destination; the focus is the immigrants' impact on, and contribution to, their new

¹⁵ Øystein Sørensen understands the nation building process as part of the construction of a national identity in Norway, which he considers to be a combination of elements, selected or in extreme cases fabricated, to serve a particular interpretation. However, Sørensen considers the nation building elite more diverse than in other European nations, which made the nation building process prone to tension and opposition; there were several competing projects. He makes a distinction between different projects, in which historians had leading roles. One of the first projects was fronted by Peter Andreas Munch, who wanted to put national history at the core of Norwegian culture through a study of Norwegian history and culture since the Middle Ages. With Rudolf Keyser, he formulated a theory of Norwegian origin. For a further outline of the projects, see Sørensen, Øystein "Hegemonikamp om det norske. Elitens nasjonsbyggingsprosjekter 1770-1945" in Sørensen, Øystein. (ed) *Jakten på det norske. Perspektiver på utviklingen av en norsk nasjonal identitet på 1800-tallet*. Oslo 1998. Pp 17-48.

¹⁶ For a short historical outline of the celebration in its initial years, see Bjørgen 1998:16-18.

¹⁷ Aaby 1997 has analyzed the celebration of May 17th in Kristiania 1906-1925. She shows that there were parallel celebrations of the day, depending on political affiliations. The Labor movement arranged its own celebration in the decades that followed independence from Sweden in 1905. In this manner, the celebration served a political goal. For a description of the role of May 17th in Norwegian American communities, see Lovøll 2001.

¹⁸ Bjørgen, Hildegunn and Britt Marie Hovland. "I takt med nasjonen. –Den nasjonale paraden gjennom historia" in Hovland, Britt Marie and Olaf Aagedal. (eds) *Nasjonaldagsfeiring i fleirkulturelle demokrati*. Århus 2001:49.

¹⁹ Bjørgen and Hovland 2001:51.

homeland. In contrast, how cultural characteristics from the nation of origin have been developed through the early years of settlement through to following generations has received less attention. With regard to Norwegian Americans specifically, Norwegian research has traditionally emphasized the motivation for leaving and the process of *emigration*,²⁰ whereas American research stressed the process of *immigration* and *adaptation* to American culture. In the first case the emphasis has been the impact of migration on Norway and in the latter the migrants' contribution to American national history. From the 1960s and 70s, a new *ethnic perspective* appeared in American research.²¹ This could be considered a consequence of a historiographical tendency towards including forgotten minorities, as well a revived American focus on ethnic diversity.²²

Immigrant? Ethnic? Definition

After a number of years or even more so after several generations of settlement, the label *immigrant* may seem misleading. I have chosen to differentiate between Norwegian American *immigrants* and Norwegian Americans as an *ethnic* group. An *immigrant* is born in another country, and has emigrated first hand. Accordingly, the person would be a *first generation* Norwegian immigrant. In this thesis, the term *immigrant* refers to a person who has lived in his or her new country of residence for a relatively short period of time. An *immigrant group* is consequently made up of people who have arrived in the new country quite recently. The *immigrant's children* are for instance second generation Norwegian; the next generation third generation Norwegian.²³ After one or two generations, this group changes character to form an *ethnic* group. The ethnic group maintains an interest in the culture of origin, but has developed outside the country of origin. The term *ethnic group* is the most frequently applied term in American research for people who identify with peers having the same national origin. Consequently, I have chosen to use the same notion, and apply the term *the Norwegian ethnic*

²⁰ The historic study of emigration has been a recognized field since the 1930s, led by historians such as Ingrid Semmingsen. See for instance Semmingsen, Ingrid *Veien mot vest*. Oslo 1941.

²¹ This is my own description. The shift in ethnicity has been described and understood differently, and I chose to describe increased ethnic focus as a new *perspective* to have a neutral approach to the different conceptions of ethnicity. See chapter 4, *Ethnic Revival or Symbolic Ethnicity?*

²² This should be considered part of the ethnic perspective, in which the history of ethnic groups becomes increasingly emphasized. In addition, the 1970s heralded an era in historiography which emphasized forgotten minorities more than the history of the ruling class. See Iggers, Georg G. *Historiography in the twentieth Century. From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge*. 2005: 98

²³ I use the term second generation for people with at least one parent born in Norway. Third generation refers to a person having one or more grandparents born in Norway. The emphasis on Norwegian culture is dependent on individual choice and self-image as a Norwegian American.

group of Seattle; which should be considered related, but not equal to an ethnic understanding of the *nation*.²⁴

A third generation Norwegian American will not necessarily be a part of the Norwegian *ethnic* group in America, if that person is not involved in an ethnic community and does not identify as ethnic. An ethnic *community* and ethnic *identity* are two different entities. The community has a physical manifestation, for instance in housing or organizations. Ethnic identity merely refers to the concept of *feeling* ethnic.²⁵

Previous Research

The most relevant fields of earlier research for this thesis are the history of the Norwegian American community in Seattle and that of Norwegian Constitution Day, both in Norway and Norwegian America.

Odd Lovoll has given a thorough historical outline of the Norwegian American community in general. *The promise of America* includes an examination of Norwegian immigration to Seattle, whereas *The Promise Fulfilled* contains a contemporary portrait of Norwegian America communities, including that in Seattle.²⁶ Lovoll presents the development of Norwegian American newspapers in *Norwegian Newspapers in America: connecting Norway and the New Land*.²⁷ These works all outline the object of study, Norwegian Americans in Seattle, as well as the function of one of the study's primary sources, the Norwegian American newspaper. In addition, Lovoll's article *The change of 17th of May as a Key Symbol* outlines the historical role of 17th of May for Norwegian American identity; a similar approach as this thesis aims at.²⁸

Jorgen Daehlie's and Patsy Adams Hegstad's doctoral theses in History on Scandinavian immigration and naturalization respectively, have supplied useful background information about Seattle's Norwegian American community.²⁹ Daehlie in particular touches

²⁴ I will describe the term nation later in this chapter.

²⁵ These aspects are the focus of Gans, Herbert "Symbolic Ethnicity: The future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America" (1979) in Sollors, Werner (ed) *Theories of Ethnicity: A Classical Reader*. London 1996. Pp. 425-459. and Richard Alba. *Ethnic Identity. The Transformation of White America*. New Haven 1990.

²⁶ Lovoll 1999 and Lovoll, Odd *The Promise Fulfilled: a Portrait of Norwegian Americans today*. Minneapolis 1998a.

²⁷ Lovoll 2010.

²⁸ See Lovoll 2001: 65-78.

²⁹ Daehlie, Jorgen *A social History of Scandinavians in Washington State*. Washington State University 1967. Hegstad, Patsy Adams. *Citizenship, Voting and Immigrants; a Comparative Study of the Naturalization Propensity and Voter Registration of Nordics in Seattle and Ballard, Washington 1892-1900*. University of Washington, Seattle 1982 .

upon the early celebration of May 17th, as does Camilla Rokstad's MA thesis on the celebration of Christmas and May 17th in Seattle 1885-1920.³⁰

April Schulz in *Ethnicity on Parade* analyzes the celebration of May 17th in the twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul in 1925, at a time when xenophobia, tighter immigration laws and greater assimilation pressures characterized American society. At this time, a well organized celebration served an important function in showing the American public that Norwegian Americans were "better" Americans.³¹ Kathleen Conzen outlines the German American participation in American parades in the nineteenth century as a means to enter American public life. She argues that their parade participation made the American public aware that they were well organized.³² In addition, the arrangement of their own ethnic events fuelled the creation a collective identity; which Conzen argues could later serve to invent what later generations would label an *ethnic identity*.³³

As an outlines of more contemporary development, three MA theses touch upon relevant aspects for this thesis. Terje Garvik's thesis on the *Karmøy Club of Washington*, founded in 1991, also describes association's participation in the 17th of May parades.³⁴ Heather Short has examined the use of costumes in the celebration of the Norwegian Constitution Day in Seattle.³⁵ Elisabeth Drøyer has analyzed the role of ethnic community in Chicago 1945-1995. Her assumptions is that the spread over a larger geographical area contributed to a decline in ethnic institutions, and that ethnic awareness became an individual more than an collective or institutional matter.³⁶

As regard to the Norwegian 17th of May, *Nasjonaldagsfeiring i fleirkulturelle demokrati*, edited by the sociologist Olaf Aagedal and historian Britt Marie Hovland, examines the celebration of Nordic national celebrations. This anthology takes an approach similar to this thesis; to study the ritual and symbolic dimensions of May 17th in a multicultural population. The articles highlight different aspects of national celebration; their

³⁰Rokstad, Camilla. *Bringing Home to America: The significance of Holiday Traditions in the Establishment of a Norwegian-American ethnic Identity in Seattle, 1880-1930*. Master's thesis submitted to the Department of English Norwegian University of Science and Technology. Trondheim, 2006 Rokstad 2006.

³¹Schulz, April R. *Ethnicity on Parade. Inventing the Norwegian American through Celebration*. Amherst. 1994.

³²Conzen, Kathleen. "Ethnicity as Festive Culture. Nineteenth Century German America on Parade" in Sollors, Werned (ed) *The Invention of Ethnicity*. New York 1989.

³³Conzen 1989:58. Conzen applies the constructivist approach, which will be outlined in the section *Invented Traditions*.

³⁴See Garvik, Terje. *The Karmøy Club of Washington*. Universitetet i Oslo. 2006

³⁵Heather Short. *Nordic Nostalgia and Nationalism: Performance of Norwegian Ethnic identity in Seattle*. University of Washington. Seattle. 2009. Short refers both to the use of traditional *bunads* as well as Viking costumes and club t-shirts.

³⁶Drøyer, Elisabeth. *Norwegian Americans in Chicago, 1945-1995. From Ethnic Community towards Privatized Ethnicity*. University of Oslo. 1998.

historic purposes, and how the 17th of May has changed its focus from being merely ethnic Norwegian to include Norwegians of other ethnic backgrounds. The description of the 17th of May celebration in *Nasjonaldagsfeiring i fleirkulturelle demokrati* shows how this ritual slowly changed character in accordance with general attitudes in society.³⁷

A Theoretical Approach

In the following, I will apply a theoretical framework for the recurring concepts such as *ritual*, *symbol*, *nation* and *ethnicity* and explain how they are used in the thesis.

Ritual –an Anthropological Approach?

Norwegian 17th of May, like other national celebrations, contains a strong element of ritual; a phenomenon frequently studied in Social Anthropology. Ritual can be defined as “any practice or pattern of behavior performed in a set manner.”³⁸ The act is repetitive; it may mark a daily routine or a festivity, and function in both religious and cultural practices. The ritual involves action; it is *performed* by its participants. Rituals and their elements are conservative by nature; they change slowly, but when they do, the transition may communicate development both within the particular group and in relation to society at large. In so matter, they offer an approach to understand a certain culture.

The significance of rituals is a recurring theme in anthropological research. As a novice in the field, I have cited some researchers that all offer relevant approaches to studying immigrant celebrations in an historical context. More specifically they offer perspectives to understand the ritual’s *function* and *meaning*. The function should be the purpose and the *social contribution* of the ritual. The meaning is the subjective understanding of the ritual. It can be found at a micro or macro level, being the significance for an individual or a group respectively. The ritual is not just an act, but also contains meaning for both its participants as well as its spectators.

Clifford Geertz is preoccupied with the ritual’s significance for its participants. His classic example is the role of cockfighting in Balinese culture. The cockfights involve status, relationships and money. The higher the bet, the more important the game. The cockfight functions as a lens through which the anthropologist can analyse the culture. Geertz distinguishes between *deep* and *shallow* play. The *deep play* involves a lot of prestige and money, the participants being deeply involved in these games. By contrast, in *shallow* games, neither the best cocks nor large bets are involved. The players are mainly participants who

³⁷ Hovland and Aagedal 2001.

³⁸ www.dictionary.com/browse/ritual.

have a more distant position to the ritual; women, children, the poor or socially despised.³⁹ The deep players are too proud to associate with these. Geertz argues that the deep play perspective carries most interest, as these participants will have a deeper understanding of the symbolic.⁴⁰ Contrary to this, Bruce Kapferer argues that the participants who are deeply involved in the ritual may struggle to see its significance. His argument is that spectators are better equipped to see the symbols and significance, due to their outsider perspective.⁴¹ My own comment to the debate is that they both suggest one “true” meaning, while they are really offering two different perspectives. Still, the approach may be relevant to understanding the celebration, depending on the role in the ritual as organizer, participant or spectator accordingly.

Victor Turner approaches ritual with the same goal; as a means to increase the understanding of a certain society. One of his main themes is *rites de passage*, rituals that symbolize a development from one stage to another. In the example of the ritual of confirmation the formal act marks the transition between childhood and adulthood. Prior to confirmation, the person is in a state *liminality* or *betwixt and between* two stages: neither a child nor an adult.⁴² If we allow us the use of Turner’s approach to immigrant groups, they may be considered *betwixt and between* their old and new national cultures, before establishing an *ethnic* culture. In the state of liminality a bond which he labels *communitas* occurs. *Communitas* should be understood as an intense feeling of group cohesion. Turner emphasizes that *communitas* is not restricted to the phase of liminality, and he distinguishes between *normative communitas*, which takes place within a *permanent* state of a group, and *spontaneous communitas*, which occurs in specific situation.⁴³ An ethnic enclave could represent a permanent *communitas*, whereas ethnic identity that is merely linked with festive occasions could be an example of a more spontaneous *communitas*.

The mutual identity aspect in Turner’s *communitas* has points of resemblance with Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*. Anderson’s reference is to national communities. Even though the members of the nation do not know each other personally, they share language, culture and tradition which contribute to a feeling of group cohesion.⁴⁴ The

³⁹ Geertz, Clifford. *The interpretation of Cultures*. New York. 1973:431-2.

⁴⁰ Geertz 1973: 441.

⁴¹ Kapferer’s theory is based on the study of Singalesian extinction of demons . See “The Ritual Process and the Problems of Reflexivity in Singalese Demon Exorcism” in MacAloon, John (ed) *Rite, Dram, Festival, Spectacle*. Philadelphia 1984:204.

⁴² Turner, Victor. *The ritual process. Structure and anti-structure*. New York 1969.

⁴³ Turner 1969: 132.

⁴⁴ Anderson, Benedict *Imagined Communities. Reflections of the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London. 1991.

idea of the *imagined community* could be quite compatible with ethnic group identity. Geertz emphasizes the meaning of ritual, whereas Turner and Anderson give priority to the interconnection between its participants.⁴⁵

Maurice Bloch emphasizes that the ritual's social function and its symbolic or intellectual meaning must be connected; the one cannot be understood without the other.⁴⁶ There may be a distinct difference between the standard anthropological and historical ritual studies in their perception of continuity and change. Many anthropologists approach ritual synchronically; mainly investigating its current practice and stability. For historical purposes, ritual should be approached diachronically; analyzed in terms of its past and expected future direction. Bloch makes a noteworthy exception to the standard anthropological approach. He argues that ritual must be approached *diachronically* to perceive transitions in its function and significance.⁴⁷ While fairly unchanging in its forms, ritual may evolve in its significance, in accordance with historical and cultural changes. A tendency towards altered interpretation of the symbols used in the ritual may indicate these shifts.

The Interpretation of Symbols

The significance of the symbol is found in its power of reference. The symbol could be defined as a sign having the ability to speak beyond itself.⁴⁸ For my purpose, to analyse the interpretation of national symbols over an extended period of time, I find Clifford Geertz' approach useful. Geertz attaches symbols to interpretation and meaning. He defines symbols as "any object, act, event, quality or relation which serves as a vehicle for conception-the concept is the symbol's *meaning*."⁴⁹ Its significance is related to cultural and individual interpretation; one expression may have several interpretations, both on a personal and cultural level. The sign is not *given*, but *interpreted* within a political, cultural or historical context. The symbol is open to interpretation, but shared cultural and national understanding contributes to certain consensual associations concerning the symbol. The Norwegian flag, for instance, could either be symbolic of the *state* of Norway or function as an *ethnic symbol* in

⁴⁵ Other work by Turner emphasizes the meaning aspect such as *The Forest of Symbols –Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Cornell University Press. 1967. Maurice Bloch criticizes Turner for not bringing the symbolic side and the functionalist side of rituals together convincingly. Bloch, Maurice. *From Blessing to violence. History and ideology in the circumcision ritual of the Merina of Madagascar*. Cambridge University Press. New York. 1986:9.

⁴⁶ Bloch 1986:9. Bloch's study treats the circumcision ritual of the Merina from 1770-1970. The long period under study allows Bloch to analyse its transition over time, pre and post colonialism as well as pre and post Christianity as a state religion.

⁴⁷ Bloch 1986.

⁴⁸ Biedermann, Hans. *Symbolleksikon*. Translated by Finn B. Larsen. Oslo 1992.

⁴⁹ Geertz 1973:91.

the 17th of May celebrations in America. On a personal level, it could bring connotations of a nation's cultural aspects as well as its political identity. Both the flag and the celebration of May 17th hold such strong cultural significance that they could be considered to form what anthropologist Sherry Ortner labels *key symbols*.⁵⁰

Key Symbol

A *key symbol* is a symbol of particular importance, which, if interpreted correctly, could open the door to an understanding of the whole culture. One should however note that not all cultures have key symbols, and on the other hand there may be several key symbols in a culture.

The *key symbol* is recognized by several indicators; the natives define it as culturally important, the population responds positively or negatively rather than indifferently to the symbol, there is a large vocabulary or elaboration around the key symbol, and there are restrictions concerning the symbol; rules for its use and sanctions for misuse. There may be additional indicators, but the criteria listed above will steer the researcher in the right direction. The main criterion, however, is that expression takes place somewhere in the public sphere, in the words of Ortner: "Because the public symbol system is ultimately the only source from which the natives themselves discover, rediscover, and transform their own culture, generation after generation."⁵¹ In the case of May 17th, several of Ortner's indicators of a key symbol may be recognized; the children's parade or *barnetog*, or the use of the national costume *bunad* are both incorporated in the vocabulary as well as fixed elements in an annual celebration, serving as restrictions that characterize a ritual. In Norway, the high rate of participation signifies great cultural importance; and its symbolic collective act takes place in the public sphere.⁵² If we recognize and understand the celebration as *key symbol*, one approach for historical study is to use it as a key to open the door to understanding Norwegian national identity.⁵³

Odd Lovoll applies Ortner's key symbol concept to the Norwegian American celebration of May 17th, underlining that the celebration's history is almost as long as the Norwegian settlement. Initially, it occurred spontaneously, as on board ships during the crossing to America in 1836-37; later through more formal public celebrations in areas with a

⁵⁰ Ortner, Sherry. "On Key Symbols" in *American Anthropologist*. Vol. 75. Blackwell. 1973. Pp 1338-1346

⁵¹ Ortner 1973:1339.

⁵² 74 per cent annually participate in public celebrations in Norway, compared to 5 and 6 per cent in Sweden and Denmark. Aagedal and Hovland 2001: 8.

⁵³ Øystein Sørensen argues that the 17th of May gradually became a central symbol of Norwegian national identity after 1820. Sørensen 1998: 25.

large Norwegian-American population. Lovoll's studies emphasize that historically there was a need to show the American public that celebrating Norwegian ethnicity did not conflict with the American civic concept of nationalism.⁵⁴ The celebration throughout Seattle's long and continuous history could serve as an indication of its role as a *key symbol*. The 17th of May fulfills the criterion for what Ortner labels a *summarizing key symbol*.⁵⁵ She defines this as "those symbols which are seen as summing up, expressing, representing for the participants in an emotionally powerful and relatively undifferentiated way, what the system means to them."⁵⁶ Both the 17th of May as well as the Norwegian and American flags sum up and *represent* the attitudes which the participants in a May 17th celebration may have concerning their festival and identity related to being both Norwegian and Americans.

The Norwegian Constitutional day both *constitutes* and *consists of* complex and biased symbols. In terms of the Norwegian American celebration in Seattle, the transition of how the symbol is interpreted reflects a changed view of the nation or the ethnic group. At this point, it is necessary to explain what is meant by the word *nation*.

What is the Nation?

The political scientist Øyvind Østerud points out that there are three main understandings of the word *nation*. First, it refers to a state or a geographical unit. Second, it is interpreted as a people and its culture. Finally, the notion points to a group of people which *considers itself to constitute a nation*, and which is recognized by others as belonging to one. The last criterion will be synonymous with national identity.⁵⁷ This subjective dimension is based on the assumption that the boundaries of ethnicity and language will be ambiguous and unstable, changing with state borders, or as with the case of Norwegian Americans, through migration and establishment of new ethnic communities.

The concept of the modern nation was developed in the late 18th century.⁵⁸ The division was between the concept of a political nation, rooted in the ideals of the French revolution, and the concept of an ethnic-cultural understanding, where bloodlines, legacy,

⁵⁴ Lovoll 2001: 70-71.

⁵⁵ Ortner distinguishes between summarizing and elaborating symbols. Elaborating symbols are yet again divided into root metaphors and key scenarios. The root metaphors could be integral parts of the larger key symbols, for instance as repetition of vital elements in May 17th speeches. See Aaby 1997:13

⁵⁶ Ortner 1973:1339.

⁵⁷ Østerud, Øyvind. *Hva er nasjonalisme?* Oslo. 1994: 17-18.

⁵⁸ The foundation of modern nations is between primordialists and constructivists/modernists. The primordialist argues that modern nationalism is rooted in pre-modern origins, whereas modernist argues that this is a modern invention. This will be discussed under the next section.

culture and language held primary importance as exemplified in Germany.⁵⁹ In the first concept, national membership is voluntary, and open to anyone who accepts the nation's ideals within the state borders. France is frequently referred to as a prototype, but the United States is also an example of this *civic* nationalism. Independence in 1776 gave birth to the American nation state. As the United States was a nation of immigrants, the teaching of the nation's supposed core values of democracy, freedom of speech, religion and liberal market orientation have been part of socialization or Americanization.⁶⁰ Put simply: *The state precedes the nation.*

Ideas of an *ethnic* nation are not necessarily linked to the nation as a state; but have been characteristic of several European countries, either before a unification of territories or an emancipation from multinational states.⁶¹ National membership is determined, not chosen. Put simply: *The nation precedes the state.*

Migration challenges the traditional views of the nation as presented above. To use Norwegian-Americans as an example of Østerud's concept of nationality: their nationality of *state* is *American*, nationality of *ethnic origin* is *Norwegian*, and their national *identity* is *linked to this duality*. In other words, a nation can consist of several *ethnic* communities, such as the Norwegian American community in Seattle.⁶² However, an ethnic community is also subject to change and development in accordance with larger society.

Herbert Gans points out that ethnic groups in America are not nationality groups. The fight for state sovereignty, political equality or dominance, which has characterized many European ethnic groups, does not concern ethnic groups in America. Their struggle is mainly about local political power, public jobs, preventing discrimination, and perhaps most importantly, respect.⁶³ The desire to achieve acknowledgement from society at large and the country of origin may accord with Østerud's third understanding of the concept of *nation* as a recognized unit.

⁵⁹ These national prototypes are described as a *Staatsnation* vs. *Kulturnation*.

⁶⁰ Østerud 1994 20-21. The point of people's association with national values is also brought up by Ortner 1973: 1340. Here she points out that the American flag represents "a conglomerate of ideas of feelings including (theoretically) democracy, free enterprise, hard work, competition, progress, etc.

⁶¹ Germany serves as the prototype of the ethnic nation, but both central European nations of the Habsburg empire, as well as the states that belonged to the former Yugoslavia are associated with ethnic nationalism.

⁶² See the section *Immigrant? Ethnic? Definition..*

⁶³ Gans, Herbert. "Ethnic Invention and Acculturation, a Bumpy-Line Approach." In *Journal of American Ethnic History*. Vol. 12. No 1. University of Illinois Press. 1992. Pp. 42-52.

Invented Traditions?

The British historian Eric Hobsbawm considers national rituals an *invented tradition*, invented by the elite which could legitimize its position by referring to historical bonds. Through the celebration, certain values are internalized, and repetition implies continuity with the past.⁶⁴ The national history, which serves as the ideology of nations, has been “selected, written, pictured and popularized to do so.”⁶⁵ Hobsbawm offers a constructivist approach to the establishment of traditions and national symbols.⁶⁶ I find the constructivist theory useful for describing the *origin* of May 17th, in which the chosen symbols and their interpretation indicates how the celebrating group interprets their national or ethnic identity. However, Hobsbawm is merely preoccupied with the establishment rather than the further practice of tradition; he does not provide a satisfactory explanation for how the traditions are maintained and developed. Furthermore, to gain a foothold in the population, the tradition’s symbols and their bond to national history must have a personal resonance with its participants, which Hobsbawm seems to underestimate.

The Norwegian historian Øystein Sørensen applies the constructivist approach in his outline of the nation building process in Norway. However he makes it clear that there were several competing attempts to construct a national identity and their success depended on their ability to gain a foothold. Sørensen suggests that open projects with a higher degree of flexibility have a better opportunity of being maintained.⁶⁷

Agedal and Hovland’s outlines of the celebration in Norway have shown that it has been subject to historical change or *reinvention*. The celebration is once again *re-established* or *reinvented* through being taken up in Norwegian American communities.

Nationalism and the Ethnic Perspective

In order to study a Norwegian American celebration, it is necessary to outline the American concept of ethnicity as compared with an understanding of ethnicity in civic/ethnic division. The nation and the ethnic group were seen from other perspectives in America. High rates of

⁶⁴ Hobsbawm, Eric *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge. 1983.

⁶⁵ Hobsbawm 1983:13.

⁶⁶ The constructivist or modernist approach is in sharp contrast to the primordialist, represented by Anthony D. Smith. Smith argues that nations cannot arise without an *ethnie* or a national core. On the constructivist and modernist side Benedict Anderson labels the nation as *imagined*, related to the perception of unity people feel on the basis of a shared language and cultural impression. The origin of this community feeling corresponds with the circulation of printed press in the spoken languages. Eric Hobsbawm as *invented*. Anthony D. Smith argues that national rituals will not have a wide range if they are not organized from *below* rather than *above*. See Smith, Anthony D. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Oxford 1986.

⁶⁷ Sørensen 1998: 17-48. Particularly page 25-26 and 46-48.

immigration led to xenophobia and nativism which peaked around the 1920s.⁶⁸ It was argued that immigrants should abandon their old culture as quickly as possible and assimilate into American culture. As will be argued in the next chapter, Norwegian Americans who celebrated the 17th of May consequently gave priority to showing appreciation of their new country as well celebrating the country of origin.

From the late 1960s ethnic diversity became a more important part of the social agenda. There are several interpretations of this shift; it has been characterised both as an ethnic revival and as post ethnicity. In addition, ethnicity was interpreted both as *invented* and *symbolic*.⁶⁹ The *ethnic revival* was a description of increased acceptance of ethnic diversity as well as a growing interest of the American-born population in their ethnic backgrounds.⁷⁰ The post ethnic approach suggested that ethnicity was a matter of choice and identification more than being determined by birth.⁷¹ American ethnicity is also described with a Hobsbawmian constructivist approach; for instance that the ethnic American is invented through celebration.⁷² American ethnicity is also described by the American sociologist Herbert Gans as a *process* which would have a weaker foundation with the passing of time.⁷³ Gans considers that social function hold primary importance, it holds an *expressive* rather than *instrumental* function; it is rooted in symbols rather than ethnic organizations.⁷⁴

The Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth argues that ethnic groups predominately form their self image in relationship to other groups; the group defines what they are *not*, rather than what they are. In this manner, ethnic groups are not immutable and are subject to

⁶⁸ This will be discussed in further detail in chapter 2 .

⁶⁹ This concept is related to Herbert Gans understanding of the third generation's interest in their culture of origin, introduced in 1979. Gans argues that that ethnicity had become voluntary and private had rooted in mainly in ethnic symbols. This will be discussed in chapter 4.

⁷⁰ In 1980, the US Census asked for ethnic ancestry rather than the individual's or parents' place of birth. This shift may be a signal that ancestry was to a larger extent interpreted on a personal level as well as illustrated an ethnic awareness on a general level. The subjective dimension of ethnicity in Seattle since the 1980s is discussed in chapter 2. For a thorough account of the implications of the 1980 census, see Lieberman, Stanley and Mary C. Waters *From Many Strands. Ethnic and Racial Groups in Contemporary America*. New York 1990.

⁷¹ See discussion in chapter 4, section *Ethnic Revival or Symbolic Ethnicity*. The concept should be related both to cosmopolitanism and universalism, towards a society beyond ethnic boundaries. Moreover, it should be related to post modernism and made a deterministic category a matter of choice.

⁷² Sollors, Werner (ed): *The Invention of Ethnicity*. New York 1989 applies the constructivist approach within the interpretation of ethnicity "as a modern or postmodern invention." (Sollors 1989:xiii) The constructivist perspective for ethnic celebration is treated in the same anthology by Kathleen Conzen (pp 44-76) as well April Schulz 1994. Schulz and Conzen understand the ethnic celebrations as an arena where the German American and Norwegian American identities were constructed. Recognition from general society at large and cohesion of the ethnic group were other positive consequences of the celebration.

⁷³ Gans 1992:42

⁷⁴ Gans 1979: 435

change and redefinition. In my opinion, this view should be considered compatible with the American concept of ethnicity.⁷⁵

The Methodical Approach

The approach in this thesis may be described as an attempt at historical anthropology; focussing on the development of a celebration which contains ritual elements. It has been a hermeneutic process since I did not know much about this field before I began to research it. The pattern of development became clearer through the investigation of newspaper material and discussions with interviewees. Through a thorough investigation of constituent parts, I have aimed to interpret the whole.⁷⁶ The sources were selected according to availability and my own opportunity to access the information during my stay in Seattle for two months of research from May to July 2009.

Sources and Limitations

As this thesis deals with a long period of time, the nature of the sources changes. The most important source is the Seattle-based Norwegian American newspaper *Washington Posten/Western Viking/Norwegian American Weekly*. The newspaper changes both its focus as well as its function throughout the investigated period.

Until the early 1960s, *Washington Posten* described the celebration in great detail. Consequently, I have based my own descriptions of the celebration on relevant elements chosen from this newspaper's reporting.

It is important to recognize that *Washington Posten/Western Viking* was not without an agenda of its own. It may portray the celebration idealized rather than descriptively, and attention has been paid both to what is said and what is indirectly spoken. Periods with lesser coverage may not necessarily indicate low participation or interest, but could also be caused by internal issues or low distribution.

During the 1960s, the coverage of the celebration was less prevalent than in the early post-war years. The lack of reporting may indicate that the significance of the celebration was changing, or that the newspaper became less supportive, or that the readers had become less interested in the detail. From the mid 1970s, the *Western Viking* regained its earlier enthusiasm as the celebration moved to the Ballard area and welcomes a larger audience. Again, these descriptions helped inform my own analysis of the celebration.

⁷⁵ Barth, Fredrik. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*. Oslo 1969.

⁷⁶ Gadamer, Hans G. "Om forståelsens sirkel" (1959) in *Forståelsens filosofi. Utvalgte hermeneutiske skrifter*. Oslo 2003. Pp. 33-44.

From 2006 *Western Viking* was continued as the English language *Norwegian American Weekly*, the only remaining newspaper of its kind in the USA. The newspaper is no longer an adequate source for a narration of May 17th celebrations. Yet the development may be very symptomatic of changes in the Norwegian American community.⁷⁷

Finding Information

The National Library in Oslo contains archives of *Washington Posten* up to 1960 on micro fiche. During my stay in Seattle, I went through the May editions of *Western Viking* from 1961 to 2009. The archive of the *printed* newspaper was complete. It proved more difficult to access the newspaper's picture archive, as the newspaper had changed ownership and an archive was not maintained as part of the current newspaper.⁷⁸ Due to limited time, I was unable to find more pictures than that were printed and which may have been in private hands. I also investigated the May 16-18 editions of the *Seattle Times* from 1945 to 2009 and the May editions of the *Ballard News Tribune*.

In terms of archive material, I found useful sources in the 17th of May Committee Archive at the *University of Washington*. However, as the committee is a private it has not been obliged to deposit its minutes for archival purposes. Consequently, the documents were rather sporadically organized, though the archive was supposed to contain continuous material from 1945 to 1985.⁷⁹ In some years the committee meeting records were more or less complete, whereas in other years the archive records seemed coincidental or simply non-existent. In general, the period from 1975 to 1985 was quite well covered in the archive, while only patchy documentation was available for other periods.

The Interviews

To investigate the celebration at a micro level, interviews were a valuable supplement to the other sources. I interviewed fifteen persons during my stay in Seattle, which I will refer to as the *informants*.

As I sought more qualitative than quantitative information, I found interviews in person to be the best means. Thoughts and feelings, which were my priority, are better expressed in a personal interview; in addition it was easier to clear up possible misunderstandings. The interviews were taped and transcribed. I devised a questionnaire or

⁷⁷ The transition will be more thoroughly described in chapter 4, *Public Debate*.

⁷⁸ From 2006, the *Norwegian American Weekly* has been published by the Norwegian American Foundation, directed by the Norwegian Honorary Consul in Seattle, Kim Nesselquist (Consul 2007-, Vice Consul 1998-2007.)

⁷⁹ Only the programs were more or less complete for the entire period. (Norwegian 17th of May Committee Archive, folder 13).

checklist of topics that I wanted the informants to talk about, but it was not a fixed set of questions.⁸⁰

My intention was to let the informants suggest a convenient location, making the setting as relaxed and comfortable as possible. As their stories, feelings and reflections were the focus of the interview, it was important that they found the setting was natural and convivial. It has been argued that people speak more freely in their own home, and this may also help in memory recall. In such situations, an interviewee might be more liable to discuss family and social matters. Several of the subjects interviewed in their home showed items that reminded them of earlier celebrations, such as the family album or a *bunad*.

Informants that were interviewed at work offered somewhat more functional responses to the questions; tending to focus on the abstract meaning of the celebration rather than on personal or family memories. Some informants had obviously told their stories and reflected upon aspects of the celebration on past occasions. This might lead to answers which are more considered and normative, less spontaneous and subjective.

Reflections on the Interviews

The interviews were carried out at an early stage of my information gathering, consequently I did not always ask the informants to expand on topics, or ask questions that came to mind in retrospect. I had become acquainted with some informants before interviewing them. This may have created trust, but risked steering the answers in a certain direction, leading to “appropriate” answers. On the other hand, informants that I had not met prior to the interview might not feel as relaxed, but could to some extent speak more freely. One informant asked that the tape recorder be turned off before certain information was shared.

Oral historians have debated whether informants speak more freely to an outsider or not.⁸¹ Could my background as a student from Norway be of advantage or disadvantage? As mentioned in the previous section, it was advantageous for finding contacts in ethnic organizations. Outside these forums, it may have been more difficult. First, as a visitor for only a limited while, it took time to find out where to contact people. Second, my Norwegian background might have been alienating to those having a more remote attachment to Norwegian America.

Several informants interpreted the question “what does the 17th of May mean to you?” as “can you explain what the celebration is commemorating?” The formulation might have

⁸⁰ The list of questions is included in the Appendix.

⁸¹ Kjeldstadli, Knut ”Kildekritikk” in Hodne, Bjarne, Knut Kjeldstadli and Göran Rosander(eds) *Muntlige kilder: om bruk av intervjuer i etnologi, folkeminnevitenskap og historie*. Oslo. 1981:55.

been biased or unclear, or the informants might have assumed that I was testing their knowledge, being both Norwegian and a student of History.

The Aspect of Time

As pointed out previously in this chapter, the celebration has ritual elements and does not change much on an annual basis. Consequently, it may be hard to distinguish one year from another. Placing the thoughts and feelings in a historical context proved difficult, particularly because their attachment to the celebration was both historical and current. Many of the informants found it hard to remember specific happenings, where the celebration was located, and what made some celebrations or periods different from another. Because of this difficulty, I have chosen to consider the interviews mainly as an expression of *recent* opinions, which should accordingly be related to contemporary practise. It was difficult to find informants that remembered early celebrations vividly, or who could clearly recall previous practises.

Psychological research suggests that people seek coherence between their current and previous opinions, which prevents disorder in the human mind.⁸² It is not clear whether informants had changed their opinions in recent years, but for an annual event, it is hard to differentiate between current and past perspectives.

Participating Observation

Arriving in May 2009, the intention was to attend a celebration of May 17th. Accordingly; my own observations could then contribute directly to the research. Being a young Norwegian female student made it easy to gain trust. I was invited to join May 17th committee meetings and meetings of other ethnic organizations.⁸³ Many people were eager to talk to “a real Norwegian” and help me find information or informants.

Not everything I was told could be documented. How shall the researcher deal with purely anecdotal information? Should information that has not been thoroughly documented be classified as unreliable? In terms of *practical information* on how the celebration had been arranged, I did not classify the information as reliable unless I found it documented in the written sources. On the other hand, thoughts, feelings and reflections on the celebration were given a high priority.

For the 17th of May 2009 I was asked to be one of the parade’s flag bearers together with three other *bunad* clad girls.⁸⁴ The *bunad*, as well as a Norwegian accent might have facilitated contact with informants of Norwegian ancestry. I made a first encounter on 17th

⁸² Kjeldstadli 1981:71.

⁸³ I was invited to give a presentation of my project at a *Daughters of Norway* meeting May 6, 2009.

⁸⁴ I was also asked to be the Norwegian flag bearer for the patriotic program. This will be discussed in chapter 4.

May with three contacts who subsequently served as interviewees. As I participated myself, I may not have a sufficiently appropriate distance to the informants. On the other hand, as discussed above, the feeling of trust and the time taken to become familiar with the environment of the study may have been helpful.

Presentation of the Chapters and Structure

The material is for the most part structured chronologically by chapter, and thematically within the chapter that describes a given period.

Chapter 2 presents the history of the Norwegian community in Seattle. I endeavor to outline why Norwegian migrants settled in the Seattle district of Ballard, and describe the growth of the Norwegian American community. A short quantitative presentation of settlement patterns after 1945 is also included here. The role of ethnic organizations will be discussed. The early celebration of May 17th and the reactions of Americans at large are also presented.

Chapter 3 describes and analyzes the celebration in the postwar years by examining the arrangement, participants and audience of a celebration. I offer an analysis of the ritual by investigating national symbols, speeches and flags. Lastly, I seek to understand *why* the celebration changes its character.

In chapter 4, a theoretical approach to the new ethnicity is presented before discussing the celebration in the period between 1974 to 2009 in the same manner as in chapter 3. In addition the type of people that take part in different parts of the celebration is considered.

Chapter 5, analyzes the celebration at the micro level. This is based on interviews combined with newspaper reports and editorial comments. This part of the work focuses on the personal perspectives of individuals.

In chapter 6 the findings as a whole are summarized in the context of the main research questions.

2 NORWEGIAN SEATTLE

Should all Norwegians understand to use their rich heritage from home for the benefit of their descendants and the advancement of their new home land.¹

The aim of this chapter is to outline the background for the emergence and growth of the Norwegian American community in Seattle. Initially, I will describe how the city was settled and how it grew and developed. Then I will describe the development of the Norwegian community. The community and ethnic organizations were closely related, and I will describe the function of the Norwegian organizations and give an account of how the 17th of May was celebrated in its early days.

Figur 1: Map 1.1 Seattle and Washington state.²



Figur 2: Map 2.2 Areas of Seattle³

¹ Fest Program 1914:27. My translation. Original phrase: "Maatte alle nordmænd forstaa at udnytte vel sin rige arv hjemmefra til beste for sine efterkommere og til det nye fædrelands fremgang."

² http://www.washingtonstaterearch.com/Washington_maps/

³ <http://www.myballard.com/2009/10/06/attendance-area-boundary-map-released/>



Why Seattle and the Northwest?

The Pacific Northwest coast constituted the final and natural frontier in American westward migration. The area was among the last to be explored by European settlers.

Before the land could be put to use, forests had to be cleared. Characteristic of the migration to Washington was an initial phase led by single, young men, who found work in fishing, shipping and log driving.⁴ What really spurred immigration to the Northwest was the completion of the transcontinental railroad in the 1880s.⁵ The railroad had an effect on transcontinental travel comparable to the impact of the steamship on the Atlantic crossing; it prevented the discomfort and danger of previous times, speeded up the journey and brought an influx of new immigrants that was not to slow down until after the First World War.⁶ Unlike in Europe, the railroad did not initially serve existing markets, but built the markets it could later serve.

The Puget Sound area⁷ was attractive to immigrants, including many Norwegians, and it quickly became the most densely populated part of Washington State. The town of Seattle grew rapidly and became an attractive destination for Norwegian emigrants.

Scandinavian immigration dates back to the territorial years, but it did not become extensive until the 1890s.⁸ Washington achieved statehood in 1889, and the cities of Seattle and Ballard were founded in 1865 and 1889 respectively.⁹

⁴ Lovoll 1999:233.

⁵ Lovoll 1999:235.

⁶ Veirs, Kristina. (ed) *Nordic heritage Northwest*. Seattle 1982 :19.

⁷ Sound area in western Washington, which stretches from Olympia to the south to the north. See map 2.2.

⁸ Daehlie 1967: 23.

The Development of Seattle and Ballard

From 1870 to 1890, Seattle grew from a small village of 1100 to a city of 43 000 inhabitants.¹⁰ During the last decade of the 19th century, the population doubled to more than 80 000 inhabitants, and in 1910, following the annexation of the city of Ballard, Seattle had a population of 238 000.¹¹

Norwegians were among the first pioneers to the area, and quite quickly became a strong ethnic group. Many Norwegians and other Scandinavians settled in Ballard, a small town to the north of Seattle. Whereas Seattle mainly developed into being a commercial city, Ballard was industrially based. Ballard was, to a greater extent than Seattle, a center for lumber and shingle mills.¹² Until 1907, Ballard was the last stop on the railroad going south prior to reaching to Seattle. As the railroad company had not built a trestle to cross the Salmon Bay¹³, passengers had to walk across the wagon bridge to reach Seattle. Ballard benefited economically from the railway, because it brought supplies into the area and also enabled export of locally manufactured products.

Ballard was less densely populated than Seattle, and the Scandinavian population made up a larger proportion of Ballard's total population.¹⁴ In 1900, Ballard had 4500 inhabitants, making it the seventh largest in Washington State. Ballard was annexed into Seattle in 1907, at which time Ballard had 17 000 inhabitants. Fifteen per cent of these were Scandinavians, about half of which were Norwegian.¹⁵ The Norwegian community grew rapidly. In 1910, half of the Ballard population was foreign born, and the Nordic community was at its all time high. Three out of five were born in one of the Nordic countries and half of these were Norwegian. Even though other ethnic groups constituted a majority of the Ballard population, there were few elements that united these groups. As a single cohesive ethnic group, the Scandinavian community exerted a strong and pervasive influence on community culture. As the largest contributor to the ethnic population, Norwegian immigrants were

⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Seattle, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ballard,_Seattle.

¹⁰ Lovoll: 1999:236.

¹¹ Hegstad 1982: 66, Rokstad 2006: 43.

¹² Hegstad 1982: 121, Rokstad 2006: 43.

¹³ Bay area outside southwest of Ballard The name indicates prosper opportunities for salmon fishery.

¹⁴ In the sources, the use of Scandinavian and Nordic is intermixed. Consequently, it is not always clear whether Finland and Iceland are included. I use *Nordic* rather than *Scandinavian* when it appears that these countries are included.

¹⁵ Hegstad 1982:128.

particularly influential.¹⁶ Odd Lovoll notes that Norwegians were largest single ethnic in the city of Seattle in 1940.¹⁷

In 1979, the *Nordic Heritage Museum* was founded to acknowledge the Scandinavian influence on the Ballard area and to preserve the evidence of this.¹⁸ Scandinavian historical influence on the Ballard community is further emphasized in tourist brochures, and Ballard is also described on Wikipedia as “historically Scandinavian”.¹⁹ This all testifies to the popular notion of Ballard as historically Scandinavian.

Norwegian Migration to Seattle

Norwegian migration to Seattle took place during the second wave of mass migration, starting from the 1880s.²⁰ Migration to Puget Sound and Seattle was domestic as well as foreign; a number of Norwegian immigrants had initially settled in the Midwest before arriving in Washington. The new farmland east of the Cascade Mountains attracted migrants from the Norwegian farmland, whereas many coastal migrants settled west of the Cascades and around Puget Sound. It is repeatedly emphasized in different historical accounts of the Scandinavian migration that the similarity to the homeland made the idea of permanent settlement in the Seattle area attractive.²¹ One of the pioneers of Norwegian migration, O.B Iverson from Hardanger describes Puget Sound in a letter accordingly: “This place is as similar to Hardanger as any place could be.”²²

The opportunities in the fjord and its coastal areas were of particular interest to migrants from the coastal areas of north and west Norway. Scandinavians were strongly influenced by representations of their countrymen already residing in Washington. Stories of inviting opportunities and a landscape which reminded them of the old country, as exemplified by Iverson’s quote, served to attract Scandinavian and Norwegian immigrants. In addition, the possibility of finding work in well-known sectors and eventually the emergence

¹⁶ Reinartz, Kay F. “Yankee and Immigrant –Ballardites all” in *Passport to Ballard. The Centennial Story*. Seattle 1988.: 47. In 1910, nine out of ten immigrants came from the following countries. Norway (30%), Sweden (22%), Canada (14%), Germany (7%), Finland (6%), England (5%) and Germany (3%).

¹⁷ Lovoll 1999:236.

¹⁸ Veirs 1982: 39. The museum was opened to the public in 1980. The foundation of the Museum should be considered a result of the general increased focus on ethnicity in American culture from the 1970s, which will be thoroughly discussed in chapter 4.

¹⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ballard,_Seattle.

²⁰ The great exodus of Norwegian emigration occurred between 1865-1930, where 87 per cent of all emigrants left (Lovoll 1999:8) Three waves of Norwegian emigration are recognized. The first was mainly rural from Norwegian farmland to the prairies of the Midwest. The second period was heralded in the 1880s, and was urban to a much larger extent and predominately male. During the third wave, family migration was characteristic. For a thorough account of the Norwegian emigration, see Lovoll 1999:1-38 and Semmingsen 1941.

²¹ See Daehlie 1967:23, Hegstad, 1982:118, Lovoll 1999:245.

²² Hegstad 1982: 117. My translation. Original phrase ”Her er likt Hardanger som vel noe sted kan bli”.

of a Norwegian community in Seattle and Ballard are all factors that attracted Norwegian emigrants to the area.

Norwegians rapidly found work within shipping and in the fishing industry. Lovoll states that the Norwegians weren't pioneers in this industry, but joined the already established industry from the 1880s. They became major participants after 1900. Norwegians were prominent in the development of the halibut industry; in 1920 it was assumed that around 95 per cent of halibut fishermen and boat owners had Norwegian heritage.²³ Quota laws passed in 1921 and 1924 restricted and reduced the rate of immigration; in 1929 Norway was awarded an annual quota of 2377.²⁴ The depression of the 1930s resulted in a decline in emigration. But Norwegian migration to the fishing industry continued consistently; even after the Second World War, coastal Norwegian migrants settled in Seattle.²⁵

Seattle received a substantial stream of immigrants in the post war years, as did the urban area of Brooklyn, New York. Lovoll notes that immigrants were met with mixed feelings in the established Norwegian American community. On the one hand, this might have lead to a bolstering in organizational life and invigoration of Norwegian American institutions. The Norwegian language newspapers would have more readers, and the different ethnic events and organizations would be able to recruit more. On the other hand, Lovoll implies that the newcomer's experiences and concept of Norwegianness could be a source of conflict with the already established Norwegian American community. Lovoll refers to an anonymous reader of *Duluth Skandinaven*²⁶ who believes that the experiences and images the newcomers had of Norway were basically different to the national romantic relationship established Norwegians Americans had with Norway. On the other hand, the editor of *Washington Posten* Ole Eide maintained that the newcomers "feel at home in Norwegian American surroundings and are for us a pure unadulterated joy"²⁷ Several of the newcomers came from provincial areas and joined the fishing industry. The new wave of immigrants also stimulated contact and cultural exchange with the Nordic countries.²⁸

²³ Lovoll 1999:245

²⁴ Lovoll 1999: 38

²⁵ An influx of new Norwegian immigrants to the fishing industry was characteristic of coastal areas. The strong post war migration from Karmøy is discussed in Garvik 2006.

²⁶ Newspaper published in Duluth, Minnesota 1887-1965.

²⁷ Lovoll 1999:334

²⁸ Veirs 1982:39

Norwegian Emigration and Settlement after the Second World War

Large scale migration ended in the 1960s. The traditional *push* and *pull* factors²⁹ between Norway and America ceased to exist, as social conditions in Norway improved. Migration became *personal* rather than *structural*, and was characterized by a larger extent of skilled workers.³⁰ There was a significant increase in the number of Norwegian born from 1940 to 1950; 3436 to 10 447 individuals. From 1960 to 1970, the number dropped significantly from 11065 to 4721.³¹ This should be related both to declining immigration rates as well as the natural departure of the first Norwegian immigrants.

From the 1980s, the US Census has asked for ancestry rather than place of birth.³² They define ancestry as “a person’s ethnic origin, heritage, descent or “roots”, which may reflect their place of birth, place of birth of parents or ancestors or identities that have evolved within the United States.”³³ Ancestry is obviously a wide concept, open to the respondents’ interpretation. The former Finnish Consul Norm Westerberg points to a growing number of individuals in Washington State who report Norwegian ancestry in 2000 compared to the 1980 and 1990 Censuses. The increase of “Norwegians” does by no means correspond with relatively low immigration rates. Sixteen per cent more of the inhabitants listed Norwegian as their ancestry in 2000 compared to 1990.³⁴ At the same time, the number of individuals that list other Nordic ancestry, has declined. Westerberg believes that including the box “Norwegian” as an example of ethnicity in the Census form may have caused a significant increase of apparent “Norwegians”. In addition, the fact that the Norwegian ethnic community in Ballard and Seattle has been historically both numerous and patriotic could have contributed to the biased numbers.

²⁹ The concept of *push* and *pull* factors is traditionally used to explain patterns of migration. The *push* factors acts to drive people away from their place of residence, such as economic hardship, religious prosecution or difficulties to find labor. On the other hand *pull* factors offer opportunities that draw the migrant to the particular area.

³⁰ For an account of structural aspects on the process of migration from an historical point of view, see Myhre, Jan Eivind.” Historiske perspektiver på flytting” in Lovoll, Odd. (ed) *Migrasjon og tilpasning. Ingrid Semmingsen. Et Minneseminar. Tid og tanke.* No 3. Fall 1998b. Skriftserie fra historisk institutt. Universitetet i Oslo.

³¹ Hegstad 1982:116.

³² From 1880, it was possible to identify the second generation, as the form asked for parents’ place of birth. From 1980, ancestry was introduced, which should be considered interconnected with the new focus on ethnicity. For a thorough analysis of the 1980 Census, see Lieberson, Stanley and Mary C. Waters *From many Strands. Ethnic and Racial Groups in Contemporary America.* New York 1990.

³³ Westerberg 2006.

³⁴ Westerberg 2006:53.

Norwegian Ethnic Organizations

The founding of Norwegian immigrant organizations served several functions. They served as a means to maintain Norwegian culture as well as helped immigrants integrate into American society. For those who migrated alone, it was a way to socialize and find labor, and substituted for family structures in an unfamiliar place and country. Organizations worked to aid countrymen, foster common ideals, give opportunities for socialization and entertainment, to bring old and new settlers together and generally decrease loneliness and alienation.³⁵ Organizations were founded to serve the religious, national, social and regional needs.

Traditionally, churches were the first type of organization set up in an immigrant community. Though there were settlers before the 1880s, they were too few to organize churches.³⁶ During the 1890s, the first churches were founded in Seattle and Ballard, including *Seattle Norsk-Dansk Evangelisk Luthersk menighed* (1888), *Den norske Methodistkirke* (1889), *Den første norsk-danske Baptist-menighed i Seattle* (1889) *Ballard norsk-danske Baptist menighed* (1894) and *Pilgrims Baptistisk kirke*. (1894). By 1914, there were at least nine active Norwegian language churches in Seattle.³⁷ The largest church was *the Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church*, described as “undoubtedly the largest and most beautiful church on the Pacific Coast.”³⁸ Several of these churches had their own choirs, youth or sick aid groups.³⁹ Sick aid and youth groups had important functions in the Norwegian immigrant community, and might have been particularly important for people arriving on their own.

Balder may serve as an example of a safety net oriented group; it was established in 1908 as a fraction of the youth group *Nordstjernen*, and served as a sickness fund for young workers. Its goals were defined as to offer aid in case of inability to work, as well as entertainment and amusement. *Balder* appealed to potential members in the following words: “Youth of Norway, do not be alone and unprotected in a big city. We are weak alone, united

³⁵ Daehlie 1967:34.

³⁶ Kvamme 2005:21.

³⁷ The number of churches listed or mentioned in *Washington Posten* 's 1914 centennial brochures. Judging from the names of the ministers, it seems that they had Norwegian ancestry. The churches are defined as Norwegian and it seems likely that they were predominately Norwegian language based by 1914. The transition in Norwegian language to English was made between 1915 and 1930. (Kvamme 2005:38) In 1946, the church dropped Norwegian from its name, and was renamed the Evangelical Lutheran Church. It was intended to appeal to all Lutherans, regardless of ancestry. (Semningsen, Ingrid *Norway to America. A History of the Migration*. Translated by Einar Haugen. Minnesota 1980. 3rd ed. 1980:155).

³⁸ Fest Program 1914 : 34. My translation. Original phrase: ”uden tvivl den største og vakreste norske kirke paa Pacific kysten.”

³⁹ *Norsk-Dansk evangelisk luthersk menighed* (Norwegian-Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church) and *Immanuel Evangelical church* which included separate Church, Male, Ladies and Youth groups.

we are strong. In sickness, help is welcome. If you stay healthy, it is always a blessing to help others.”⁴⁰

The *Norwegian Male Chorus* and the Norwegian language newspaper *Washington Posten* were the first secular organizations to be founded, both in 1889. The chorus tradition started out in Germany and Switzerland with a patriotic purpose; to pay tribute to national symbols and the king.⁴¹ 18th century Norway also had a vital choir tradition. The *Norwegian Male Chorus*’ intention was “to promote and cultivate music and dramatic art”⁴² Their repertoire consisted of traditional Norwegian folk songs as well as both Norwegian and American national mainly of national songs.⁴³ An important point was to retain the use of the Norwegian language.⁴⁴ The *Norwegian Ladies Chorus* was founded in 1936 as a female counterpart.⁴⁵ Both choirs became popular and influential, and regularly performed at 17th of May celebrations.⁴⁶

Washington Posten was founded in 1889 to disseminate news and information and as a medium of general communication within the ethnic community. It reported and described ethnic meetings and gatherings, and was one of few newspapers that endured.⁴⁷

The *Sons of Norway* was founded in the Midwest in 1895 and gained a foothold as a social network to aid Norwegian compatriots during the hard times fuelled by the economic depression of the 1890s. At a time of hardship, it functioned as a safety net for those who struggled to find work and provide for their families. In 1901, *Den norske Foræning* was founded in Everett.⁴⁸ In 1903, some members of the organization extended an invitation to the *Sons of Norway* to be organized under their affiliation, and the *Leif Erikson lodge* of *Sons of Norway* was established in Ballard. The founders were for the most part associated with the

⁴⁰ Fest Program 1914: 35. My translation. Original phrase: ”Norsk ungdom staa ikke ensom og ubeskyttet i en stor by. Alene er vi veike, mange er vi sterke. Hjelp er kjærkommen I sygdostilfælde, og faar du være frisk, er det alltid en velsignelse at hjelpe andre.”

⁴¹ Knudsen 2007:42.

⁴² Norwegian American Anniversary Commission *Norse to the Northwest* 1975:14.

⁴³ I find the term *national songs* appropriate to patriotic songs that focus on national struggle and greatness. This term reaches beyond simply the national anthem. Examples may be *God Bless America*, *Mellom Bakkar og Berg*, *Gud signe vårt dyre fedreland*, as well as *The Star Spangled Banner* and *Ja vi elsker*. I distinguish between *national* and *folk songs*; last of which refer to music transmitted by the word of mouth, often with an unknown composer, traditionally passed on from one generation to another. The category of *national* and *folk* songs will be debated in chapter 3 and 4.

⁴⁴ Knudsen 2007:49.

⁴⁵ Norwegian American Anniversary Commission: *Norse to the Northwest. A Sesquicentennial Saga*. Seattle 1975:14

⁴⁶ This will be discussed in chapter 3 and 4.

⁴⁷ Several other Norwegian ethnic newspapers were founded on the Pacific coast in the late nineteenth century, but were for the most part short-lived. For a thorough discussion on Norwegian ethnic newspapers, see Lovoll 2010. Particularly pages 189-197 and 343-348.

⁴⁸ Village to the north of Seattle.

ethnic newspapers and members of choral groups.⁴⁹ Their explicit goal was “to unite sober men of a distinguished moral character in a fraternal organization” working to “maintain the tradition of the Norwegian language and all the fineness of the Norwegian people’s character.”⁵⁰ The lodge provided for its sick, old and disabled members; in 1914 at the rate of 5 dollars a week.⁵¹ Furthermore, *Leif Eriksson lodge* started to work for “unity among Norwegians in America, and to preserve the history of Norwegian immigrants.”⁵² *Leif Eriksson lodge* became the largest Norwegian organization on the Pacific coast from 1911. Other bodies affiliated with *Sons of Norway* in the Seattle area were the *Normanna lodge*⁵³ and *Eidsvold lodge*.⁵⁴

In 1905, the first body affiliated to the *Daughters of Norway* was founded on the Pacific coast under the name of *Valkyrien lodge*. The organization appealed to all women of Norwegian heritage. High moral standards were required in order to join the lodge to “preserve the Norwegian language and traditions.”⁵⁵

Norwegian immigrants also took part in organizations that worked for political goals. One of the prevalent forces intended to encourage greater civility in pioneer society was the anti-saloon movement, which initially consisted of women’s church groups.⁵⁶ In the early days of the temperance movement the *International Order of Good Templars* was founded.⁵⁷ The *Baltic Lodge* was founded in 1888. Initially it was dominated by Swedes, but by 1914 it was considered to be predominately Norwegian.⁵⁸

In the early 1900s regional organizations such as *Nordlandslaget*, *Gudbrandsdalslaget Heimhug*, *Trønderlaget* were founded. Their main function was to contribute to socializing, enjoyment and maintaining bonds between the place of origin and the new land. Members of different organizations worked together to arrange events of mutual interest, such as the 17th of May.

⁴⁹ Daehlie 1967: 166-67.

⁵⁰ Fest Program 1914:42. My translation. Original phrase: ”at sammenslutte i en broderskabsforening mænd av norsk herkomst som er ædruelig, og av en god moralsk karakter”.. ”at vedligeholde tradisjonen for det norske sprog og alt som er godt i den norske folkekarakter.”

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid. My translation. Original phrase: “samhold blandt nordmenn I Amerika, og søge bevaret de norske invandrerers historie.”

⁵³ A continuation of *Den norske foræning*.

⁵⁴ *Eidsvold* refers to the location of signing the Norwegian Constitution. The lodge was founded in 1910.

⁵⁵ Fest Program 1914:44. My translation. Original phrase “at hjelpe til at bevare det norske sprog og tradisjoner.”

⁵⁶ Cock, Susan “A church for every Saloon” in *Passport to Ballard. The Centennial Story*. Seattle 1988:138.

⁵⁷ The IOGT was founded as a movement of temperance and currently labels itself as “regardless of gender, color, nationality, political persuasion or social position.” (www.iogt.org) It appears that three lodges of the IOGT had a high number of Norwegian American members as they were listed as part of *Den norske klubb* who arranged 17th of May celebrations.

⁵⁸ The Baltic lodge of IOGT still existed in 1959, but is not mentioned in later sources. It seems that temperance became less of a debated issue, and the movement lost its relevance.

The 17th of May

Historian Jorgen Daehlie claims that all Scandinavian national groups desired a set day on which they could express their ethnic identity. For Norwegian Americans, the choice of the 17th of May was easy, due to its position in Norway. The day rapidly gained a foothold as a *key symbol* of Norwegian Americans in Ballard and Seattle.⁵⁹ The 17th of May was initially celebrated in Seattle in 1889, arranged by the *Norwegian Male Chorus* and *Washington Posten*.

The celebration adopted the practices of the mother country; in 1900 a children's parade was arranged in Ballard Park.⁶⁰ Before long, the arrangement of the 17th of May included contributions from members of several of the ethnic organizations listed above.⁶¹

The full independence in Norway 1905 sparked enthusiasm for the 17th of May in Seattle. In their celebration, Norwegians used the opportunity to remind themselves of both their heritage and tradition, as well as of American readiness to accept their heritage.⁶² Even though the celebration was arranged as a particular reminiscence of the country of origin.

Daehlie states that the celebration was relatively Americanized right from its infant years. It seems that non-Norwegian speakers frequently were invited to the event, which indicated that Norwegian Americans were quite rapidly expected and encouraged to learn English. The following quote from lawyer John Lamb's speech could serve as an illustration:

Within a few years after a Norwegian reaches our shores, he becomes, if possible more intensively Americanized than Americans themselves. In no essential ways does a Norwegian American Community differ from ours except that a Norwegian has two loves, while the Yankee has but one.⁶³

Picnics were arranged where both the Norwegian and American flags were used as decorations. Two Norwegian flags were located on side poles, whereas a large American flag

⁵⁹ See chapter 1, *Key Symbol*.

⁶⁰ Rokstad 2006:98.

⁶¹ The event was arranged by *17de Mai komiteen*, which included members from *Det Norske National-Forbund af Seattle*. In 1914 the following organizations were listed as belonging to the umbrella organization : *Sons of Norway Leif Erikson Lodge* and *Daughters of Norway Valkyrien Lodge*. The IOGT was represented with the *Baltic*, *Ballard* and *Norrøna* lodges. The church based youth groups another three youth groups participated *Fremad*, (Forward) *Haabet* (Hope) and *Nordstjernen* (The Northern Star). In addition, the regional *Dølelaget Heimhug*, *Nordlandslaget Fembøringen* and *Tordenskjold* (lodge from the Trondheim area which referred to the Norwegian naval officer Peter Wessel (1690-1720) were born. He served in the Danish-Norwegian navy who fought the Swedish fleet at Dynekil during the Great Northern War in 1716. He was ennobled as *Tordenskjold* (Thundershield) and is considered a national hero both in Norway and Denmark.) The Norwegian Male Chorus and Washington Posten were not listed as part as arrangers of the 17th of May, but it is still likely to assume that they were frequently involved in the arrangement of May 17th in this period.

⁶² Daehlie 1967:85.

⁶³ *Washington Posten* May 17, 1903. Cited in Daehlie 1967:104.

was placed in the middle.⁶⁴ The placing and the size of the American flag serves as an illustration of the combination of national aspects. There were several Norwegian flags, but the American was largest and stood in the center.

In general society, there appeared to have been a growing opinion from the turn of the 19th century that immigrants should abandon their ethnic celebration and declare their full patriotism by only celebrating the 4th of July. Because the 17th of May embraced American *civic* ideals, Norwegian Americans believed these were in fact mutually compatible. This may be illustrated through the following quote:

It may seem that, dwelling so far from the old country we as Norwegians should celebrate only the 4th of July. Explain the meaning and importance of the 17th of May to our fellow citizens, however, and they will be quick to declare that such a patriotic people deserve the respect and sympathy of every true American.⁶⁵

The somewhat critical attitudes expressed from general society were about to be even further challenged within the next decade.

Americanization and Xenophobia

From the early 1900s, and peaking during the First World War, there was an explicit demand that immigrants should assimilate; “There is no room for the hyphenated American”, thundered former president Theodore Roosevelt in 1917.⁶⁶ Political nativism was adopted which implied that marks of ethnicity should be abolished and that national identification must be strictly American. The use of foreign language in public contexts such as churches and ethnic organizations was prohibited. During this period, the celebration of May 17th became less formal, and ethnic organizations arranged their own events rather than coming together. There was a strong focus on American patriotism and American identity during the war years, and the Norwegian emphasis was toned down. The 17th of May was referred to as a patriotic event.⁶⁷ Simultaneously, the Norwegian American Centennial was arranged in St. Paul and Minnesota. One of its overarching aims was show society at large that they were well-organized, patriotic and even better Americans because they were Norwegian.⁶⁸

At this time, a number of myths, which literature professor Orm Øverland labels *Home-making myths*, flourished.⁶⁹ These myths arose in a political climate where immigrants

⁶⁴ Rokstad 2006:98.

⁶⁵ *Tacoma Tidende* May 17, 1896. Cited in Daehlie 1967:85.

⁶⁶ Theodore Roosevelt cited in Veirs 1982: 37 Roosevelt was president 1901-1909.

⁶⁷ Rokstad 2006:102.

⁶⁸ Schulz 1994.

⁶⁹ Øverland, Orm. *Home-making myth. Immigrants' Claim to a Special Status in their new Land*. Working paper No. 20. Odense 1996. Pp- 1-24T. This is more thoroughly debated in Chapter 3, *Speeches*.

and ethnic Americans felt the need to demonstrate that their origin and achievements were easily compatible with being American citizens. was primarily a means to increase its own group status and not an attempt to increase acceptance of ethnic groups in general.

Daehlie points to some anti-Catholic sentiment among Norwegian Americans, which he considers to be a way of enhancing their own group's status as Protestants rather than emphasizing a shared ethnic identity with other immigrants.⁷⁰

Declining rates of immigration due to the Quota Act, as well as economic difficulties made Americanization less of an issue. In 1927, *Washington Posten* expressed concern that the Americanization process might erase the memories dearly held by the first generation: "We are few under time and we will become even fewer."⁷¹ To avoid this development, it was suggested that a joint effort be made to celebrate the 17th of May and on a larger scale. By 1945, the Norwegian American community seemed to have regained this ethnic confidence.

⁷⁰ Daehlie 1967:112.

⁷¹ *Washington Posten* May 20, 1927. Cited in Rokstad 2006:104

3 1945-1973: AN EXCLUSIVE EVENT?

All evident signs signal Norway will be free by the 17th of May, and then it self evident that there will be celebrated a 17th of May in Seattle like never before.¹

As illustrated from this report in *Washington Posten*, the first celebration of a once more independent Norway was marked by a strong festive atmosphere among Norwegian Americans in Seattle in May 1945. *Seattle Times* noted that “Norwegian groups will mark their independence day[sic],” referring both to the regained liberation after the Nazi occupation as well as pointing to what was incorrectly taken to be the original reason for celebration; independence rather than signing of the Constitution in 1814.²

The 1945 coverage of the celebration may serve as an example of how an ethnic event was seen in this time period: decisive and all-consuming within the ethnic community and recognized, but not considered of large public interest to the larger society. The celebration was an indoor event, introduced by a children’s parade and a patriotic program with songs, performances and speeches before the going on to the evening dinner and dancing.

Both the newly achieved liberation and a new wave of immigration from Norway to Seattle in the early 1950s were likely to have strengthened the enthusiasm May 17th in the Norwegian community in the immediate post-war years. Was this involvement in Norwegian celebration in Seattle maintained throughout the succeeding decades? How was the celebration of May 17th organized and arranged in this period? What elements could be characterized as Norwegian or American in the celebration? How did national symbols appear, and how were they interpreted in the American context? And what types of national views were expressed in the speeches? In the following, I will describe elements which typified post-war celebrations, and outline how these changed or developed during this period.

Organization and Arrangement

To make a *Syttende Mai* celebration possible, there had to be both organizers to create a program, participants to bring the program into being, and spectators, for whom the program was arranged.

¹ *Washington Posten* May 4, 1945, page 6. My translation. Original phrase: “alle tegn tyder på at Norge vil staa fritt til 17. mai, og da sier det sig selv, at der vil feires en 17. mai i Seattle som aldri før.”

² *Seattle Times* May 17 1945, page 16. The 17th of May is repeatedly referred to as the Norwegian Independence Day rather than Norwegian Constitution Day, probably because it fulfilled a function equivalent to the 4th of July. I will use the term applied in the sources throughout the text.

The celebration of the Norwegian Constitution Day was initiated by the *17th of May Committee*,³ which consisted of participants from various Norwegian organizations or lodges. They worked on a voluntary basis, and came together jointly to arrange *Syttende Mai*. It appears that two representatives from each organization met for the committee.⁴ From the sources, it is unclear what was required from an organization to join the committee, other than being Norwegian.⁵

The two largest organizations involved were the *Leif Eriksson Lodge* and *Valkyrien Lodge*, belonging to *Sons and Daughters of Norway*.⁶ Other lodges of Sons and Daughters of Norway respectively involved in the celebration were the *Knute Rockne*⁷ and *Terje Viken*⁸ lodge of *Sons of Norway*, and *Breidablikk*⁹ lodge of *Daughters of Norway*. *Nordmannsforbundet*¹⁰ was another examples of affinities attached to large organizations, represented across the US. Examples of regional organizations were *Sunnmørslaget* and *Nordlandslaget*, linked to *Sunnmøre*¹¹ and *Nordland*,¹² which were coastal areas from which migration had been strong. Both the *Norwegian Male Chorus* and the *Norwegian Ladies Chorus* were also frequently represented on the committee. In addition, commercial organizations such as the *Norwegian Commercial Club*, *Norse Home* and *Norwegian Hospital Association* were represented.¹³

The person who would be closest to serve as a Norwegian state authority would probably be the *Honorary Norwegian Consul* in Seattle.¹⁴ The consul rarely participated on

³ The Norwegian 17th of May Committee Archive will mostly be referred to as the *Committee*, with a capitalized letter to indicate a proper name.

⁴ *Washington Posten* May 1, 1959, page 2.

⁵ It was repeatedly noted that the committee consisted of Norwegian organizations exclusively. The Baltic Lodge of IOGT was the only organization with a more pan-Scandinavian title. However, as discussed in chapter 2, the Baltic lodge IOGT became predominately run as a Norwegian organization. As Norwegian American representatives from the IOGT met for the Committee it may be reasonable to assume that the temperance ideal was still strong among Norwegian Americans in the postwar era.

⁶ The *Sons and Daughters of Norway* were founded as fraternal organizations of Norwegian emigrants, whose goal was to function as a social network for its members. *Sons of Norway* was started out as exclusively male, hence the female counter piece with *Daughters of Norway*. See presentation chapter 2.

⁷ Norwegian born successful American football player (1888-1931) He was portrayed by Ronald Reagan in the 1940 screenplay *Knute Rockne All American*. (www.knuterockne.com) In many ways, Knut Rockne seems to embody a Norwegian American dream of success; and the symbolism of choosing the name for a *Sons of Norway* lodge may suggest that Norwegian heritage and American success were considered well combined.

⁸ A character from an epic poem by Henrik Ibsen.

⁹ Breidablikk was the home of the old Norse God, Balder.

¹⁰ An ideal organization founded in 1907 whose goal was to promote the relationship between Norwegian descendants in America. (<http://www.snl.no/Nordmanns-Forbundet>.)

¹¹ The southern part of the county *Møre og Romsdal*, on the northwest coast.

¹² County in Northern Norway.

¹³ *Washington Posten* May 1, 1959, page 2.

¹⁴ An Honorary Consulate fills the function of an official consulate, but the staff is employed locally. The Honorary consulate in Seattle was placed under the jurisdiction of the Consulate Generale in San Francisco, and still was in 2010.

the 17th of May Committee in the post-war decades,¹⁵ but was often assigned an important role in the celebration, bringing greetings from Norway or giving short speeches.¹⁶ If one perceives the consul as a representative of *civic* Norway, the role in this event was to be present, recognizing, yet not take control of the celebration.

As this was an ethnic celebration, no funding was received from an official level consequently, to make a celebration possible, the participating organizations made financial contributions to the Committee. In addition an entrance fee was charged to attend the official celebration as well as the dinner and dancing later in the evening. Private and commercial funding was also both welcomed and needed.¹⁷

Participants

The largest group of participants in the post-war celebrations was children marching in a children's parade or *barnetog*,¹⁸ inspired by Norwegian celebrations, where children since 1870 have marched with their school or youth band.¹⁹ This tradition was established in 1959, on the initiative of one of the committee members, Charles K. Anderson, who was inspired by the practise after a visit to the Norwegian capital. Seeing the children's parade was "one of his greatest and most beautiful experiences ever." It was believed that an adaption in Seattle would be "a large and beautiful part of our work for Norwegianess"²⁰

As there were no exclusive Norwegian schools, the *barnetog* was formed on a private initiative, mostly by children whose parents were involved in the Norwegian American community. Children dressed up in national costumes seems to have been a popular part of the program, judging from both newspaper coverage and official programs that listed "bunad clad little toddlers" as one of the celebrations' main attractions.²¹ However, children were welcome at the parade, also if they didn't have bunad:

(http://www.norway.org/ARCHIVE/sanfrancisco/honorary_consulates/Honorary_Consulates/)

¹⁵ Consul Thomas A. Stang (Consul from 1967-2007) was chair of the May 17th Committee in 1972. In a conversation May 7 2009, Stang explained that he wished to contribute to, and take a leading role in the celebrations. However, during periods of internal disagreement in the committee, the Consulate has taken a leading role of organising to ensure that a celebration would take place. Together with vice consul Kim Nesselquist, Thomas A. Stang was also chair of the committee 2004-2006. (2009 Program:32,36.)

¹⁶ See *Washington-Posten* May 21, 1948, page 1, May 23, 1952, page 1, May 22, 1953, page 1.

¹⁷ Norwegian Norwegian 17th of May Committee Archive Archive, folder 7. Participating organizations on the committee contributed with a suggested donation. In addition, there was an entrance fee to attend the patriotic program.

¹⁸ Norwegian children's parade.

¹⁹ The initial children's parade was arranged in 1870. Since 1889, girls were allowed to join the parade in 1889. For a more thorough account of the Norwegian celebration, see Bjørgen and Hovland 2001: 27-56

²⁰ *Washington Posten* May 1, 1959, page 2. My translations. Original phrases: "en av hans største og vakreste opplevelser noensinne", "noe stort og vakkert i vårt norskdomsarbeid"

²¹ *Washington Posten* May 7, 1965, page 12.

One expects the children's parade to be extra large this year, and no mother ought to keep her children away if they don't carry national costumes. A simple bow in the hair or a sailor suit for the little one is plenty.²²

The children marched under the banners of the organization to which they or their parents belonged. Most years there was no set an age limit for the *barnetog*; both toddlers and high school students were welcome. The committee welcomed children between the age of four and fourteen, and made sure they all had Norwegian and American Flags.²³ The number of participating children is only randomly recorded. In 1948, *Washington Posten* estimated the number of marching children at 400.²⁴ This was probably a higher number than average for the investigated period, as attendance in 1948 was at its peak.²⁵ Still, it was reported that the children's parade appeared to grow by the year, even for years with lower overall attendance.²⁶ In the words of *Washington Posten*'s reporter: "every year we say that the children's parade gets bigger and more festive –and though it may not have been larger this year than last, it was certainly just as festive"²⁷. It seems that that the reporters' love or fondness for the children's parade was growing more than the actual size of the parade.

It was not unusual that a school class from Ballard schools performed, either with a play, dancing or singing.²⁸ Even though Ballard schools by no means were exclusively Norwegian, Norwegian Americans were a large and strong ethnic group in the community, and the school classes' involvement in the program may indicate a certain degree of community involvement beyond the Norwegian group. However, it is not mentioned whether the entire classes participated, or if only the Norwegian American pupils were involved.

In addition to the children, members of different choirs, such as the *Norwegian Youth, Ladies and Male Chorus*, as well as *Leikarring*²⁹ groups from *Sons of Norway* entertained with singing and dancing. Plays and short sketches were often performed.

Spectators

Lastly, the celebration consisted of spectators, for whom the official program was arranged and performed. *Washington Posten* reports between 1000-4000 were people involved in the

²² *Washington Posten* May 9, 1952, page 1. My translation. Original phrase: "Man venter ekstra stort barnetog i år, og ingen mor bør holde barna hjemme fordi de ikke har nasjonaldrakter. Sløyfe i håret eller matrosdress på småen rekker fint."

²³ *Washington Posten* May 1, 1964. page 6.

²⁴ *Washington Posten* May 21, 1948. page 1.

²⁵ See diagram with the list of attendance in the next section.

²⁶ *Washington Posten* 19.05.50, page 1.

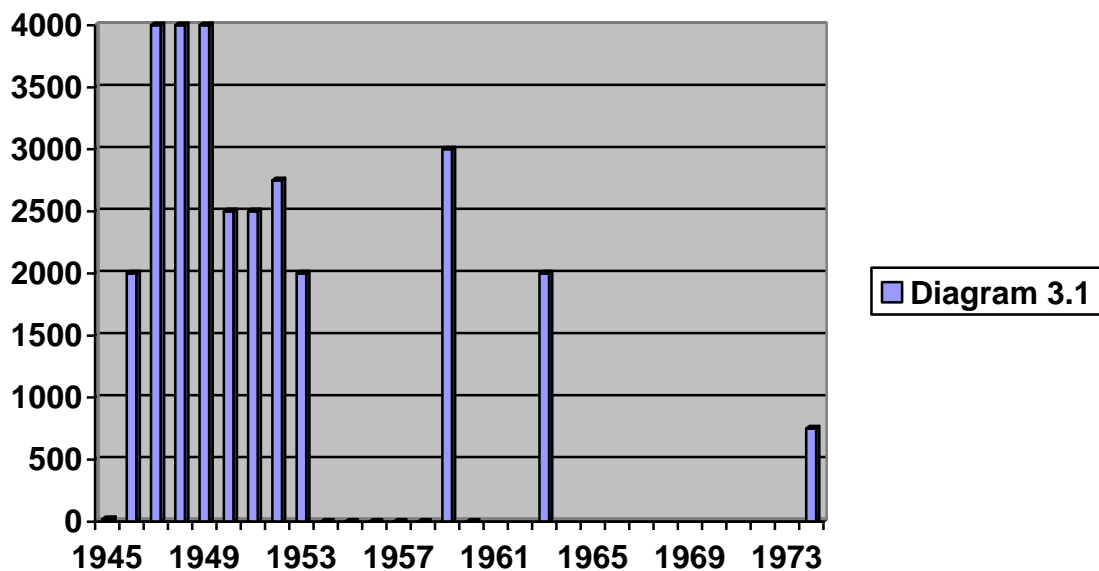
²⁷ *Washington Posten* May 21, 1948, page 1. "hvert aar sier vi jo, at barnetoget blir større og festligere. –og selv om det kanskje ikke var større enn ifjor saa var det ihvertfall like festlig."

²⁸ Norwegian 17th of May Committee Archive, folder 13.

²⁹ A type of Norwegian folk dance.

celebration of May 17th in the decades preceding the Second World War. This is the only available source with information on this topic. The documentation from Washington Posten is presented in the diagram below:

Figur 3: Source Washington Posten/Western Viking



These numbers are based on *Washington Posten*'s reports, and there are problems with regard to the accuracy of the estimated number of attendees. In the 17th of May Committee Archive, the number of paying attendees was documented for the first three post war years, and the number seems to correspond relatively well with *Washington Posten* accounts, if the newspaper presented the *total number of people*, including participants in the program and not only the paying audience.³⁰

In 1950 *Washington Posten* noted that 2500 people participated in the celebration and suggested that the pleasant weather as well as the weekend being Mother's Day might be reasons why "the number of spectators did not quite reach last years' level."³¹ Still, looking on the bright side, the newspaper stated, both in 1950 and several other years, that the celebration

³⁰ *Washington Posten* reported 2000 attendees in 1946, 4000 in 1947-1949, whereas the committee noted a paying audience of 1400 in 1946 compared to 3600 in 1947 and 3253 in 1948. (Norwegian 17th of May Committee Archive, folder 1.)

³¹ *Washington Posten* May 19, 1950, page 2. My translation. Original phrase: "publikumstilslutningen ikke var fullt så stor som i fjor."

of *Syttende Mai* in Seattle was the largest indoor celebration in the world, considerably larger than its counterpart in Brooklyn.³²

In the following years, *Washington Posten* gave more approximate estimates of the number of participants, with phrases such as the number was “between 2500 and 3000”³³, “it must have been close to 3000 people, counting both small and little ones”³⁴ “all in all there were probably several thousand people.”³⁵ The diagram is based on these somewhat inaccurate and uncertain numbers, from which it is hard to make a clear assumption. However, it seems that the immediate post war years were characterized by a participation of around 4000 celebrators, whereas the numbers dropped to between 3000 and 2000 thousand celebrators during the 1950s, and below 2000 during the 1960s. From the late 1960s, attendance is hardly mentioned, other than it being below 1000 in 1974. It is noteworthy that the better the documentation of participation, the higher the apparent attendance.

In 1950 the *Norway Center* was opened, and quickly established itself as an assembly hall for the Norwegian American community. It was not large enough to accommodate much more than 2000 people but advocates of hosting the entire celebration there argued the advantage was to “celebrate under one’s own roof”³⁶ From 1959 *Norway Center* also became the most frequently used assembly hall for the entire celebration.³⁷ Whether the relocation of the entire program to a smaller assembly hall is the result or cause of lower attendance compared to the immediate post-war years, is an interesting, but open question.

What type of Audience?

The program included a combination of Norwegian and English, making it possible for both Norwegian and English speakers to follow parts. The official programs were most frequently printed in Norwegian. As *Washington Posten* was the primary source of discussion and coverage of the 17th of May, it seems that the event primarily was of interest to a Norwegian speaking audience. A majority were probably first or second generation immigrants. In the printed program for 1949 it was noted: “The committee wishes to inform the audience that the play is written in the English language so the young people would be able to understand and

³² *Washington Posten* May 21, 1948, page 1.

³³ *Washington Posten* May 23, 1952. page 2.

³⁴ *Western Viking*. May 24, 1963, page 6. My translation. Original phrase: “det nærmet seg nok tre tusen med stort og smått.”

³⁵ *Washington Posten*, May 22, 1959, page 1. My translation. Original phrase: “det kom vel i alt flere tusen mennesker.”

³⁶ *Washington Posten*, May 15, 1953, page 2. My translation. Original “feire under eget tak”. Page 2

³⁷ Norwegian 17th of May Committe Archive, folder 13. Both Civic Auditorium and Masonic Temple are also used for the celebration, but from 1962-1974 Norway Center was solely chosen for the event.

enjoy it.”³⁸ This indicates that important parts of the native English speakers in the audience were second or third generation born in America, in addition to spouses. In general, the celebrants are referred to as “Norwegian”, occasionally in combination with “Norwegian-minded”

As mentioned in chapter 2, the early 1920s were characterized by a strict pressure on immigrants to Americanize. In this atmosphere, ethnic events were unpopular. During the post war period it may seem that ethnic events such as the celebration of May 17th were accepted, but held low interest to other than Norwegian Americans. Judging from the limited coverage in *Seattle Times*, it seems the general society in Seattle considered this an event without much relevance beyond the Norwegian American community. In 1953 it was noted that the Norwegian ambassador would be coming “to speak to the Norwegian community on their Constitution day.”³⁹

Still, there seemed to have been some non-hyphenated Americans, especially at the evening dance. *Washington Posten* only reported this once, stating that” particularly in the *Norway Center* [where the dance was held] the presence of non-Norwegian was large⁴⁰ This is an indication that a part of the event also attracted guests outside the Norwegian American community. However, since there was very little information about the event outside of the Norwegian language press, it may be reasonable to assume that most of the non-Norwegians had learned about the event from Norwegian American friends. Following this argument, it seems that during the 1950s and 1960s, Norwegian Americans in general had more contact with larger American society than non-hyphen Americans took interest in ethnic communities.

Program

The celebration of Norwegian Constitution Day in the in the immediate post-war years started out primarily as an evening event, with an official program in the *Civic Auditorium*, which was part of the *Seattle Center*. This was the most frequently used location for celebrations the since the 1930s, and was most frequently used until mid 1950s.⁴¹ After the establishment of *Norway Center* in 1950, the official celebration of May 17th had two natural assembly halls. With a few exceptions,⁴² the celebration in the 1950s was divided; starting with the official

³⁸ Norwegian 17th of May Committee Archive, folder 13.

³⁹ *Seattle Times*, May 17 1953, page 5.

⁴⁰ *Washington Posten* May 25, 1951. page 1. My translation. Original phrase: “særlig I Norway Center var innslaget av ikke-norsk stort.”

⁴¹ Norwegian 17th of May Committee Archive, folder 13.

⁴² In 1953 Norway Center hosted the entire celebration, and the decision was criticized because the assembly hall was not large enough for all the people who met. (*Washington Posten* May 22, 1953, page 1). In 1955 the celebration was hosted in Seattle’s Masonic Temple. (*Washington Posten* May 6, 1955. page 6.)

celebration in the *Civic Auditorium* before later dinner, dancing and refreshments at *Norway Center*. From 1959 the children's parade marched from the *Civic Auditorium* to *Norway Center*. From the 1960s the entire celebration was held in *Norway Center*, whereas the children's parade still started from the *Civic Auditorium*.⁴³ There is a symbolism in this choice, perhaps not intentional, indicating that the celebrants were both Norwegians and Seattleites.

For reasons of convenience, making it easier for people to attend the festivities, the celebration was normally arranged on the nearest weekend. A typical post-war celebration had a program lasting for about two hours, containing performances such as children's parade, musical elements and a speech before less fixed and formal elements, such as an evening dance.

After the audience was seated, Norwegian folk music or tunes of Edvard Grieg were often played before the program commenced. The patriotic feeling of excitement filling the audience before the celebration is well described as follows:

The auditorium was all filled up, and when Emil Hansen's little orchestra played the March of Entry of the Boyars' and Sigurd Jorsalfar it was like the entire room rose, and we felt a swelling of pride and deep love for old Norway.⁴⁴

The program was usually introduced by the chairman of the committee or the consul before a processional children's parade. The children were led by bands and drill teams and followed banners of Norwegian organizations. The children typically marched around the auditorium and up on the stage:

All the children –mostly dressed in national costumes-were given Norwegian and American flags-and were a sight for the eye as the parade meandered its way through the Civic Auditorium before gathering up on the stage, which turned into an ocean of colors. After consul C. Stang had given a short greeting, the children sang both the national anthems.⁴⁵

The first elements could be interpreted as the celebration's basic or vital units. From the quotation above, it seems that the *barnetog*, greetings from the Norwegian Consul and the singing of the national anthems were the most important parts of the program. The children's parade was adopted from the Norwegian celebration, where the children's parade commonly

⁴³ Norwegian May 17th Committee Archive. Folder 13.

⁴⁴ *Washington Posten* May 20, 1955. My translation. Original phrase: "Salen fylt til siste plass, og da Emil Hansens lille orkester spilte opp Bojarenes inntogsmarsj og Sigurd Jorsalfar var det som om hele salen løftet seg og vi følte bruset av stolthet og dyp kjærlighet til gamle Norge."

⁴⁵ *Washington Posten* May 23, 1947, page 6. My translation. Original phrase: "Alle barna – de fleste i nasjonaldrakter – fikk utlevert norske og amerikanske flagg, og ble et vakkert syn da toget buktet sig gjennom Civic Auditorium for til slutt aa samles paa scenen som ble et eneste hav av farger. Her sang barna begge nasjonalsangene etter at den norske konsul C. Stang hadde bragt en kort hilsen"

is thought to symbolize purity, innocence and the future.⁴⁶ Were these connotations necessarily applicable to the post-war celebration in Seattle? Whereas the Norwegian *barnetog* could be associated with the present or future, the children's parade in Seattle during the post-war era would also have strong links to the past. For first generation immigrants, the celebration was to recall the country they had left behind. By seeing their descendants parade, the immigrants' past could be linked to the present and future. This could be illustrated through the following observation described by a first generation immigrant in *Washington-Posten*:

Very well, it is a more or less conscious need to kindle the deepest and best in one's heart – the memories from youth and childhood- that drives Norwegian emigrant people to celebrate the 17th of May in its new homeland.⁴⁷

For the children in the parade, the celebration could function as a *construction* of their parents' or grandparents' past and their shared American future, thus *reinventing* the tradition for an American context.⁴⁸ The singing of the two national anthems may also be seen in this civic/ethnic perspective: Norway functioned as the historical and ethnic homeland, whereas America functions as their civic, present and future homeland.

After the parade and the singing of the two national anthems, the musical entertainment was left to more experienced parties. The *Norwegian Male Chorus*, *Ladies Chorus* and *Youth Chorus* were natural and vital parts of the celebration of May 17th. The choirs were described in most positive terms, as illustrated from *Western Viking's* description: "The Ladies Chorus appeared like a national garden of flowers, and sang like a morning of spring."⁴⁹ The choirs, who mostly performed separately, gave their interpretations of national and patriotic songs, such as the Norwegian *Gud signe vårt dyre fedreland, Norge, mitt Norge, Vi vandrer med freidig mot* as well as the American *America* or *This is my country*. Traditional Norwegian folk songs, such as *Ola Glomstulen, Kjerringa med staven* were also frequently performed.⁵⁰ The choirs were often accompanied or succeeded by an orchestra. Tunes or elements from Grieg's compositions appear to have been frequent, often presented

⁴⁶ See Bjørgen and Hovland 2001.

⁴⁷ *Washington Posten* May 30, 1947, page 2. My translation. Original phrase: "Nåda, det er vel først og fremst en mer eller mindre bevisst trang til å nøre det dypeste og beste i ens hjerteliv – minnene fra egen barndom og ungdom – som driver det norske utvandrerfolk til å feire den 17. mai dens nye hjemland."

⁴⁸ See chapter 1, *Invented Traditions*.

⁴⁹ *Western Viking* May 25, 1962, page 6. My translation. Original phrase: "Ladies Chorus tok seg ut som en nasjonal blomserhage og sang som en vårmorgen."

⁵⁰ Norwegian 17th of May Committe Archive, folder 13.

as solo interpretations with the violin.⁵¹ *Bunad* clad *Leikarring* or folkdance groups were also an important part of the entertainment, again accompanied by the Norwegian choruses or orchestra. A play or a sketch with Norwegian elements also seems to have been part of the program, most frequently until the early 1950s. Though the plays had Norwegian settings, they were performed in English.⁵² In 1948, there was a bridal scene from *Hardanger*, which featured *Leikarring* dance and singing by members of the *Norwegian Ladies Chorus*.⁵³ One possible symbolic interpretation could be that the married couple represented two cultures, Norwegian and American, uniting and finding a new expression in Norwegian American culture.

Evening Program

After the official celebration, dinner and dancing was arranged at Norway Center. *Washington Posten*, and its successor *Western Viking*, did not seem to give this event much coverage; rather they just gave notice that a dance was arranged. Whether this means that the event was considered too informal and not interesting to cover, or not purely or sufficiently Norwegian, is not revealed from the available sources. I find it reasonable to assume that this was considered mainly to be a social event, and as less interesting for coverage than the official celebration. Easily prepared food, such as a Swedish-style smorgasbord, or “cookies or other refreshments” were served. In other words, simple to serve many, and Scandinavian inspired.⁵⁴

Despite little coverage, the evening dance evidently changed a lot during the post war years. In 1951 there was a performance of Scandinavian ring dances in combination with American make up dances. Albeit the combination of Norwegian and American dances, newly arrived immigrants felt that the performance was more Norwegian than in Norway.⁵⁵ In 1964 the dance was severely criticized for being a performance of rock and roll and a twist on the Constitution Day: “This is equal to mocking the Norwegian flag by pulling it under our feet. Only truly Norwegian is good enough for the 17th of May.” The “real” Norwegians were encouraged to stay at home, and a plea was expressed to celebrate the Norwegian Constitution

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² In the program from 1949 it was stated that “The play would be performed in English so that the young generation would be able to understand.” (Norwegian 17th of May Committee Archive. Folder 13.)

⁵³ *Washington Posten* May 21, 1948, page 1.

⁵⁴ See for instance *Washington Posten* May 25, 1956, page 6. Norwegian 17th of May Committee Archive. Folder 13.

⁵⁵ *Washington Posten* May 25, 1951, page 2.

Day “purely and nationally.”⁵⁶ This clearly illustrates disagreements with regards to what elements should be included in a celebration. Should the celebration mainly contain national romantic Norwegian elements? To what extent should American features, or modern elements for that matter, be included?

National Symbols in the Celebration.

As a celebration of a Norwegian event, the celebration naturally contained traditional Norwegian elements, but the appearances of American elements were also strongly present. There was the appearance of the American flag, flown alongside the Norwegian, both used for decorations as well carried by the children or other participants in the parade. This double use could indicate dual nationality. A combination of traditional Norwegian folk songs, as well as the patriotic nationalist songs, both Norwegian and American, seemed to indicate national identity with both countries, with Norwegian ethnic roots. Pictures of Norway in a traditional national romantic style were often depicted on a large screen. But on at least on one occasion, a visual background from the Washington area was chosen: “Solveig’s song and Norwegian Dance became an unforgettable experience. The beautiful background, a gigantic picture of Mt. Rainier contributed greatly to the prevailing high spirits.”⁵⁷

Nature is a recurring theme in national romanticism. National romanticism is often associated with ethnic nationalism, there is a people, a land and a history, and nature is depicted as a part of the folk spirit. As the local nature was depicted, this could be an indication that the Norwegian people were settling permanently in the Washington area. As pointed out in chapter 2, many coastal Norwegians easily settled in Washington as the landscape reminded them of home.⁵⁸ The combination of the local landscape and Norwegian folk music functions as homemaking. The homemaking aspect of nature is further repeated in the *Western Viking*: “If you take a Norwegian and place him with the back towards Mt. Rainier and his chest facing Puget Sound, then he will settle.”⁵⁹

With regards to songs, the national anthems *Ja vi elsker* and the *Star Sprangled Banner*, both have a patriotic national meaning. The singing of these anthems introduced the celebration; hence they should be seen as elements of primary importance. *God Bless America*

⁵⁶ *Western Viking* May 25, 1962, page 6. My translation. Original phrase: “Lat oss feire nasjonaldagen reint og nasjonalt!”

⁵⁷ *Washington Posten* May 19, 1950. page 1 Solveigs sang og Norsk Dans ble en uforglemmelig opplevelse. Den vakre bakgrunnen, et kjempemessig bilde av Mt. Rainier, bidrog stort til å forhøye stemningen.”

⁵⁸ Lovoll 1998a: 235.

⁵⁹ *Western Viking* May 16, 1975 My translation. Original phrase: “Tar du en nordmann og plasserer ham med ryggen mot Mt. Rainer og brystet mot Puget Sound, ja da slår han rot.”

and *This is my country, Norge, mitt Norge* and *Gud signe vårt dyre fedreland* are other examples of frequently used songs which all in principle have more civic connotations for the two countries respectively. As previously mentioned, traditional Norwegian folk songs such as *Kjerringa med staven* or *Ola Glomstulen* could symbolise Norwegian ethnic roots, the past and heritage. In this connection, it is noteworthy that official celebration ended with combined singing of *the Star Sprangled Banner*; in many ways suggesting a future path as American citizens. In the same way as the children's parade started the program, a united singing of one of these songs was a symbolic indication that the audience had Norwegian ethnic roots, but that American was their future identity. A commentary to this finale was stated in the *Western Viking* as follows:

Yes, this is our new home land. This country where the old Norsemen left large and rich traces, and where the Norwegian people probably will leave new and even larger marks. We have grown to love this country too. It brought most of us what we wanted in life. But perhaps most important, it brought us the "Pillars of Freedom."⁶⁰

Use of Language

Just as the elements and symbolic functions were a combination of Norwegian and American, the language was also a blend of both Norwegian and English. The chairman welcomed the audience in both languages. It seems that the speeches were to a great extent given in English, even if the speaker was Norwegian.⁶¹ *Washington Posten* was not too excited by this practice, stating the following upon a speech given by Norwegian professor Herman Tønnesson.

It is a pity that these Norwegian exchange-professors are not allowed to give their speeches in Norwegian for a Norwegian audience. How much more would not we Norwegian listeners digest from their excellent speeches?"⁶²

In 1947, Paal Berg, leader of the civil wing of the resistant forces from London during the Second World War, was invited to speak and did so in a mixture of Norwegian and English.⁶³ The decision that Berg should speak in English to Seattle's May 17th audience was however severely criticized:

⁶⁰ *Washington Posten*, May 30, 1958. My translation. Original phrase: "Ja, dette er vårt nye fedreland. Dette land hvor de gamle nordmenn satte rike og store merker etter seg, og hvor den norske slekt nok vil sette nye og større merker. Dette land er vi også blitt glad i. Det gav de fleste av oss mange av de ting som de kanskje ønsket seg i livet. Men kanskje det største det gav oss, "Pillars of Freedom."

⁶¹ *Washington Posten* and its successor *Western Viking* are the main sources for information about the celebration in this period of time. When they *described* the speeches, it was done in Norwegian, but when an entire speech is printed in the newspaper, it was written in English. Manuscripts of speeches are written in English. (August Werner Archive. Folders 20-42.)

⁶² *Washington Posten* May 22, 1959, page 2. My translation. Original phrase: "Synd at ikke alle disse norske bytte-professorene kan få lov til å fremføre sine taler på norsk for de norske forsamlinger. Hvor meget mer kunne vi norske tilhørere fordøye fra deres utmerkede taler."

⁶³ *Washington Posten* May 30, 1947, page 2.

People simply couldn't follow. The English pronunciation was too strange. The committee did not just let the many listeners down, but also was unjust to the distinguished, sympathetic guest by putting him in an awkward position as principal speaker of an audience where almost everyone understand Norwegian and are longing for the bliss of hearing the great command of the Norwegian language, which Paal Berg and other sophisticated Norwegian guests represent.⁶⁴

Judging from these opinions in Washington, it may seem that a clear majority of the participants were Norwegian-speaking, and their views represent a desire to keep the event predominantly Norwegian. In addition, it may seem that the Norwegian Americans were confident English speakers, and a more rustic pronunciation of English would also seem alien to them.

Whereas it was desirable that Norwegians used their mother tongue rather than English, the effort of Norwegian Americans to use Norwegian was described in much more positive terms. With the *Norwegian Youth Chorus'* 1958 version of *Ola Glomstulen* and *Vivandrer med freidig mot*, *Washington Posten's* reporter was impressed and surprised that the children, merely second or third generation Norwegian, could interpret Norwegian folk songs with such perfection.⁶⁵ English with a Norwegian accent seemed to have been undesirable, whereas Norwegian with an English accent did not seem as unpopular. Evidently, most Norwegian American would be speaking Norwegian with a stronger American accent.

What type of Celebration?

The celebrants were located in an auditorium and the official program was performed from a stage. The stage could give bring to mind a theatre, and from this point of view, the celebrations could be regarded as a performance of Norwegian American culture; containing elements from both cultures. In line with Hobsbawm's constructivist approach, this could be viewed as the scene in which Norwegian American identity is formed, expressed and developed. The play was performed in the auditorium, behind closed doors, and both the participants and directors had a Norwegian American background.

There seems to be a double message in the elements of celebration. First, the dual arena for celebration, *Seattle Center* and *Norway Center*, between which from 1959 was the route for the children's parade. Second, there was a combination of flags, the Norwegian and

⁶⁴ *Washington Posten* May 30, 1947. My translation. Original phrase: "Folk kunne simpelthen ikke følge med, den engelske uttalen var for fremmed. Komiteen sviktet ikke bare de mange tilhørerne, men gjorde urett mot den eminente, sympatiske gjesten ved å sette ham i et mindre heldig lys som festtaler på engelsk til en forsamling hvor de allerfleste forstår norsk, og hungret etter den nytelse som språkføringen til Paal Berg og andre åndsformede gjester fra Norge representer."

⁶⁵ *Washington Posten* May 30, 1958, page 2.

the American flags being used both for the parade and stage decorations. Third, the use of language was dual; a combination of Norwegian and English. Fourth, the choice of songs; combining Norwegian folk songs and more national songs, as well as American national songs. Fifth, the post war plays; where the setting and music was primarily Norwegian, but were performed in English. Lastly, the dances also attest this dual message, including bunad clad *Leikarring* dancers on stage versus the more informal or spontaneous twist dancing at the dance later in the evening.

Yet, some elements appeared to be purely Norwegian or American without its binary opposite. In 1951, recently arrived immigrants from Norway exclaimed that the celebration of May 17th was even more Norwegian than in was the case in Norway. *Washington Posten's* reporter saw this as a sign that the Norwegians of Seattle raised their children according to fine, Norwegian traditions.⁶⁶ This could be a way of trying to preserve identity and to maintain the traditions from the time of emigration, which Historian Knut Kjeldstadli has labelled an “imagined home country”⁶⁷

On the other hand, part of the celebration was adapted to American ways. One of the objectives was fund raising for charitable causes. In years of surplus, the 17th of May Committee donated to costs of building of *Norse Home*, which was a retirement home primarily for elderly Norwegian Americans.⁶⁸ In this way the celebration was both a socializing event for the young generation as well as creating a safety net for the older generation. In 1963, profits from the celebration contributed to financing the erection of a statue of Leif Eriksson at the harbour in Ballard, which was unveiled at the Seattle Worldfair in 1962.⁶⁹ Leif Eriksson had a unique status within the Norwegian American community as the first “Norwegian” and explorer of America, making Norwegian claim recognition as the most authentic ethnic group in America. This aspect was emphasized in several of the speeches in this time period.

⁶⁶ *Washington Posten* May 25, 1951. Page 2.

⁶⁷ Kjeldstadli, Knut. “Immigrasjon” in Lovoll, Odd (ed) *Migrasjon og tilpasning. Ingrid Semmingsen. Et minneseminar. Tid og Tanke*. No 3/Fall 1998b. Pp. 39-54. The theory is rooted in Benedict Anderson’s theory of *Imagined Communities*, in which he argues that press and common written language created an imagined bond between language users, in which they would identify with each other. Kjeldstadli suggests that an idea of an imagined home country may take root in immigrant communities, a more or less idealized image, more in line with reminiscence of the country they left than the actual present country.

⁶⁸ A total of 1057,73 dollars were donated in the years 1954-59. In 1959-1962, there were deficits of between 20 and 200 dollars annually. (Norwegian 17th of May Committee Archive. Folder 7.)

⁶⁹ Norwegian 17th of May Committee Archive. Folder 7.

Speeches

The speeches were an important patriotic part of the program, and the thoughts and ideas expressed in the speeches may serve as an important key to understanding Norwegian American views on Norwegian and American identities. Whereas the expressive elements of a ritual such as May 17th could be difficult to interpret, the speeches are more explicit and cognitive due to their textual forms. The speaker's opinions did not necessarily represent a dominant view among the celebrators, but the speakers were primarily chosen from prominent members of the Norwegian American community in Seattle or Washington. The speakers probably formulated their speeches more or less in line with their conception of the audience's expectations. It is not clear what was expected or required of the main speaker on the Norwegian Constitution Day, but clearly it was an honor given to distinguished individuals of Norwegian background, either for their status within the community, their political or professional achievements, and also naturally for their oratorical abilities. On one of the speeches it was noted: "It was an enjoyable experience. One could give in to the beauty of the language and the rhythm of eloquence."⁷⁰ From the late 1960s, the committee to a larger extent invited non-local speakers, such as the ambassadors Arne Gunnereng and Ole Aalgard in 1968 and 1972 accordingly, as well as Edward Hambro, Norwegian Ambassador to the UN in 1971.⁷¹ Still, only two of the speakers in this period did not live in Norway.⁷²

Group Cohesion- Homeland Myth

Since most of the speakers belonged to the Norwegian American community, a strong emphasis was put on the role and achievement of Norwegians in America. Naturally, there was also attention to Norway, the original reason for celebration and an outline of Norwegian history. Congressman Henry M. Jackson emphasized Norwegian history and the reasons for celebrating the Constitution Day in his speech in 1948. *Washington Posten* pointed out that he had a difficult job trying to teach Seattle's Norwegian audience anything new about its country's history.⁷³ Apparently, the role and achievements of Norwegians in America were of larger interest.

⁷⁰ *Washington Posten* May 23, 1952. My translation. Original phrase: "det ble en behagelig opplevelse. En henga sig til språkets vellyd og veltalenhetens rytme."

⁷¹ Program 2009, page 30-31.

⁷² Paal Berg in 1948, Hallvard Lange, member of the Norwegian parliament for *Arbeiderpartiet*. (The Labor Party) in 1968.

⁷³ *Washington Posten* May 21, 1948, page 1.

August Werner served several times as main speaker during the post-war period, starting with the festive year of 1945.⁷⁴ He was a professor of music at the *University of Washington*, and a prominent figure in the Norwegian American community. He focused on the greatness of Norway and Norwegians, in art, music, literature, and exploration, and highlighted great well-known Norwegians such as Edvard Munch, Edvard Grieg, Ole Bull, Henrik Ibsen and Sigrid Undset, Roald Amundsen and Leif Eriksson. He pointed out, however, that: "it is not only those born in Norway that paints a hail of Glory around Norway's name."⁷⁵ Achievements by Norwegian American should also be recognized. One of Werner's examples was General Heg,⁷⁶ who fought and died as a heroes in the American Civil War as leader of a Norwegian regiment: "completely Norwegian, all enlisted"⁷⁷

As briefly pointed to in the previous chapter, Orm Øverland argues that a variety of myths of belonging flourished among immigrants to the US, especially during the Americanization era after the First World War. These myths Øverland labels *Homemaking myths*, which he defines as "a particular construction of ethnic memory with a special view to ensuring and improving an ethnic future."⁷⁸

The myths are characterized by a claim to a new and specific status in the immigrants' new homeland. It is not just a claim of recognition as a group; but also an idea of being better Americans because of belonging to a certain ethnic group.⁷⁹ One of these myths, as mentioned in Werner's speech, dealt with the presence and participation of Norwegians in the American Civil War, especially owing to Norwegian born General Heg and the 15th Wisconsin regiment, of which the majority had Scandinavian heritage. It was argued that "no other nation was so greatly and bravely represented as the Norwegian one"⁸⁰. This was symbolic to

⁷⁴ August Werner (1893-1980) was a 1st generation immigrant born in Bergen. He served as principal speaker in 1945, 1951, 1961, 1962 (Program 2009:30-31). He was Professor of Music at the *University of Washington* from 1931 to 1965, and directed both the Norwegian Male and Ladies Chorus. He was also an artist, both painting landscape pictures of Norway and made the sculpture of Leif Erikson, placed in Ballard 1960. There is an archive at the University of Washington containing his work and speeches, a clear indication of his position both within and beyond the Norwegian American community in Seattle.

⁷⁵ August Werner Archive. Folder 28. Notes to speech 1961, page 12.

⁷⁶ Hans Christian Heg (1829-1863) was a first generation immigrant from Lier outside Drammen. He served as a Colonel and Brigade Commander of the 15th regiment of the Union Army during the American Civil War. He died after being wounded at the battle of Chickamauga in 1863, and was not promoted General before his death, and the regiment is said to have regretted this decision. The reference to Heg as a General may illustrate the symbolism in presenting Norwegian contribution to America in the best possible manner. For a thorough account, see Blegen, Theodore "Colonel Hanas Christian Heg" in *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*. Vol 4.No 2. Dec 1920.

⁷⁷ August Werner Archive. Folder 28, speech 1961 page 12c.

⁷⁸ Øverland 1996:6.

⁷⁹ Øverland 1996: 2. Schulz 1994:10.

⁸⁰ Ole Buslett 1894. Quoted in Øverland 1996:12.

the claim that there were no better Americans than Norwegian Americans, and the first to stand up to defend the country at a time of crisis.

With regards to myths of origin for Norwegian Americans, Øverland recognizes the following characteristic elements. First, Norwegians and Norwegian Americans were descendants of Vikings and Leif Eriksson, who were the original discoverers of America, 500 years before Columbus, who did not even set foot on North American soil. Consequently, Norwegians were genuinely the first of the immigrant groups. Second, democratic ideas and principles were Norwegian by origin, as old Norse laws were brought to England with the Vikings, and paved the way for the English Magna Carta, from which both the American and later Norwegian Constitutions were inspired. Therefore by extension American democratic principles were Norwegian in origin. Third, it was believed that there had been Norse settlement in areas of Britain which later fostered the first generation of immigrants to the British colonies, such as the Mayflower. From this point of view, *ideas* originated in Norway took part in establishing American system of government, and *people* of Norwegian origin were the first Americans.

Øverland emphasizes that these myths of origin may come without territorial claim, reshaped and redefined for immigrants. He argues that these myths seem to have had their heyday from 1870 until the 1920s, but judging from the content of the speeches held for the Norwegian Constitution Day after 1945, it is evident that these myths still appeared relevant for the Norwegian American community in Seattle in the post war period.

All of the above mentioned myths were represented in August Werner's speeches. He pointed out that the Declaration of Independence was inspired by the 1500 year old Norse Laws, and that the parliamentary system came with the Vikings to England, emphasizing the freedom of speech, personal rights and freedom. These ideals were manifested in the Magna Carta, and then in the Declaration of Independence.⁸¹ The Norwegians also "taught the world the concise writing of history and were pioneers both in winter sports, ship building and shipping."⁸²

Another factor was the recognition made by important Americans. The endorsement of Abraham Lincoln seemed to give confidence to the ethnic group: "I know the Norwegians, and I don't know of any other group of immigrants who have done more for this country than

⁸¹ *Washington Posten* May 25, 1951, page 1.

⁸² August Werner cited in *Washington Posten* May 25, 1951, page 1. My translation. Original phrase: Nordmennene lærte verden konsis historieskriving, og var foregangsmenn i vintersport, skipsbygging og shipping."

they have”⁸³ The contribution and greatness of Norwegians were strongly emphasized. “We put our mark and stamps on many things which have bettered the human race, and of these things we are justly proud.”⁸⁴

Ethnicity and Civic Nationalism

Several of the speeches had references to the mother nation, Norway, and the current country of residence, America.

August Werner described the patriotism for his two countries as follows: “A thanks to those who gave their lives so that both Norway and this, our adopted country can live in freedom.”⁸⁵ “Adopted” may bring out a family connotation, referring to the social function of the offspring. An adopted child is not one’s biological offspring, but socially and emotionally the feelings are, or should be, the same. However, the affection for the biological child, or motherland, could be more unconditional or patriotic.

The family analogy was also used in other speeches: “You don’t love your wife any less if you love your mother dearly.”⁸⁶ Here the mother could represent tradition, memories and heritage, whereas the wife might represent present and future, every day life and choice. Both in Norway and America in the 1950s, men mostly chose their wives, never their mother. But their ethnicity or heritage was still decisive and important in terms of shaping their personal character.

Several speakers stressed the dual heritage; Norwegian and American. In one of his speeches, Governor Arthur Langlie⁸⁷ described Norwegian Americans as “Americans in whose veins course the blood of Vikings”⁸⁸

But as proud as we are of Norwegian heritage, let us not for a moment forget the American heritage that is also ours. We should use May 17th as a day when reminding ourselves of our rich dual heritage that help us become even better Americans.⁸⁹

This argument accorded with Øverland’s homeland myth: The Norwegian heritage made the Norwegians better Americans.

⁸³ August Werner Archive. Folder 28. Notes from 1961 speech, page 12.

⁸⁴ August Werner Archive. Folder 25. Notes from 1951 speech, page 4.

⁸⁵ August Werner Archive. Folder 28. Notes from speech 1961, page 15.

⁸⁶ *Washington Posten* May 11, 1951, page 1. My translation. Original phrase: “Du elsker ikke konen din noe mindre om du elsker din mor høyt.”

⁸⁷ Arthur B. Langlie (1900-1966), a second generation Norwegian American, was member of the Republican party. He served as Mayor of Seattle (1938-1941) and Governor for the state of Washington for two periods, 1941- 1945, and 1949-1957. (Berner, Richard *From Boom to Bust, Seattle in the 20th century*. Seattle 1992. 354-355) Langlie was chosen as speaker 1946, 1949, 1950 and 1955. (See appendix.)

⁸⁸ Arthur Langlie cited in *Washington Posten*, May 19, 1950, page 2.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

The family analogy was also used to describe the first American president. “The father of our country; George Washington, was a proud member of the Scandinavian society in Philadelphia.”⁹⁰ Norwegian ethnicity and adherence to American civic principles was well combined, as the first civic leader of the independent nation had Norwegian heritage. Knowing the heritage would help the individual become a better American. Knowing one’s root compared not to knowing one’s root helped in creating a good American.⁹¹

Different Nations- Same Goals?

A gradual tendency throughout this period was an increased focus on the mutual ideological bonds between Norway and America. The majority of speakers were no longer invited locally, but included Norwegian representatives from across the US. Several times Norwegian ambassadors or Norwegian politicians and professors were invited. The Second World War was hardly a generation away, and the world again seemed to be polarized and threatened, this time by the Cold War. The ideals of freedom were emphasized in speeches, probably both referring to the regained peace after the Second World War and the fear of communism. In such a polarized climate, emphasizing a shared ideology between Norway and the US could function as a way to create a sense of belonging and group cohesion both within and across ethnic or national groups. In contrast to the situation after the First World War, acceptance for identification with another nation was starting to spread – having another political ideology was considered far more dangerous.

When the relationship between Norway and the US was discussed, the focus was put on the similarity between the two countries, in practise and Constitution. Norway was described as an exemplary partner for the US in the free world’s democracy. The necessity to preserve Norway within the systems of alliance to protect the country from Russian aggression was stressed. Americas’ allies were expected to share responsibility in handling “the Russian problem.”⁹² Norway was hailed as a “northern anchor of democracy.”⁹³ The Scandinavian success was by choosing a middle of the road program; social and economic justice for all was applauded. In contrast to the situation in the immediate post-war years, *Washington Posten* noted that Norway had changed a lot, and learning about Norway no longer seemed irrelevant:

⁹⁰ August Werner Archive. Folder 25. Notes from speech 1951, page 16.

⁹¹ *Washington Posten* 23.5.1952. Henry Jackson’s speech.

⁹² From Henry Jackson’s speech referred to in *Washington Posten* May 28, 1952. This point is also mentioned in various August Werner speeches.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

During these 25 years after the German capitulation there has been a period of growth that would be hard to imagine for an immigrant. Norway has become a country with opportunities for all social classes, including widows and orphans, the disabled, the helpless and elderly.⁹⁴

Similarities in the system of government also seemed to be a popular topic for speakers, especially politicians or state officials such as the consul or ambassadors.

The similarity between the constitutions; that the Norwegian Constitution was inspired by the American one, and the two nations' similar fight for independence, were frequent topics for the speakers. Similar government and shared ideology enabled the two nations to cooperate well, and their freedom and democracy should be an example to all the un-free nations in the world, it was argued.⁹⁵ The celebration of May 17th should be "an occasion of sincere rededication to the principles of liberty and equality and opportunity, upon which both the United States of America and Norway are founded."⁹⁶ To a great extent, emphasis was put on the similarities between the two different nations, making identification with one recognition of the other.

Public Debate –Unity or Diversity?

With only one exception, the celebration of May 17th was arranged on the nearest weekend.⁹⁷

It was argued that the celebration needed to be adapted to American life. Arranging the celebration on a weekend made it easier for people to come, and the atmosphere would be more festive, adherents argued. One had to adapt to American realities, in which the 17th of May was an ordinary weekday.

The celebration of May 17th will not be disturbed by moving it some days back or forth. It should not be any more difficult than Palm Sunday, which changes date every year. With a bit of good will it is just as easy to find the May 17th spirit on the 19th or 20th as on the 17th.⁹⁸

Contrary to this view, it was argued that moving the day of celebration was unpatriotic. To consider the celebration of an event moveable, was admitting that it was not sufficiently important to merit a fixed date, critics argued. Other national holidays, such as the 4th of July

⁹⁴ *Western Viking*. May 1, 1970, page 4. My translation. Original phrase: "Gjennom disse 25 år etter den tyske kapitulasjon hard et vært en oppbyggingsperiode I Norge som en utvandrer vanskelig kan forestille seg. Norge er blitt et land med livsmuligheter for alle samfunnsklasser, også for enker og faderløse, for de uføre, de hjelpsløse, og for eldre."

⁹⁵ *Western Viking* May 23, 1969, page 2. From ambassador Gunneng's speech.

⁹⁶ Arthur Langlie cited in *Washington Posten* May 19, 1950.

⁹⁷ In 1951 the celebration was arranged the 17th, which fell on a Thursday.

⁹⁸ *Washington Posten* May 18, 1956, page 2. My translation. Original phrase: "17. mai feiringen tar ingen skade av å bli flyttet noen dager fram og tilbake. Det bør ikke bli vanskeligere enn med palmesøndag, som stadig skifter dato. Med litt godvilje er det like lett å komme i 17. mai stemning på den 19. eller 20. som på selve datoen."

or the Irish *St. Patricks Day* the 17th of March were never moved due to expediency. Hence May 17th should have the same status and be celebrated on the correct date.⁹⁹ Newly arrived immigrants, referred to as “post war Norwegians” were especially critical of the practice of moving the celebration. The official celebration did however remain a weekend phenomenon all through the period.

The 17th of May Committee consisted of several different ethnic organizations representing different views, be they religious, regional, political or commercial. As the committee wanted to incorporate “all” of the Norwegian community, there seemed to be disagreement about the forms of celebration. There were also competing celebrations of the Norwegian Constitution day, many of them arranged by church communities. These celebrations receive more column space from the 1960s, at the expense of the official celebration. It might seem that there was a schism between those who want to preserve the celebrations form from the 1950s and those who want to include more than traditional Norwegian elements and reach out to a wider community. A comment in *Western Viking* predicted that Seattle in the future would have three different types of celebrations; those arranged by the churches, an official one, and one primarily focusing on dancing and fun.¹⁰⁰ Apparently, the debate boiled down to whether the celebration should primarily be a religious, a national or a social event. This discussion and the alternative celebrations might have contributed to a somewhat lower attendance for the official celebration from the late 1950s.

As new migration also came to a relative standstill, the natural recruitment that characterized the immediate post war years was no longer found. For the generation which had grown up in the US, the celebration may not have had held same emotional meaning as for the immigrant generation. Two of the people I interviewed were born in Norway in the 1920s and emigrated as young children explained that they used to attend the celebration with their parents before they stopped while they raised a family and then got involved again later.¹⁰¹ They both independently explained that it was difficult to find the time when they were bringing up children. As the celebration was arranged in a manner which was amenable to children, it may seem more likely that the celebration had become alien to the generation who had grown up in America before the Second World War. As a consequence, recruitment stagnated and made it difficult keep the attendance at a 1950-level.

⁹⁹ *Washington Posten* May 19, 1950, page 2

¹⁰⁰ *Western Viking* May 25, 1962, page 2.

¹⁰¹ Informant 8 and 10. They both remembered attending the celebration in the Civic Auditorium, marching on stage, but did not continue the tradition as young adults.

For the 150th anniversary of the Norwegian Constitution in 1964, a plea for cooperation was expressed in *Western Viking*: “This will be a celebration that could unite all Norwegians, despite different beliefs and church interests.”¹⁰² There also seems to have been a disagreement between the old and the newly arrived immigrants with regards to practises. Some newly arrived immigrants were critical of celebrating on the nearest weekend, whereas young new immigrants were criticized for dancing the twist at the evening dance at Norway Center, and wearing short skirts: “Most of those who did the twist at Norway Center spent their childhood years in the occupied Norway – without giving that a single thought”¹⁰³ This commentator further recalls his own childhood in Norway in the early 1900s, when “the skirts were flared and full”.¹⁰⁴ It seems that his childhood in Norway was associated with purity, whereas the modern, or American, for him signaled some sort of moral decay. To this commentator, early 1900 Norway was *the imagined home country*.¹⁰⁵

What be should the reasons for continue to celebrate the Norwegian Constitution Day in America? One suggestion launched the following:

Let us celebrate the 17th of May maybe no longer so much for having our constitution, for the abolishment of Danish rule, but to remember we are still Norwegians. Only through a strong national bond and a conscious unity, the Norwegians have managed to make themselves noticed in the new world.¹⁰⁶

The new Ethnicity

The desire to receive acknowledgement outside one’s own ethnic group seemed to have grown stronger during the 1960s.¹⁰⁷ With regard to the Norwegian American community and the 17th of May, coverage of the event beyond the ethnic community newspaper was desired. By advertising on the local TV and radio stations, wider publicity was attempted at.¹⁰⁸

Despite efforts to attract people outside the Norwegian community, participation was falling, and there is no evidence that the 1960s attracted more people outside the Norwegian

¹⁰² *Western Viking* May 8, 1964. My translation. Original phrase: “dette vil være en fest som alle nordmenn kan samle seg om, uansett trosbekjennelse og kirkelig interesse.”

¹⁰³ *Western Viking* May 25, 1962. My translation. Original phrase: “de fleste av dem som danset Twist på 17.mai-festen i Norway Center trådte vel sine barnesko under okkupasjonen I Norge –uten å gi det en tanke.”

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ This concept is explained in the section *What Type of Celebration?*

¹⁰⁶ *Western Viking* May 15, 1970, page 2. My translation. Original phrase: ”la oss feire 17. mai, kanskje ikke så meget lenger fordi vi fikk vår grunnlov, fordi det ble slutt på foreningen med Danmark, men for å minnes at vi fremdeles er nordmenn. Bare gjennom en sterk nasjonal følelse og følgelig et bevisst samhold har nordmenn klart å hevde seg som en markert gruppe i den nye verden.”

¹⁰⁷ The theoretic background for this will be discussed in chapter 4.

¹⁰⁸ *Western Viking* May 1, 1964, page 6.

American community. *Seattle Times* have a few reports from the celebration, but the choice of words still indicates that the event is of specific rather than general interest. In 1965 the following is noted “May 17th is a big day in Norway. And so it is to the thousands of Norwegians who live in Seattle.”¹⁰⁹

In *Vikingen*, *Leif Eriksson’s Lodge* magazine, frustration with falling attendance was expressed as follows:

With 2100 paying members in our own lodge alone, one would expect that at least 750 paying patrons would come to a United 17th of May Committee celebration. What are we doing wrong? Is it impossible to stir up Norwegian enthusiasm anymore? Due to the not quite full house, the committee will have a hard time making expenses.¹¹⁰

Clearly, the event was in a period of strong decline, and changes needed to be made to prevent it from slowly fading away altogether.

A newcomer among alternative arrangements marking the Norwegian Constitution Day was the *Ballard Chamber of Commerce* celebration, which was initially mentioned in the *Western Viking* in 1972. The celebration was marketed as a Ballard community event, in which people were encouraged to buy Norwegian foods or other merchandise.¹¹¹ A Norwegian “Mother of the Year” contest was arranged, in which Norwegian born mothers were eligible, and the winner received a trip to Norway. Here the “mother” could also allude to the motherland, both as the winner and the award in this contest. The event was advertised as being an “appreciation of the large Norwegian American population in Ballard and in honor of the Norwegian Independence Day”.¹¹²

A grand parade was also arranged for this event. This event seemed to have drawn quite big crowds, and the parade grew rapidly. As early as 1973, it was reported that sixty seven units were signed up for marching in the Ballard parade.¹¹³ The event by no means tried to exclude other ethnic groups or the main Seattle population, and other ethnic groups were encouraged to join the celebration: “Whether you are a Norsky, Svensky or Irish- grab your hat and come down to Ballard where the action is”¹¹⁴

In 1974 it was decided to move the official celebration to Ballard and combine efforts with the *Ballard Chamber of Commerce*. The celebration of the Norwegian

¹⁰⁹ *Seattle Times* May 8, 1965, page 4.

¹¹⁰ *Vikingen*, April 1972, no.4, page 3. In Norwegian Norwegian Norwegian 17th of May Committee Archive Archive of Seattle. Box 1, Folder 1.

¹¹¹ *Western Viking* May 26, 1972, page 10. *Ballard News Tribune* May 24, 1972, page 1.

¹¹² *Western Viking* May 12, 1972 page 4.

¹¹³ *Ballard News Tribune* May 1, 1973, page 1.

¹¹⁴ *Ballard News Tribune* May 17, 1972, page 1.

Constitution Day in Seattle was taking to the streets and explicitly welcoming a larger audience.

Summary and Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have investigated the celebration of May 17th from 1945-1973. It appears that enthusiasm after the liberation of Norway, as well as an influx of new immigrants gave the celebration a boost which lasted throughout the 1950s. During the 1960s and early 1970s, the number of attendees dropped significantly; from a peak of about 4000 paying attendees in the early 1950s, to an attendance below 1000 from the early 1970s.

The celebration was arranged by the 17th of May committee, which consisted of members from Norwegian ethnic organizations. The participants seemed predominately to be the organization members' children, in addition to choirs and Norwegian folk dance groups. It seems likely that most of the attendants also were first and second generation Norwegian. The *barnetog*, folk dance performances and the plays with a Norwegian setting were all indications of attachment to the mother country, maintaining a national culture from the country of origin. The combination of languages, singing of the two national anthems and display of both flags rather than the domination of one seemed to serve to build and support the Norwegian American ethnic community, and develop confidence in a Norwegian American identity. This function appeared to be well supported from the content of the speeches; in the first part of the post war period, the achievement and contribution of Norwegians both to American and human society was emphasized; aspects that should be considered a part of *Homemaking myths*. These aspects were relevant for the function of *community building*, particularly for those who had emigrated first hand before the Second World War. Though the number of attendees reached a peak during the 1950s, it seemed that many of the newcomers did not maintain going to the official celebration for long.

To a certain extent, the speeches could signal the transition of views about nationality. The initial focus had emphasized a Norwegian American pride. Later, ideological equality and fear of socialism gradually became a stronger agenda. During the 1960s, a gulf between the "old" and "new" immigration appeared to grow stronger; as did the concept of what was properly Norwegian. On one side were temperance aspect and strong religious views, whereas on the other side contemporary elements, such as twist dancing were featured. It appears that the celebration struggled to attract both a conservative and a liberal audience; neither appealing to the most traditional nor the most modern Norwegian Americans. A growing number of people had grown up in America, and did not seem to identify with the

celebration's sentiments. Consequently, the Norwegian Constitution Day was struggling to maintain its function as an arena for a Norwegian American *communitas*.¹¹⁵ The need to stress immigrant identity became less prevalent, and the display of an ethnic identity within mainstream society gradually came to be a more relevant issue.

¹¹⁵ See discussion of Victor Turner in chapter 1, *Ritual an Anthropological Approach?*

4 1974-2009 AN INCLUSIVE EVENT?

When most people think of the 17th of May Celebration they usually remember the parade, which is one of the largest ethnic parades in the United States with over a 100 units every year. After all, everyone loves a parade, especially the children. But there is much more to the 17th of May Celebration in Seattle than the parade.¹

With the moving of the official celebration to Ballard, the celebration of Norway's Constitution Day took to the streets. More precisely to the commercial center of Ballard; from Adams School through Market Street, finishing at *Bergen Place*.² The parade became the symbol of public celebration, attracting both participants and spectators from all over the city, in addition to Norwegian Americans from other parts of the state. The celebration of the Norwegian Constitution Day was no longer intended to be an event arranged by Norwegian American organizations solely for its own ethnic group, it also became a local community affair. Though the parade became the most visible part of the celebration, the occasion was marked the whole day through events in Ballard and a patriotic dinner or luncheon.

This chapter starts with an outline and description of the altered role and view of ethnicity in America; a development which I will argue fuelled the transition of the celebration of May 17th in Seattle from 1974. This could help describe *why* it changed. There are other research questions relevant for this chapter. How was the event organized in this period? Was the event gradually becoming more open? Were different parts of the celebration more inclusive than others? And finally, what elements were similar or different compared to earlier – in which direction was the celebration going?

Ethnic Revival or Symbolic Ethnicity?

Until the 1960s, the dominant view was that immigrant culture in America was gradually absorbed into the host culture after a couple of generations. This was referred to as the

¹ www.17thofmay.org.

² Bergen Place is located in the commercial center Ballard, named after its sister city, Bergen. It was founded as a park in 1975, dedicated to King Olav and a mural with paintings was dedicated by King Harald and Queen Sonja in 1995.

“melting pot theory.”³ Common experiences were considered to be important bricks in building an American identity and culture, and American nationalism to a great extent served as a prototype of civic nationalism.⁴ Still, ethnicity seemed to play a certain role in American public life, as some groups were thought to hold a stronger position than others. The White Anglo Saxon Protestant (WASP) was considered the most successful and “authentic” ethnic American, as this group was the first dominant immigrant group in America. Sociologist Herbert Gans argues that ethnicity was an American surrogate for class meaning that the social ladder and ethnic ladder to a great extent were one and the same.⁵ Following Gans’ arguments, Mary Waters pointed out that in the 1930s it was more common for a person to define himself as a worker than Irish or Polish-American, but in the 1970s, the opposite was true.⁶ How did this development come about?

Historically, as shown through previous chapters, the early 1900s were characterized by pressure on ethnic groups to Americanize. In contrast, ethnicity during the 1940s and 1950s appeared to a larger extent to be a private matter, if one may generalize from the Norwegian Constitutional celebrations. Simultaneously, as illustrated through the speeches in the previous chapters, Norwegian Americans perceived themselves not only as equal, but as better Americans because of their ancestry. In addition, similarities between Western countries and their cultures were emphasized. From this point of view, Norwegian Americans might more easily be accepted than non-Western immigrant groups.

From the 1960s, ethnicity became a hotly debated issue in the United States. Both the protest movement about the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movement had put negative aspects of American culture on the agenda. To a much larger extent, national identities replaced the badges of skin color or religion; hence more people chose to describe themselves as “Norwegian” or “Italian” rather than “white”, “Catholic” or “Protestant”. This development was both picked up and further fuelled by commercial and academic trends. Ethnic commodities such as T-shirts, buttons or books of recipes flourished, as did courses in ethnic studies at the Universities, and language courses.⁷

³ Concept which described a two-way assimilation of both natives and immigrants gave and received aspect of their culture into a new melting pot. See Kaufmann, Eric “The Decline of the WASP in the United States and Canada” in Kaufmann, Eric *Rethinking Ethnicity. Majority groups and Dominant Minorities*. Cornwall. 2001:67.

⁴ For a discussion of the concept of ethnic and civic nationalism, see chapter 1, section *What is the Nation?*

⁵ Gans 1992: 45.

⁶ Mary Waters cited in Drøyer 1998: 37.

⁷ As examples, *Seattle Times* mentions that minority contribution has become part of the curriculum from kindergarten to high schools. May 19, 1968 page 1. From 1967, Norwegian was taught as a foreign language at Ballard High School. *Western Viking* May 2, 1975, page 2.

The idea of individual choice and focus on ethnicity dates to further back than the 1960s. As early as 1937, Marcus Lee Hansen argued that immigrants struggle to adapt to general society and within the family and community, they want their children to maintain traditions from their country of origin. Many second generation immigrants feel torn between different cultures, struggling to find acceptance and identification in both. When possible, they will reject their original national culture and vigorously try to Americanize, as a means to climb the social ladder. In contrast, the next generation, fully integrated into American society, has no reason to feel inferior and will be curious about its ethnic background. What the second generation wishes to forget, the third generation will try to remember, Hansen argues. This theory is popularly labelled “the return of the third generation”⁸ Hansen’s theories did not become part of a public debate until the late 1950s. He has been criticized for not providing adequate empirical evidence for his arguments.⁹ Nonetheless, his emphasis on different generational experiences, as well as the individual choice to focus on ethnic background, remains relevant. From 1960s and 1970s, when ethnicity to a much larger extent became a part of public life, Hansen’s theories about different generational experiences and individual choice seemed apposite. The revived ethnic interest in the American born generation was caused mainly as a curiosity about their roots. For the previous generation of immigrants, however, it was a means to endure life in a new country with a foreign language.

As ethnicity became both more accepted and part of the social agenda in America, more people became interested in their background, even though their parents or grandparents had not been active in ethnic communities. One of the informants explained that his second generation Norwegian parents showed little interest in their ethnic past. One of his emigrated grandfathers even refused to speak a word of Norwegian after arriving in America. Only in recent years did this informant take up an interest in Norway and his heritage.¹⁰ I also spoke informally with several people on the 17th of May 2009 who explained that they had developed an interest in their ethnic past during the last thirty years, despite parents’ or grandparents’ marginal focus upon Norwegian heritage when they grew up.¹¹ This is an example of both a general acceptance from the mainstream society as well as an awakened interest in ethnicity from people who were not previously interested in their background.

The shift that occurred in the 1960s has been interpreted in several ways. From one point of view, it was labelled an *ethnic revival*, which Richard Alba defines as “an

⁸ Hansen, Maurice Lee. *The Problem of the Third Generation*. Illinois 1987:15 (reprint of 1937 address.)

⁹ As example see Gans 1979:429, Alba 1990:337.

¹⁰ Informant 7.

¹¹ Personal observation. May 17th 2009.

increasingly assertive and prideful stance on the part of ethnics who once had been quiet of deference to the melting pot ideal".¹² On the other hand, a *cultural pluralism*, with reference to continuous change and reform within the ethnic group was alluded to. Moreover, the new and revived interest came from a generation born in America, whose parents also had also been born in America.

Critical of the idea of ethnic revival, Herbert Gans argues that ethnicity served a festive or symbolic purpose over a general identity, which he labels *symbolic ethnicity*. The ethnicity is related to ethnic symbols more than other institutional or physical manifestations.¹³ He argues that ethnic organization and enclaves have more or less diminished, while people's identities are linked with and communicated through ethnic symbols, be they food, national costumes or ethnic festivals. In terms of ethnic festivals such as the 17th of May, Gans attests that people continue to celebrate mainly because they enjoy their social form, and not for their original meaning. To Gans, ethnicity is mainly symbolic, a question of "feeling" Norwegian on the 17th of May rather than "being" so on a general basis. As a result of ethnically mixed marriages, people will choose aspects from different ethnic cultures, either identifying with parts from several or choosing one in particular. Gans also points to a spouse's identification with their partner's ethnic background as "feeling" rather than being "ethnic."¹⁴ Gans has been criticized for putting too much attention to shallow aspects and neglecting a larger acceptance and interest in ethnicity in American public life.¹⁵

As a moderation of Gans argumentation, sociologist Richard Alba believes that ethnic culture needs to have a specific content to escape the shallowness of symbolic ethnicity.¹⁶ He argues that this content could be found in repetition of cultural acts such as eating ethnic food and knowledge of words and phrases from the country of origin, which may connect the individual to a larger *imagined community* of an ethnic culture.¹⁷ He that ethnic identity will persist, because it was well compatible with the individualism of American life. The American community does not only have room for this pluralism, it is also a part of the American mosaic. A central point in Alba's line of arguments is that European ethnic groups

¹² Alba 1990:2.

¹³ Gans 1979:435.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Lovoll argues that "the ethnic renaissance that associated with that [1970s] decade, expressed in humorous as well as substantive fashion can in any event hardly- given the overwhelming evidence of ethnic mobilisation and of ethnic cultural blossoming- be understood merely in terms of shallow symbolism." Lovoll 1998a:43.

¹⁶ Alba 1990:76

¹⁷ See introduction Benedict Anderson *Imagined communities*.

will resemble even more in the future, because of the relatively equal experience. The European American identity in development.¹⁸

Literary critic Werner Sollors applies the constructivist approach on American ethnic groups. In his view, ethnicity is dynamic and a subject both to *invention* and *change*. Both in line and as with a critique of Hobsbawm's *Invented Traditions*,¹⁹ Sollors argues that even though a tradition is invented, it is nonetheless real.²⁰ Because the group considers itself as real, it creates real consequences and happenings, such as the celebration of May 17th.²¹

The new Ethnicity and the 17th of May

The new emphasis on ethnicity gave room for a new and wider type of identification or categorization, which welcomed multiple ethnic identities. This multiple ethnic understanding does not fit into the traditional idea of civic/ethnic division. Whereas the traditional ethnic nation rested on a static view of ethnicity, Sollor's approach stresses its dynamic and flexible character in a society characterized by migration.²²

But how are these changing views of ethnicity relevant for the celebration of May 17th in Seattle from the 1970s? As discussed in chapter 3, the celebration had been struggling with falling participation from the 1960s. At the same time, the new migration to Seattle and the state of Washington came to a relative standstill.²³ The natural recruitment that had nurtured the celebrations of previous decades no longer existed. For the celebration to grow or maintain its size, enthusiasm had to be found in the American-born population. To attract new spectators, as well as keeping the old, the celebration needed to seem meaningful on some other level. The ritual in its old form seemed to be losing its meaning side²⁴ as an arena where Norwegian-American identity was constructed, preserved and developed. A larger proportion of the Norwegian-originated population was America-born, and would not as easily relate to the symbolism typical of a post war celebration, as described in chapter three. A stronger focus on Norwegian heritage seen from an American perspective, and an inclusion of typical American festive elements was a better prospect for continuing to draw an audience. If

¹⁸ See Alba 1990: 290-320.

¹⁹ See discussion of Hobsbawm, chapter 1.

²⁰ See discussion of Hobsbawm and *Invented Traditions* in the introduction.

²¹ See Sollors (ed) 1989: xiv-xv.

²² See Østerud's categorization of nation in chapter 1.

²³ See discussion in chapter 2. Due to decreasing rates of immigration from Norway, the amount of American born individuals of Norwegian ancestry would increase steadily.

²⁴ Maurice Bloch points to the interconnection of the ritual's *function* and *meaning*. See chapter 1, section *Ritual-an Anthropological Approach*.

Norwegian heritage was becoming more Americanized, communicating with the larger society included communicating with Norwegian Americans.

From this point of view, the new focus on ethnicity was likely to have made American-born generation interested in the celebration. Its transition of form would Americanize with an emphasis on Norwegian symbols, in line with Gans' theories. The fact that the parade moved to the streets of Ballard and welcomed those other than the Norwegian ethnic group indicates both acceptance from the main society as well as increased interest from individuals with Norwegian heritage. Keeping up with ethnic traditions was now done in the open, and found a new, americanized expression. Inclusiveness rather than isolationism seemed gradually to become the norm.

In line with the spirit of time, the Norwegian 17th of May Committee turned to the general society for both attention and recognition in the early 1970s. On the initiative of the Committee, the Norwegian Constitution Day was initially declared "Norway Day" in 1974, both by Seattle Mayor Wes Uhlman and Washington Governor Daniel J. Evans.²⁵ In the proclamation, they recognized the value of the Norwegian Community for the city of Seattle and state of Washington, urging all the citizens to take part in the celebration of the Norwegian Constitution Day.²⁶ This declaration was signed by the Mayor and governor annually, and from 1979, Mayor Charles Royer declared the 17th of May Permanent Norwegian Day, in which the Norwegian immigrants' contribution to the state of Washington was recognized. The Norwegian flag was promised to be flown outside the municipal buildings on this occasion.²⁷ The Irish St. Patricks Day Celebration underwent a similar development in that the first official street parades were arranged from 1972, and from 1973, the local politicians proclaimed March 10-17 Irish week.²⁸ All in all, general society was invited to take part in ethnic celebrations.

Organization and Arrangement

Similar to earlier celebrations, the Ballard celebration was organized by the 17th of May Committee, mostly consisting of members of different Norwegian lodges.

The object of the 17th of May Committee was stated in the law-amendment of June 27, 1974 as follows:

²⁵ *Western Viking* May 17, 1974, page 1.

²⁶ Statement of the Governor, Proclamation of the Mayor. Norwegian 17th of May Committee Archive, folder 2.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ <http://www.irishclub.org/>.

To unite all Norwegian organizations in Greater Seattle area for the purpose of planning and organizing a program, to be held on the 17th of May each year, observing and celebrating Norway's Constitution Day, the 17th of May 1814 in a manner in keeping with the Norwegian tradition.²⁹

Membership of the committee should be open to “all Norwegians and other organizations interested in promoting the objectives of the committee.”³⁰ Norwegian ancestry was no longer mandatory for membership of the committee, but naturally a great interest in arranging the celebration was. New organizations and representatives had to be approved and invited by the current committee to become members.³¹ The 1974 amendment stated that the organization was non-profit, and all committee work was unpaid.³² Committee by-laws also granted the Honorary Norwegian Consulate final authority if the committee should not reach agreement on its own. This should prevent any organizations “ownership” of the celebration, yet ensure arrangement of May 17th, if the committee failed to reach an agreement.³³

As the community of Ballard had become the scene for celebration, it could have been expected that Ballard community organizations were represented on the committee. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the *Ballard Chamber of Commerce* initiated community parades in Ballard a few years before the celebration was officially moved.³⁴ However, the organizations representing the community of Ballard were not frequently involved on the committee until the mid 1980s. At a 1978 meeting, it was complained that the Ballard Chamber of Commerce had not co-operated well with the committee, as they had failed to send a representative to join the committee. As a consequence, it was suggested to change the parade route away from Ballard and back to its earlier route from the *Seattle Center* to the *Norway Center*. The suggestion was never realized and it seemed that co-operation improved during the 1980s. In 1985, the Ballard Chamber of Commerce was listed as co-organizer of the Parade with the committee.³⁵

Different Ballard organizations have met on the committee since the mid 1980s, such as the *Viking Bank* and *Ballard Merchants*, but not necessarily on an annual basis.³⁶ In the different programs, the names of the members are frequently listed, whereas organizational

²⁹ Norwegian 17th of May Committee Archive, folder 1.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Consul Kim Nesselquist. E-mail correspondence January 26, 2010.

³⁴ See Chapter 3.

³⁵ Norwegian 17th of May Committee Archive, folder 3/4. Correspondance 1984-1985.

³⁶ Miscellaneous programs 1999-2005. Judging from the different program, *Viking Bank* was the most regular participant on the committee in this period.

affiliation is not.³⁷ From this point of view, it may seem that personal involvement in the committee was more important than organizational, even though the members met on behalf of their organizations. Some members were also given a large responsibility in preparing and organising the event. To a certain extent, program, arrangement and publicity followed the desires of the members of the committee. Judging from the different programs, as well as informal discussion with committee members in 2009, it seems that serving on the committee for several years was the rule rather than the exception.

Ethnic Background of Committee Members

According to the 1974 Committee amendments, Norwegian background was no longer required to be eligible to meet for the Committee. However, active membership in the participating organizations was mandatory, as the committee members met as representatives of their own organizations. Two of my interviewees expressed quite different views on the preference for a Norwegian background for committee members. One feels that Norwegian background is tacitly required:

The committee is welcoming of all people who want to celebrate. Everyone wants there to be a good turn-out at the parade, and that people enjoy and have a good time. But if you wanna be on the committee, you better be Norwegian (...) They like things to be authentically Norwegian.³⁸

Another informant expressed the opposite view:

There are members of the committee who have no connection with Norway, except the community relationship, and I don't think people even think about that. They're certainly not negative. If you want to join the celebration, you are Norwegian for that day.³⁹

From these different statements, it could be assumed that strong connections with Norwegian heritage gave an advantage and a stronger say on the committee and was preferable, but not essential. Still, as far as I can see from my empirical research, those who have held the most important and influential positions on the committee, such as the leader and parade chairman, seem for the most part to have been first and second generation immigrants.⁴⁰ There seemed to be a Pan-Scandinavian and community feeling after the celebration moved to Ballard. The *Nordic Heritage Museum*, have for the committee annually since 1982, and ethnic organizations such as *Sons and Daughters of Norway* welcome members without Norwegian

³⁷ Norwegian 17th of May Committee Archive. Folder 13.

³⁸ Informant 2.

³⁹ Informant 4.

⁴⁰ A list of the chairmen is presented in the appendix.

ancestry.⁴¹ Some of these members have even met for the committee.⁴² As the Norwegian community traditionally has been larger than the Swedish, some people of Swedish ancestry might rather attend the Norwegian events, such as May 17th. From this point of view, the ethnic Norwegian event was inclusively Pan-Scandinavian.

Participants

The celebration of the 17th of May developed into a day-long event after 1974. But while the day was full, some parts of the program featured a larger number of participants than others. On the one hand, there were participants who were involved in the patriotic program, luncheon or dinner, and on the other hand participants who only marched in the parade. Naturally, most of those who performed in the patriotic program also marched in the parade, but the list of attendees for the parade was a lot longer and more diverse.

Until 1984, the patriotic program was an evening event with dinner, speeches and entertainment, located at the Norway Center. The location was the same as in the 1950s, and the celebration resembled the earlier celebration. Many of the same types of groups were involved in the performance, such as the *Norwegian Male* and *Ladies Chorus*. A new element was that more guests were invited directly from Norway to attend. It was not unusual to invite a choir, school band or a group of scouts to perform.⁴³ In 2009 *Hellevik Mannskor* was invited to perform at the patriotic program. They were about twenty people, and many of them brought their partners and children.⁴⁴

The most important guest of honor at the celebration was the *Grand Marshall*,⁴⁵ who gave the speech of the day at the patriotic program and headed the parade accompanied by the consul and the committee chairman.⁴⁶ In addition to the *Grand Marshall*, a person who has made special contributions to the Norwegian American community in Seattle was invited as an *Honorary Marshall*, honored by the Norwegian American community for his or her work and dedication. This person was usually a member of the Norwegian ethnic community, but

⁴¹ The *Daughters of Norway* welcomes members who were born, married to or descend from people born in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland or Iceland. <http://www.daughtersofnorway.org/join.html>., The *Sons of Norway* has the same requirements for eligibility, see http://www.sofn.com/content/about_us/Charter_Constitution/Charter_const.pdf

⁴² One of the members of the committee in 2009 was an active member of the *Leif Eriksson Lodge of Sons of Norway* and had Swedish ancestry. She had been a member of the committee for several years. This may indicate both inclusiveness as well as a pan-Scandinavian approach.

⁴³ Norwegian 17th of May Committee Archive, folder 13.

⁴⁴ Personal observation. May 17th 2009.

⁴⁵ A Grand Marshall is a parade dignitary for American parades. As the function is American, and the role is Norwegian, signifies a combination of Norwegian and American elements.

⁴⁶ Personal observation, May 17th 2009. Miscellaneous photos from *Western Viking*

local Seattle and Washington politicians have also been invited to take this role.⁴⁷ I would argue that the combination of Marshalls signals that the Ballard celebration has an implicit function in contributing to the relationship between Norway, Norwegian America, the city of Seattle and the state of Washington.

Most of the ethnic organizations that sent representatives to the committee also marched in the parade annually. The different Norwegian organizations played an important and characteristic part in the parade.⁴⁸

The second types of participants were those who only march in the parade. Some groups marched regularly, other more spontaneously. There seemed to be a tradition for drill teams or bands to attend many different parades, independent of what the parade was commemorating. These groups were divided into units such as *Scandinavian*, *Band*, *Novelty*, *Motorized*, *Float*, and *Youth*,⁴⁹ and the best groups in each category received a trophy. The aim seemed to be an enhancement of competition to create a show for the spectators.

The categorization of the parade merely suggested how the parade was marketed more than it presented a systematic overview. Some of the parade units could be organized into several categories. A school band could fall into two groups, both *Youth* and *Band*, whereas a Norwegian Motorcycle Club could both fall into *Scandinavian* and *Motorized*. According to the 2009 parade chairman, the committee desired that approximately one third of the parade consist of Norwegian or Scandinavian units.⁵⁰ The categorization as *Scandinavian* rather than *Norwegian* could suggest the previously mentioned Pan-Scandinavian tendency.

Spectators

Similar to the participants, there also seemed to be a distinction between those who attended the patriotic program and those who only came down for the parade. Clearly, attending the patriotic program was a more conscious choice than watching the parade. In line with the general tendency started in the 1960s, the number of attendees at the patriotic program was slowly falling.

⁴⁷ Senator Henry Jackson was appointed Honorary Marshall in 1981, mayor Charles Royer was appointed Grand Marshall in 1978, and Honorary Marshall in 1985. (Norwegian Constitution Day Program 2009: 34.)

⁴⁸ See section *Norwegian elements in the parade*.

⁴⁹ <http://www.syttendemaiseattle.com/parade.html>.

⁵⁰ Committee chairman Laila Sharpe, May 17th 2009.

In 1976 it was reported to be “not quite full house, probably around seven to eight hundred people.”⁵¹ In 1982, *Western Viking* estimated about five hundred people for the evening event, which was “not as many as last year’s festivities”⁵²

After the program moved to Ballard in 1984, and to the *Sons of Norway’s Leif Eriksson Hall* in 1988, there was room for hosting around 300 people. It seems that the event stabilized at this number of guests; in 2009 the tickets were sold out.⁵³

Is it reasonable to assume that the spectators at the patriotic program before and after 1974 were by and large are the same; that it is primarily first and second generation Norwegian Americans? Or did the patriotic program after 1974 have a larger influx of people who have discovered and taken an interest in their ethnicity? It is beyond the scope of the thesis to give a quantitative outline of this, but in 1985, *Western Viking* observed that people born in Norway were asked to stand up, and more than 75 per cent did. The reporter described this as a sign of a vibrant Norwegian American community: “We hear that emigrants are dead in the US, but apparently not among the Norwegians.”⁵⁴ Whether the reporter’s estimate was accurate, is doubtful. However, it may still be reasonable to assume that the majority of the people present for this and other 1980s arrangements were born in Norway, relatively similar to the earlier celebrations. I do not have the adequate sources to make an assumption on whether the event had changed from the 1980s until 2009. But judging from my own observations in 2009, it seems that most of the attendees at the luncheon were the members and families of people involved either on the committee and/or Norwegian ethnic organizations; in addition to the specially invited guests. The event was by no means exclusive for Norwegians and Norwegian Americans, but clearly those who attended had an interest in Norwegian history and culture.

The second group of spectators were those who watched the parade on the streets. Many people of Norwegian heritage only come down to the parade.⁵⁵ Some of the informants who explain that they only watch the parade, considered the patriotic program mainly to be organizational.⁵⁶ This may imply that the patriotic program was dominated by participants from the various Norwegian ethnic organizations.

⁵¹ *Western Viking* May 21, 1976, page 10. My translation. Original phrase: Det var ikke helt fullt hus, antagelig rundt 7-800 mennesker.”

⁵² *Western Viking*, May 28, 1982. Page 15.

⁵³ <http://www.syttendemaiseattle.com/event.html>.

⁵⁴ *Western Viking*, May 31, 1985, page 15.

⁵⁵ Informants 3, 11, 12, 13.

⁵⁶ This was brought up by informant 3, 11 and 13. This topic will be discussed further in chapter 5.

Program

After the celebration moved to Ballard, the 17th of May schedule was filled with a wide range of activities. They range from a *Fun Run* in the 1980s, *Barne Leker* at a main square to events at the *Nordic Heritage Museum* and an evening dance. In addition, different stores feature Norwegian products for that day, such as food and souvenirs, and different ethnic organizations put on displays of *Leikarring* dances, in other words public representation of elements associated with Norwegian ethnic culture. The most important parts emphasized in the cited newspapers and by the informants, were the patriotic program and the parade. These elements will be discussed in the following sections.

When the 17th of May fell on a weekday, the parade was usually held in the evening around 6 or 7 pm, whereas the parade was arranged in the afternoon around 2 or 3 pm when on a weekend.⁵⁷ Arrangements and activities were organized from early morning to late night, not only for weekend celebrations. This first started showing its effect in 1976, when the 17th of May fell on a Monday:

Despite it being Monday evening it was celebrated with great flourish and admirably high participation. –This goes for both the 17th of May parade, the crowds from the pavements and the festivities in Norway Center, where 450 *lapskaus* dinners were gone so quickly they were all sold out before the arrangement began.⁵⁸

Western Viking expressed the opinion that great national pride was involved in celebrating the Constitution Day on the 17th May, rather than holding the celebration on the nearest weekend: “using a convenient day is equal to questioning the colony’s patriotism for Norway and the 17th of May.⁵⁹” The practise in Seattle before 1973 was obviously quickly forgotten.

Luncheon and Patriotic Program

Until 1984, the patriotic evening program with speeches and dinner took place in the *Norway Center*. Then the evening event was moved to Ballard; first in 1984 to an assembly hall called *The Backstage*, later to the *Sons of Norway’s Leif Eriksson Hall* in Ballard in 1988, where it was held for the rest of the investigated period.⁶⁰

For several years, there was an event labelled a *no host* luncheon with Norwegian food before the parade. This was abolished when the patriotic program started to be arranged as a

⁵⁷ Norwegian 17th of May Committee Archive. Folder 13.

⁵⁸ *Western Viking* May 21, 1976, page 10. My translation. Original phrase: “Trass i at det var mandag aften, ble det feiret med pomp og prakt og beundringsverdig stor deltagelse – bade i 17. Mai toget, tilskuermassene langs fortauene og festlighetene i Norway Center, der 450 lapskausmiddager gikk unna så raskt at de var utsolgt før festen begynte”

⁵⁹ *Western Viking* May 27, 1977, page 16. My translation. Original phrase: “å benytte en ‘convenient’ dag er faktisk å betvile koloniens patriotisme for Norge og 17. mai.”

⁶⁰ 17th of May Committee Archive, folder 13. Programs 1974-1995.

luncheon in the early 1990s.⁶¹ As there was no pre-booking or tickets required for the *no host luncheon*, it may have appeared less formal and more accessible than the patriotic program. In turn, this could have attracted a somewhat wider or random audience; including people interested in Norwegian heritage without attachment to the ethnic organizations. The Seattle mayor and members of the Seattle city council participated regularly. Similar to the patriotic program, Norwegian food such as *lefse* and *krumkaker* was served, and traditional Norwegian songs were sung. On one occasion, a fashion show with Norwegian *bunads* was arranged at the luncheon.⁶² This illustrated a combination of an entertaining show and ethnic cultural elements. According to Alba, ethnic cultural symbols such as food and songs function to create an ethnic identity.⁶³ In line with Gans' theories of *symbolic ethnicity*, this could be an ethnic aspect that had a wide reach beyond the defined ethnic communities and organizations, those "feeling" Norwegian on the 17th of May, attracted by symbols associated with Norwegian culture.⁶⁴

It seems that local politicians frequently were invited to this event. In 1984, Seattle Mayor Charles Royce was given a *lusekofte* at the luncheon, and thankfully declared himself a "permanent Norwegian."⁶⁵ This could be interpreted as a post ethnic way of thinking, or more as an informal recognition of Norwegian culture in the city of Seattle. By explicitly recognizing the Norwegian American community in Seattle, it could be a means to embrace potential voters.

Though the open luncheon may have had a somewhat wider reach than the evening patriotic program, a limited number of people were able to attend when on a weekday. *Western Viking* listed this as one of the reasons to keep the patriotic program an evening event:

Although a great number of Norwegian Americans in the Greater Seattle area take in all of the 17th of May celebration in Ballard, many of the participants in the evenings program are people who can't take the whole day off, or for other reasons prefer the evenings program with the 17th of May speech etc.⁶⁶

Despite the argument of arranging the patriotic program in the evening due to practical reasons, the program was moved from being an evening event to a luncheon the year after, and the no host luncheon was abolished.

⁶¹ *Ballard News Tribune* initially reports this in 1991. May 15, 1991, page 2.

⁶² *Western Viking*, May 23, 1980, page 15.

⁶³ Alba 1990:85.

⁶⁴ Gans 1979:425.

⁶⁵ *Western Viking*, May 25, 1984, page 16.

⁶⁶ *Western Viking* June 1, 1990 page 10.

In 2009, I was invited to the luncheon. There was a small Norwegian flag on each table, in addition to a large Norwegian flag hanging on the stage behind the head table, where the consul, the committee and parade chairman, the Grand and Honorary Marshalls, and the reverend of one of the Lutheran churches in Ballard were seated. The head table was put on a small podium for the audience to see them. The committee and parade chairman introduced and led the program, and the two Marshalls both gave speeches, the Honorary Marshall talked about the Norwegian American history in Seattle, whereas the Grand Marshall gave the speech of the day.⁶⁷

The patriotic program was introduced in the same manner as in the previous period, starting with the singing of the two national anthems. Two girls, both clad in *bunads* usually carry the Norwegian and the American Flag in this procession. I was asked to carry the Norwegian Flag that year, and appeared to serve as a symbol of Norway and Norwegianess. We started at different sides of the hall, before the American Flag crossed in front of the Norwegian and ended up on opposite sides of the stage. This may symbolize the two national cultures blending into a Norwegian American culture; the American leading the way with the Norwegian roots still being preserved. From this point of view, the *bunad* clad Norwegian American girl carrying the American Flag could be interpreted as a symbol of Norwegian America. After the reverend had read a prayer, a toast was made to the king of Norway and the American president. A telegram from King Harald was also read to the audience.⁶⁸ The committee makes an effort in trying to get a greeting from the president and the Norwegian king, in addition to the permanent proclamations from Seattle's mayor and the Washington governor. This is not ensured every year, but both the two former presidents Bush as well as Clinton and Reagan have sent their greetings.⁶⁹

Similar to the previously discussed period, song performances were an important part of the program. The *Norwegian Male* and *Ladies Chorus* usually lead the musical performance, unless there was an invited Norwegian guest choir. The repertoire of songs printed in the programs was predominately patriotic; *Fedrelandssalmen*, *Mellom bakkar og berg* and *God Bless America*, were frequently listed, in addition to the two national anthems.⁷⁰ The traditional folk songs, such as *Ola Glomstulen* or *Kjerringa med staven*, which were frequently listed in the programs from 1945-1974, ceased to appear on the list of songs for the

⁶⁷ The speeches are more thoroughly discussed in the next section.

⁶⁸ Personal observation. May 17th 2009.

⁶⁹ Norwegian 17th of May Committee Archive, folder 13. Programs 1974-1995.

⁷⁰ 17th of May Committee Archive. Program. The texts printed in the program, probably meant for unison singing were predominately songs with a civic focus.

patriotic program. The change of repertoire might indicate that the knowledge of folk songs was declining, as a consequence of the falling rate of immigration and a growing number of American-born Norwegian Americans. Ethnic symbols and their entailed meaning are different for a newly established group of immigrants and an ethnic group.⁷¹

Ethnic Symbols in the Patriotic Program

Richard Alba argues that some ethnic indicators function to give meaning to an otherwise abstract assertion of ethnic identity, and allows the individual to take part in an ethnic culture. He describes ethnic culture as “commonplace actions that distinguish members of an ethnic group from others.”⁷² Knowledge of words, phrases and eating food fosters a form of solidarity and is based on a mutual appreciation of ethnic heritage.⁷³

To a greater extent than in the earlier period, the food functioned as a social glue for the celebration. This may seem natural as the celebration in this period was arranged as a meal; dinner until 1995, and later a luncheon. The whole event took place at the table, and the celebrants were brought together in the act of eating. The food served was traditional and Norwegian. *Lapskaus* dinners were frequently served until the mid 1980s, as was *smorgasbord*, the Swedish style sandwich table.⁷⁴ Salmon followed by *bløtkake*⁷⁵ was the menu for 2009.⁷⁶

Throughout the program the language of communication was English, except for some Norwegian phrases *Hipp, hipp hurra!*, *Skål!*, *Gratulerer med dagen* and *Syttende Mai*.⁷⁷ The use of English enabled non-Norwegian speakers to attend and enjoy the program, but a certain degree of knowledge about these phrases could seem to contribute to create an *imagined community* among the attendees at the patriotic program.

At the luncheon, there were often several guests from Norway, who were given particular attention. In 2009, the guests from Norway were asked to stand up and say something about themselves and why they had joined the celebration. They were all especially welcomed.⁷⁸ This might testify to the organizers’ interest in maintaining the bond between Norway and Norwegian America. The most important Norwegian guest of honor, the

⁷¹ See chapter 1, section *Immigrant? Ethnic? Definition*.

⁷² Alba 1990:76.

⁷³ Alba 1990:85.

⁷⁴ The Swedish *smorgasbord* seems frequently to be served in connection with meeting in Scandinavian ethnic organizations, and may indicate both Pan-scandinavian elements as well as embracing popular Swedish cultural elements as their own.

⁷⁵ Norwegian for sugar loaf covered in cream. Traditionally used for festive occasions.

⁷⁶ Personal observation, May 17th 2009.

⁷⁷ Norwegian for “hipp, hurrah” “cheers”, “happy birthday”, and “17th of May.

⁷⁸ Personal observation.

Grand Marshall, has held his or her speech in English in the period under investigation with only two exceptions, where a combination of both have been used.⁷⁹

Speeches

Similar to the earlier period studied, the speeches were an important part of the patriotic programs and merit special attention.

As previously mentioned, the speaker in the patriotic program was also Grand Marshall of the parade, and the function was mostly taken by a Norwegian cultural or political personality. If we compare with the foregoing period, the speaker was still an influential and respected member of society. But guests invited from Norway dominate this statistic, in addition to ambassadors or consuls serving the state of Norway in the US. One of my informants explains this tradition:

Most of the years I was part of the committee I was responsible for bringing a speaker and a Grand Marshall. And we brought the tradition that it had to be somebody from Norway. Earlier it was just a local politician or someone from the community...so we started bringing a *ordfører*,⁸⁰ a cultural personality, professor from Oslo or Bergen, and people liked that...former rektor⁸¹ from the University of Bergen...Jahn Otto Johansen was here in 89 when we celebrated Western Viking's 100 years anniversary..Jens Book Jenssen came along, and many members of the community remembered him.⁸²

As illustrated by this quote, the main function of inviting Norwegian speakers seems to be to connect contemporary Norway with Norwegian America. Most of the speakers were and well-known political or cultural personalities, which the Norwegian American community was proud to host. The factor of recognition also seems to be central, as illustrated by the quote. Again, this signals that a majority of the speakers at the patriotic program were well informed about Norwegian cultural life, and suggests that most of the participants belonged to the first generation. With the exception of professor Odd Lovoll in 1999 and Dr Ludwig Eskildsen in 1976, who were first generation Norwegian immigrants, all the speakers were Norwegian citizens.

Western Viking has printed several speeches. This signifies that the content of speeches were of interest to a wide range of Norwegian American readers, reaching far beyond the group of 300 at *Norway Center* or *Leif Eriksson Hall*. In the following, an outline of the focus of the speeches is given.

⁷⁹ The vice mayor of Bergen, Ingmar Ljosnes gave his speech predominately in Norwegian. (*Western Viking* May 29, 1992). In 1994, the Mayor of Trondheim, Marvin Wiseth held his speech partly in Norwegian. (*Western Viking* June 3, 1994, page 7.)

⁸⁰ Norwegian for *mayor*.

⁸¹ Norwegian for *principal*.

⁸² Informant 4.

Historic Content of the Celebration

Throughout the history of the celebration in Norway, certain conventions were expected in the speeches. Gunhild Aaby finds a noteworthy tradition in her study of May 17th speeches in Kristiania 1906-1925, characterized by a lack of originality. A May 17th speech was expected to give an historical background to the celebration. The rhetoric was founded on a number of key notions, in which *Eidsvoll*, *Frihet*, *Selvstendighet* and *Fedrelandskjærlighet* were among them.⁸³ Almost a century later, many of these conventions and key notions are still present in speeches given for May 17th in Seattle. *Eidsvoll* as the site of the signing of the Constitution and *Freedom* was associated with the ideas secured in the Constitution and the gradual possibility of celebrating these ideals in the process of gaining full independence. *Independence* would refer to the dissolution of the union with Sweden, but even more to the end of the Nazi occupation in 1945. *Love of the fatherland* was more ambiguous; which country should the speaker assume was closest to its listeners' heart? This will be dealt with in broader detail under the paragraph of *National identity*.

The heart of most speeches was Norwegian history, as tradition dictates; the signing of the Constitution and the democratic ideals it represented were emphasized: "It is all this and more we celebrate today. We celebrate Norwegian Independence – we celebrate Norwegian Constitution – we celebrate Norway."⁸⁴ Simultaneously, the speakers repeatedly stressed that the *ideals* of the Norwegian Constitution were inspired by the American; pointing to equivalence in government and similar democratic ideals. As an illustration, professor Orm Øverland in 1984 emphasized that Norway and America had a special responsibility to the rest of the world with the two oldest written Constitutions: "Among the many things that tie our two countries together, this is in my view the most important: long and shared democratic tradition of democratic government."⁸⁵

The speakers portrayed the democratic values as core values for the Norwegian Constitution celebration. These core values were similar and important to both the Norwegian and American constitutions; hence they were depicted as cornerstones of both the two nations:

⁸³ Aaby 1997: 80. *Eidsvoll* refers to the location for the signing of the Norwegian Constitution. The following nouns are Norwegian for *freedom*, *independence*, and *love of the fatherland* accordingly. She relates the concept to Sherry Ortner's elaborating Key Symbols. See chapter 1, *Key Symbols*.

⁸⁴ *Western Viking*, May 21, 1976. page 10. Dr. Ludvig Eskildsen

⁸⁵ *Western Viking*, June 1, 1984. page 2. Professor Orm Øverland, University of Bergen.

“The spirit of the 17th of May is in our belief in democracy, in our national independence and in the human rights of an individual. These values we share with every true American.”⁸⁶

Similar Nations, same Goals?

As pointed to in chapter 3, similarities between the Norwegian and American government were frequently alluded to. The relationship was repeatedly described as exemplary; with Norway as an important partner in NATO, in addition to analogous national values, as interpreted from the Constitution. This tendency seemed to have been maintained, but the emphasis was more strongly on abstract values rather than practical politics, even before the Cold War was abrogated. Historical accounts of Norway’s path towards independence were given, and the ideals of the Constitution were stressed. The speaker often drew upon comparable American elements, most frequently what were described as “democratic values.” Since the Constitutional values were presented as national core values, they were also argued to be reasons to maintain the celebration of May 17th, both in Norway and in Norwegian America.

To a larger extent than in the previous period, the perspective was predominately Norwegian. That is, more than stressing the Norwegian contribution to American culture; American core values were described as inspirational and equivalent to the Norwegian. This may seem as a natural consequence, seeing that the speaker was usually an invited guest from Norway, speaking to an audience that mostly had grown up in America. This brings us to the last important aspect of how the speakers addressed to the group in terms of national identity.

National Identity: Norwegian or American?

We have seen that the speaker for the most part was a Norwegian citizen addressing a Norwegian American audience. There seemed to have been different approaches to what the speaker assumed to be, or merely described as the audience’s home land. One approach was for the speaker to address listeners as predominately Americans, interested in their ethnic history. This interest was argued to foster increased tolerance of other cultures:

You are Americans first and foremost. But at the same time I know you are proud of your Norwegian heritage. It is quite possible to love America and Norway as well. Having a sense of one’s roots and developing a natural self-respect on that basis may even increase in us the respect and understanding of people of other roots and other backgrounds.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ *Western Viking*, May 22, 1981, page, 2. Professor Trygve Solhaug, Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration (NHH).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

The second approach was to speak in more general terms, about Norwegian Americans, leaving it open for the audience to decide what identity to choose. “Although they are- and should be- first and foremost Americans, we witness an increasing awareness of their Norwegian roots, displayed in particular on days like the 17th of May, when we all tend to look back on our common heritage.”⁸⁸ The use of the possessive pronoun here left it open for the audience to decide whether to identify as *they*, who were primarily American, Norwegian or Norwegian Americans. The *heritage*, still, was referred to as *ours*. Assumingly, the speaker was talking primarily to a Norwegian American audience.

The use of *we* seems quite frequent, both in connection with the heritage, as illustrated above and when comparing the ideals of the two nations; “we are assembled here today to celebrate the many things that bind us together. The constitutions of our two countries, democracy, the heritage of the immigrants from Norway.”⁸⁹

As regards to the two Norwegian American speakers, their choice of words indicated group identity with the group of reference. Dr Eskildsen in 1976 referred to a group that was mostly American, and stressed his patriotism or identity with his new home country:

This year, as we in the United States are reminded of our own freedom and our bicentennial celebrations, we look at our own flag which like the Norwegian has the colors red white and blue. (...) When I look at the Stars and Stripes, I am reminded of the many men and women who were willing to sacrifice –even life- that we may live in freedom and security – I love the flag – I respect the flag, and I have pledged my allegiance to that flag.⁹⁰

Professor of Norwegian American studies, Odd Lovoll, was, maybe not surprisingly, the only one who emphasized the significance of Norwegian American culture rather than Norwegian history and American patriotism. He gave an account of the history of the Norwegian American May 17th celebration, and outlined the celebration’s role as an ethnic symbol. To celebrate the Norwegian Constitution Day was both a celebration of *heritage* as well as of cultural diversity.⁹¹

⁸⁸ *Western Viking* May 29, 1987. Page 2. Ambassador Kjell Vibe.

⁸⁹ *Western Viking* June 3, 1994, page 7. Mayor of Trondheim, Marvin Wiseth.

⁹⁰ *Western Viking* May 21, 1976. page 10.

⁹¹ *Western Viking* May 28, 1999. page 8 and 10.

The Parade

The 17th of May parade cannot be described. Loads of music, bands, drill teams; colorful and festive with floats, horses, motorcycle teams and all that is needed to make a 17th of May parade in the best Norwegian American way.⁹²

As illustrated from this quote, the parade was understood as a visual expression of festive elements, embodied in a Norwegian American culture. If the speeches may articulate the technical meaning of the day, the parade may be seen as a physical embodiment of the celebration. It was the most public and visible part of the celebration, and also the most inclusive. It welcomed a large group of participants and attracted even more spectators. At a 17th of May Committee meeting February 12, 1976, it was decided “to accept anyone who wants to join us to honor the Norwegian Independence Day.”⁹³ This seems to have been practiced ever since then. The relative or comparative size of the parade is debated. From one quarter, the parade is touted as the third largest 17th of May parade in the world, ranking only after Oslo and Bergen.⁹⁴ More modestly, *Western Viking* has stated it to be “the largest parade beyond the Norwegian boundaries,”⁹⁵ or even more humble “one of the largest and most recognized parades outside Norway”⁹⁶ There are no accurate statistical data about the number of spectators. Only once did *Western Viking* report the number of spectators to be around 10 000.⁹⁷ The same estimate was made both by the committee chairman and parade chairman in 2009. They also estimated the number of parade participants typically to have been around 3000.⁹⁸ As the number of marching units typically was about 100, this would include 30 members per unit. It may seem reasonable that their suggestions were somewhat high, but not farfetched.

If we accept these suggested numbers, the second or third suggestion of relative 17th of May parade size may seem most accurate. On the other hand, the pride and patriotism attached to the parade could probably rank among the largest in the world.

Similar to other American parades, the May 17th parade consists of different *units*, or groups marching together. Such groups could be *ethnic organizations*, *school bands*, *dancers*, *clowns*, or different types of entertainers, categorized as pointed to earlier in this chapter. The

⁹² *Western Viking* May 26, 1978, page 2. My translation. Original phrase: ”Å beskrive selve 17.mai toget er umulig. Massevis av musikk, korps, drill teams og i det hele tatt fargerikt og festpreget med floats, hester, motorsykkel teams og ellers alt som skal til for å lage et 17.mai tog i norskamerikansk stil.”

⁹³ Norwegian 17th of May Committee Archive, folder 5/6. Minutes.

⁹⁴ http://17thofmay.org/What_is_17th_of_May_.html.

⁹⁵ *Western Viking* May 11, 1984, page 18.

⁹⁶ *Western Viking* June 2, 1995, page 9.

⁹⁷ *Western Viking* May 22, 1987, page 16.

⁹⁸ Laila Sharpe, May 17, 2009, Parade chairman Jim Vatn May 5, 2009.

chairman of the committee in 2009 explained that “everyone who wants be in the parade is welcome, as long as their entry is not offensive.”⁹⁹ She further pointed out that parades in America traditionally have set out to entertain their spectators, more than to communicate a message. As a consequence, there was a consensus that political groups and activists should not march in the May 17th parade. The only premise for the parade has been that a large part should be Norwegian or Scandinavian.¹⁰⁰ The committee desired that a third, or at least a fourth of the units should be Norwegian.¹⁰¹

The American parades have traditionally been diverse and open, whereas the Norwegian *17.maitog* has had certain traditions; marching children have traditionally been the focus.¹⁰² To what extent has the parade been typical, or represented a breach with Norwegian and American parade traditions?

Norwegian Elements in the Parade

In contrast to many countries’ military parades, references to military practice, other than the act of marching, have been considered incompatible with the Norwegian Constitution celebration. The 17th of May parade in Ballard has had to deal with conflicting traditions in this matter. On the one hand, there was the American inclusiveness in parades, on the other the Norwegian restrictions with regards to military associations.

In 1976, the US Army was accepted in the parade with a bicentennial float.¹⁰³ Later that year, the committee declined this practise in the future, “as that is not really the spirit of May.”¹⁰⁴ To what extent this practise was kept, the available sources do not reveal. However, on at least one later occasion there were committee discussions on matters that included military elements. The Norwegian consul Kim Nesselquist ended the initiative of having a War veteran lead the parade while driving a Hummer vehicle with a canon in 2002.¹⁰⁵ He explains this accordingly:

I shortly and authoritatively explained that this is traditionally a children’s parade. It was nice that the veteran wanted to march in the parade, but military vehicles and canons did not belong there. Hummer and canons were put away – and have not appeared since. There hasn’t been any large

⁹⁹ Chairman Laila Sharpe, May 17th 2009.

¹⁰⁰ As previously mentioned, *Scandinavian* was one of the subcategories for the parade.

¹⁰¹ Chairman Laila Sharpe, May 17, 2009.

¹⁰² For a thorough presentation of the history of May 17th in Norway, see Bjørgen and Hovland 2001: 27-57.

¹⁰³ 17th of May Committee Archive, folder 5/6. Minutes from February 12 1976.

¹⁰⁴ 17th of May Committee Archive, folder 5/6. Minutes June 10, 1976.

¹⁰⁵ The Norwegian Consul of Seattle has led the committee when it has failed to reach an agreement on leadership. The committee was led by consul Thomas Stang in 1976, and by Stang and vice consul Kim Nesselquist between 2004 and 2006. In the early 2000s, Nesselquist was a member of the 17th of May Committee. (Program 2009: 36).

discussion of this, but I made it pretty clear on the following committee meeting that this should not be repeated – and that the veteran should be made aware of that.¹⁰⁶

This example illustrates that though the celebration was relatively open, the idea that some elements could not be included in the parade set certain restrictions.

For the Norwegian Americans who vividly remembered earlier celebrations, the Norwegian units *were* the parade: *Western Viking* noted the following in 1980: “Without the Norwegian units, it would be a farce, a mockery to have a parade on the Norwegian Constitution Day.”¹⁰⁷

As the parade commemorated the Norwegian Constitution Day, there seems to have been a consensus both from the committee and the *Western Viking* that the Norwegian units should be as many and as vibrant as possible. But as the Norwegian units never constituted a majority, the placement of units was debated. On January 12, 1978, the committee discussed putting all the Scandinavian units in the same part of the parade, hence maximizing the ethnic nature of the celebration. There seemed to have been some disagreement about this, some argued that the parade would be “unbalanced” if the units were not interspersed through the parade.¹⁰⁸ A few years later, it was decided to place all Scandinavian units at the front of the parade. *Western Viking* expressed great satisfaction with this decision: “The Norwegian and Nordic units were placed in front of the parade, apparently a popular arrangement which created a strong feeling that this was a “Norwegian” 17th of May parade.”¹⁰⁹

Though *Western Viking* suggested that this was a popular initiative for Norwegian Americans, it seems to have been an exception to the rule. Most years it seems that the parade orders were mixed.

The Norwegian organizations were particularly encouraged to march in the parade. Popular ethnic performance included singing Norwegian songs, playing *hardingfele* or dancing *leikarring*. For the organizations, it was a chance to achieve publicity, to dress up and perform. In the case of the Norwegian ethnic organizations, or more precisely the

¹⁰⁶ E-mail correspondence with Kim Nesselquist January 26, 2010. My translation. Original phrase: ”Jeg fortalte kort og myndig at dette tradisjonelt er et barnas tog - at det var hyggelig at veteranen ville marsjere i toget, men militære kjøretøy og kanoner hadde ingen plass. Hummer og kanon ble parkert - og har ikke vist seg siden. Noen stor diskusjon om dette har det ikke vært - men jeg sa vel ganske klart fra på neste komitemøte at dette ikke måtte gjenta seg - og at veteranen skulle gjøres oppmerksom på det.”

¹⁰⁷ *Western Viking* May 23, 1980, page 15. My translation. Original phrase: Uten de norske ‘units’ ville det vært en farce eller ‘mockery’ å ha tog på Norges grunnlovsdag.

¹⁰⁸ 17th of May Committee Archive, Minutes. Report from January 12, 1978.

¹⁰⁹ *Western Viking* May 27, 1983, page 10. My translation. Original phrase: ”samtlige norske og nordiske “units” ble plassert fremst i toget, tilsynelatende et populært arrangement, som dannet en mer solid føling av at dette var et ”norsk” 17. maitog!” It seems that the Norwegian units were placed in front of the parade in 1983 and 1984 (Norwegian 17th Committee Archive, folder 5/6. Minutes from June 6, 1983. *Western Viking* May 25, 1984, page 16.)

Scandinavian parade units, display of ethnic symbols have been popular. The most frequent were *bunads* or *lusekofte*. The Viking myth has been a potent Scandinavian ethnic symbol across the US since the early 1900s, and has remained a vital ethnic symbol.¹¹⁰ The ancient Norsemen seemed to have been featured throughout the history of the Ballard parade. Following their ships, the Viking representations have mostly been staged in the *float* unit, though some organizations, such as the *Sons of Norway* have Viking elements in their banners and dress up in Viking costumes while marching in the parade.¹¹¹ Some of the participants of organizational units have occasionally dressed up as Vikings.

Examples of other Scandinavian units were the *Nordic Heritage Museum, Nordiska Folk Dancers*¹¹² and the *Swedish Cultural Center*.¹¹³ The two former were pan-Scandinavian examples, whereas the Swedish group was dressed in blue and yellow, the colors of the Swedish flag. Marching in front were two flag bearers, one carrying the Swedish Flag, the other the Norwegian.¹¹⁴

The participants themselves wore prescribed clothing. Those who own a *bunad* wear them with great pride in the parade. Other ethnic or organizational garments featured are *lusekofte* or organizational sweatshirts, be they *University of Washington, Karmøy Club* or *Nordlandslaget*. Local organizations were encouraged to wear a regional *bunad* or organizational sweatshirts, as described in Terje Garvik's MA thesis. He argues that through uniform, a sense of belonging was created.¹¹⁵

Western Viking proudly presented the setting of Ballard as "a little piece of Norway", referring to the goodwill shown by the different shops in letting their shop windows be dominated by traditional Norwegian goods in their shops, which demonstrated "different shapes of Norwegianess."¹¹⁶ As previously mentioned, the Norwegian units have mostly made up a third or a fourth of the entire parade units. Nonetheless, *Western Viking* placed emphasis on the Norwegian turnout:

¹¹⁰ This could be related to the *Home-making myth*, described in chapter 3. Leif Eriksson and the Vikings real discoverers of America, that is the first ethnic group, Native Americans not taken into account. Lovoll 1998a considers several aspects of Norwegian American conception of Vikings; as ancestors, discoverers of America and as ethnic symbols. See page 3, 34 64, 71.

¹¹¹ Personal Observation, May 17th 2009.

¹¹² The organization name combines Scandinavian and English words The a-suffix in *Nordiska* implies either that the organization is Swedish based, or an anglicized orthography.

¹¹³ Personal observation, May 17, 2009. The folk dancers performed leikarring dances, whereas caterers from Swedish Cultural Center were dressed in blue t-shirts and yellow aprons, the color combination of the Swedish flag.

¹¹⁴ Personal observation. May 17, 2009.

¹¹⁵ Garvik 2006: 102.

¹¹⁶ *Western Viking*, May 25, 1979 page 14. My translation. Original phrases: "et lite stykke Norge," "norskdom i forskjellige former."

“The list included more than 90 units, of which 22 were fully Norwegian. Not bad given the impressive turn out.”¹¹⁷

Though *Western Viking* mostly expressed enthusiasm about the celebration, criticism could be harsh when Norwegian culture was not considered to be sufficiently recognized. In 1982, the Ingraham school band played “*det er Norge I rødt, hvitt og blått*”, a traditional song frequently performed for 17th of May parades in Norway, but did not receive the award for best band. The reporter of *Western Viking* is frustrated due to the judge’s apparent lack of knowledge of Norwegian traditions:

In the future, it should be ensured that a person born and raised in Norway is among the judges; A person who understands the value of Norwegian music, costumes and other distinctive characters. Under the lead of dirigent Jerry Semrau, the Ingraham High School Band had practiced Norwegian melodies for a long period of time; especially for the 17th of May parade in Ballard. The fact that they are not even mentioned among winners is almost unforgivable!¹¹⁸

This commentary may illustrate disapproval of the lack of recognition of homeland practices. The number of people born and raised in Norway was falling, and those who were, were growing older. An increasing number of American festive elements were being absorbed into the celebration.

American Elements in the Parade

From its new beginning in Ballard in the early 1970s, the 17th of May seemed to be arranged much in accordance with American parade tradition.

Historian Mary Ryan states that parade culture has been characteristic of American public life since the late 18th century, which makes the tradition approximately as old as the American nation state.¹¹⁹ Parades were featured both on occasions such as 4th of July celebrations, in addition to local festivals. Parades became an urban phenomenon during the 19th century, and spread widely across cities. At this time, ethnic groups participated in public parades to establish visibility within society.¹²⁰ A diversity in symbols and meaning was pointed to; each unit has their own identity, yet the parade forms a unity. In Ryan’s view, a

¹¹⁷ *Western Viking* May 23, 1980. page 15. My translation. Original phrase ”Listen over units talte over 90, og av dem 22 heilnorske, slett ikke dårlig tatt i betraktning den mektige oppslutningen.”

¹¹⁸ *Western Viking* May 28, 1982. page 15. My translation. Original phrase “I framtidige år bør det sikres at en person født og oppvokst i Norge er blant dommerne, en person som forstår å verdsette norsk, musikk, skikker og andre egenarter som viser seg i et norsk 17.maitog. Under ledelse av Jerry Semrau hadde Ingraham High School band øvet seg på norske melodier i lengre tid, spesielt for 17.maitoget i Ballard. At de ikke engang ble nevnt blant vinnerne, er nærmest utilgivelig!”

¹¹⁹ If we that the idea of the American nation state was conceived as a result of the signing of the Declaration of Independence July 4, 1776. Ryan, Mary. “The American Parade. Representation of the Nineteenth Century Social Order.” In Hunt, Lynn (ed) *The new Cultural History*. Los Angeles. 1989. pp 131-153.

¹²⁰ See Conzen 1989: 44-76.

parade could be compared to anthology, there are multiple authors, yet the text or parade makes up a whole. The visuality affords additional expressiveness over literature.

Ryan lists four characteristic traits of the American parade during the nineteenth century. First, it was clearly organized into separate marching units, each representing a preestablished social identity. Second, the parade was relatively open to anyone who wishes to get involved, with some restrictions on race and gender. Still, most groups who applied to a committee for permission to march were accepted. Third, the focus was put on variety rather than uniformity; there should be a variety of marching units. It should pass through main streets and places where crowds were able to gather to see the festivities, rather than associating with important civic and religious buildings, which was the case for the children's parade from *Seattle Center* to *Norway Center* in 1959-1973. The purpose was to put on a public display, with the marching units invested in uniforms and ribbons. Finally, the parade was a march for the sake of marching and for its participants to put themselves on show. Almost two centuries later the parade is still a characteristic form of American public life.

The 17th of May parade in Ballard fits several of these criteria, though as an ethnic parade, the display of Norwegian ethnic symbols had a specific agenda of its own. During the period that the Ballard parade has been held, the 17th of May committee would probably argue that they arranged a primarily Norwegian event in the form of an American parade.

In her MA thesis on the 17th of May celebration in Ballard, Heather Short stresses that what is celebrated is often secondary to the parade form; the parade itself is taking the center stage.¹²¹ With regards to the *ethnic* aspect, Richard Alba argues that “ethnicity festivals have increasingly become a celebration of ethnicity in itself, rather than a particular culture, which can be enjoyed, be everyone, regardless of ethnic background.”¹²² In so matter, both the parade form as well as the celebration of ethnicity had become established moods of American public communication. If we then return to the *meaning* and *function* side, the meanings entailed were probably different for people outside or inside the Norwegian American community. For the Norwegian American community the meaning attached both to commemoration of the celebration, but perhaps even stronger to the use of *ethnic symbols* displayed in the parade. Because the parade was a well known American type of public communication, I would argue that *the parade itself is an American ritual*, which has both a *meaning* and a *function* to its participants and spectators, and a *function* in the surrounding society.

¹²¹ Short 2009: 36.

¹²² Alba 1990: 104.

Local elements in the Parade

The 17th of May parade is one of many community parades in the Seattle area. The largest parade is the *Seafair* parade, which was founded in 1951-1952 to commemorate the Seattle centennial.¹²³ Since the 1970s, many of these community and ethnic parades have been brought together under the *Seafair* umbrella, including the 17th of May parade in Ballard.¹²⁴ This facilitates sponsorship, insurance and a wide participation. Many of the marching units, such as bands or drill teams participate in several of the parades in the Seattle area; this is a fixed element in all the parades. It is unclear which year *Seafair* started as head sponsor of the parade.¹²⁵ However, *Seafair* queens are mentioned as part of the parade as early as 1978.¹²⁶ This makes it likely to assume that *Seafair* parade sponsorship is approximately as old as the Ballard parade. In itself, this is an indication of Americanization of parts of the celebration.

What type of Participants?

If any conclusion be drawn about the 17th of May participants, they can be considered to occupy different levels. The level or degree of involvement could be illustrated through a diagram of concentric circles. The circles illustrate the level of affiliation, the closer to the center, the stronger the attachment. The number of people involved increases with the diameter of circles. The model is an idealisation, and the description of people involved in different parts is a generalisation, or merely a prototype:

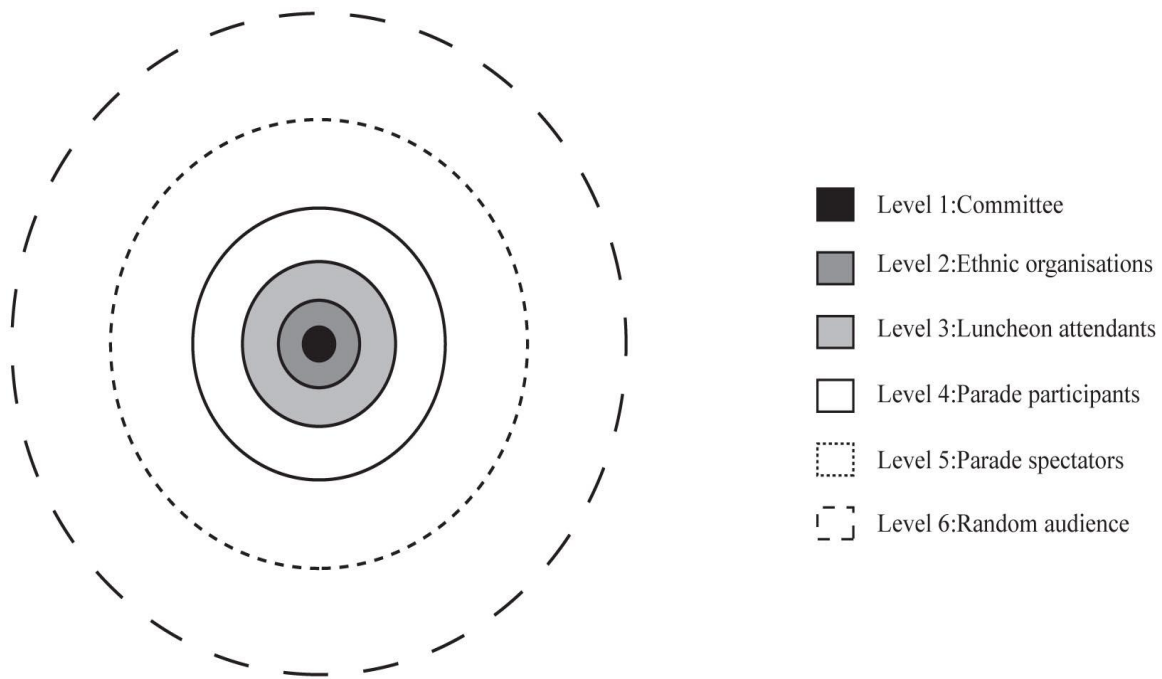
Figur 4.1

¹²³ <http://www.seafair.com/about/history/fifties/>. 25.09. 2010. 10.35

¹²⁴ Among the parades that are listed as connected with *Seafair* are the Greenwood and West Seattle community parades, in addition to *Hispanic*, *Chinese* ethnic parades. See <http://www.seafair.com/events/?&p=2>

¹²⁵ *Seafair* attachment was initially mentioned in the 17th of May program in 1978. (Norwegian 17th of May Committee Archive, folder 13.) I was unsuccessful in obtaining more information from *Seafair* by email about their sponsorship.

¹²⁶ Informant 7.



The committee occupies the innermost position. It arranges and plans the celebration, also deciding what elements the celebration should or should not include. Within the committee, there will be differences in responsibility according to tasks, period of service and status. That is, some members may be located even closer to the center than other. Though not always on the committee, the consul of Seattle should be placed at the core, due to his symbolic function seated at the head table at the luncheon and influential ability with regards to elements of the celebration.¹²⁷

The second layer would be constituted by people who regularly attend the luncheon and who also march in or watch the parade. People who would fit these categories are members of the ethnic organizations that send representatives to the committee.

The third level consists of people who sporadically attend the luncheon and regularly watch the parade. This could be people with a relatively close generational attachment to Norway, but a looser organizational attachment.

The fourth level contains groups that regularly march in the parade, for instance drill teams, school bands, and *Seafair* representatives.

The fifth level is made up of people who regularly come down to watch the parade. These may be people with a community relationship to Ballard, people with an interest in

¹²⁷ See discussion in the section *Norwegian Elements of the Parade*

ethnic celebrations or parades, or people who have Norwegian heritage but who do not necessarily identify with other parts of the celebration.

Lastly, there is a large group that watches the parade more casually. This group will be dominated by people who come for any social event, either accompanied by people with a stronger motivation for watching (level 5) or if they know people who are participating (level 4.) Alternatively that could be people who happen to be in the neighbourhood, or people with some incidental connection to Ballard.

The attendees' characteristics can be summed up accordingly: Levels 1-3 have an intimate connection with the entire celebration. Levels 1-4 participate in the event actively and they are participants more than spectators. Levels 5-6 merely function as spectators.

The celebration contains different level of meaning depending the level of involvement. For the innermost circles, the content of the patriotic program probably holds a higher degree of importance, but low significance for people who only attend or watch the parade; last of which also outnumber the inner circles by far.

As pointed to by Short and Alba, both the form of the parade and ethnic festivals have become recognisable forms of public communication, and the content would for most of the spectators be secondary to the parade form. People would recognize it as an ethnic event, some even as Norwegian, but many spectators or participants might not be familiar with the background for celebration. The question would then be what type of celebration it had become, and for whom?

What type of Celebration?

The symbolic elements of celebration could represent Norwegian ethnic nationalism, Norwegian ethnic identity as well as American civic elements. Five characteristic elements can be recognized:

First, the flags used in the celebration were mostly Norwegian, both as table decorations and wall decorations in the patriotic program, and a large flag hung from the ladder of the fire brigade on the parade route in Market Street. Norwegian flags were dominant in the parade. If the American or other flags were displayed, they were as a rule rather than exception accompanied by the Norwegian flag.

Second, the use of language was predominantly English with some Norwegian phrases.

Third, the selection of songs was predominately of national patriotic rather than traditional folk songs, both Norwegian and American. However, the band music performed in the parade was predominately American.¹²⁸

Fourth, the speeches, given in English by Norwegian speakers, emphasized Norwegian history and the original reason for celebration.

Lastly the parade was arranged in an American style with a Norwegian flavor, including symbols such as *bunads*, *lusekofte*, Vikings and flags as well as motorized units and drill teams.

Public debate- or Media Coverage

In this period, *Western Viking* and *Ballard News Tribune* were the main sources of information about the celebration. Until the early 2000s, *Western Viking* reported both the patriotic program and the parade, whereas *Ballard News Tribune* focused on the parade. This finding supports my assertion that the patriotic program was dominated by Norwegian speaking participants, whereas the parade had a broader general interest.

One noteworthy observation is that both newspapers embraced the celebration as their own; *Western Viking* stresses the importance for the Norwegian American community, whereas *Ballard News Tribune* described the celebration as a community event. As an illustration, *Ballard News Tribune* took pride in being the only local community except Brooklyn that celebrates May 17th on the actual date.¹²⁹ Both the two newspapers also presented the historical background for the celebration in prior to the 17th of May.¹³⁰ The event as recognition of a proud local community was also stressed: “It is a time to show itself off to the rest of the city.”¹³¹ As previously mentioned, the event was covered in *Seattle Times* throughout this period; Similar to the reports in *Ballard News Tribune*, the focus was predominately on the parade.¹³²

There were three notable alterations in the Norwegian American newspaper starting from the 1990s. Firstly, there was a gradual tendency to publish articles in English rather than Norwegian. Secondly, reports from the celebration *in Norway* and particularly Oslo gradually

¹²⁸ It was not unusual that Norwegian marches are played, but the band music was still predominately American. See discussion in the section *Norwegian Elements of the Parade*.

¹²⁹ *Ballard News Tribune* April 30, 1986, page 6. The same observation is also made by *Western Viking* as pointed to earlier in this chapter.

¹³⁰ See for instance *Ballard News Tribune* May 15, 1991, page 2. May 10, 1995, page 10. *Western Viking* May 13, 1977, page 8-9, May 15 1981, page 2.

¹³¹ *Ballard News Tribune* May 14

¹³² Miscellaneous editions of *Seattle Times*.

received stronger coverage.¹³³ Finally, and most importantly *Western Viking* merged into *Norwegian American Weekly* in 2006, and became an English language newspaper for the whole of the US.¹³⁴ The purpose of the newspaper was merely to present Norwegian news for interested Americans, rather than to focus on Norwegian American events. Local events, such as the celebration of May 17th, were not featured in their own right, but mentioned in the context of the general May 17 celebration across America.¹³⁵ The publisher explained that dwelling on Seattle events might alienate readers from other parts of the country; hence the newspaper has opted for a more inclusive coverage.¹³⁶

This development demonstrates an ambiguity. On the one hand, there was no longer a market for a Norwegian ethnic community newspaper in Seattle, which could suggest that interest in ethnic events such as the 17th of May was declining. On the other hand, attendance for the luncheon was held up, and participation in the parade was still high. It may seem that an increasing number of Norwegian Americans of Seattle were more interested in their heritage on a personal level, rather than on a Norwegian American community level.

Summary and Concluding Remarks

This chapter has outlined the celebration of May 17th from 1974 to 2009. There were two main parts to the celebration. The *patriotic* part of the celebration included much the same kind of participants as in the previous period. To a larger extent than before, emphasis on *civic* Norway was explicitly made. The invited Norwegian speakers; prominent political or cultural personalities gave priority to outline the historical background and consequences of the Norwegian Constitution. In this manner, national commemoration was emphasized.

The *parade*, which made up the largest and most public part of the celebration, was arranged in the American tradition with a wide variety of units. The *Norwegian* or *Scandinavian* unit appear to have been the largest and definitely most important constituents, but this still this unit only made up a third of the parade at the most. Through the large inclusion of American elements, as well as through display of *ethnic* symbols, the parade appeared to be visually American but with an ethnic character.

¹³³ For instance *Western Viking* June 3, 1994, page 7, May 11, 2001, page 8, May 17 2002, page 2, May 21, 2004, page 3.

¹³⁴ The two remaining Norwegian American newspapers, *Western Viking* and New York's *Norway Times* merged into *Norwegian American Weekly* in 2006. The news are written in English, with a short summary of the articles in Norwegian "if people like to practise their Norwegian." Editor Jake Moe. May 22, 2009

¹³⁵ *Norwegian American Weekly*, May 22, 2009.

¹³⁶ Jake Moe, May 22, 2009.

At this point, it may be useful to return to Herbert Gans and *symbolic ethnicity*. The development of the May 17th celebration in Seattle may be seen to fit Gan's hypothesis. He argues that festivals such as the Norwegian May 17th or the Irish St Patricks Day have been reinvented and linked with American ideals and symbols. Celebrating ethnicity is also Americanization.¹³⁷ This could be descriptive of the parade, but does not seem to capture the patriotic program, which to a much larger extent appeared to put attention to connection with civic Norway and theoretical meaning of the day. To analyse the meaning of the celebration on the individual level, a micro perspective will be applied in the next chapter.

¹³⁷ Gans 1992:50.

5 THE CELEBRATION OF MAY

17th- MICRO PERSPECTIVES

I celebrate mostly because its fun, a new identity, a new hat. I think for Ballard, it's a lot about the community, the past and the roots from Scandinavia living in America (...) we are celebrating independence, the Norwegian path to independence. Although I'm American, but putting on another identity, red, white and blue, it's very exiting. That's why a wanted to learn Norwegian in the first place.¹

In the two preceding chapters I have sought to give an empirical description of the celebration from 1945 to 2009. The assumption that attachment to the country of origin was the main reason for celebration has been in need of re-evaluation, nevertheless this reason has not been completely eclipsed. The 17th of May celebration had gained a higher number of attendees throughout the investigated period; with the parade as the largest and most inclusive feature.

To be able to discuss individual thoughts and feelings about the 17th of May, I found it fruitful to approach this question at the micro level. In addition, an understanding of nationality might be both more clearly and better addressed from a micro perspective. Aspects that are treated are what type of function did the celebration of May 17th serve, and what hat does the day mean to the individual? How does the celebration resemble or differ from other ethnic events? What does it take to be a Norwegian or American, according to the informants I interviewed? Is it a matter of heritage, culture, language, choice or a combination of several of these?

Finding Informants

The informants were selectively picked out. The aim was to find people who regularly attended and had an interest in the celebration, in order to establish what it meant and expressed to them. Most of the informants I initially met at the 17th of May Committee meetings or at the *Scandinavian Department* at the *University of Washington*. Many of these suggested others to contact.

In general, I found that people from the Norwegian ethnic organizations were curious about my project, eager to talk to “a real Norwegian” and many were interested in being interviewed or wanted to help me find people to talk to. I did not have a chance to conduct thorough interviews with all these people, but tried to have informal chats with some of them.

¹ Informant 5.

I was surprised to discover the extent of people involved in Norwegian organizations that had themselves emigrated firsthand. In an early phase of the process, I tried to find individuals involved on the committee and ethnic organizations that had a further remote relationship to Norway, such as the third or fourth generations. They turned out to be far less prevalent than first or second generation immigrants.

It naturally proved somewhat more difficult to find people who were only spectators, and who did not take an active role in celebration. I talked informally to people who watched the parade on the, but did not find it straightforward to ask people at random if they wanted to be interviewed. Through my network, I was offered suggestions of people who had Norwegian ancestry and took part in the celebration on a more low-level basis. I also had help in finding someone who was involved in the committee and in the celebration but did not have Norwegian ancestry, and in addition a person married to a Norwegian. These informants' backgrounds are detailed in the table below.

Figur 5.1

Informant Number:	Generational attachment to Norway			Ancestry		Age				Gender	
	1st	2 nd	Further remote	Only Norwegian	Mixed	18-30	31-50	51-70	71+	Male	Female
1		X		X				X		X	
2			X		X	X					X
3		X		X			X				X
4	X			X				X		X	
5			X		X	X				X	
6	X			X					X	X	
7			X	X				X		X	
8	X			X					X		X
9			X		X	X					X
10	X			X					X		X
11	X			X				X		X	
12			X	X				X			X
13			X	X			X			X	
14			X		X			X			X
15			X		X			X			X

As indicated from the table, several of the informants were born in Norway, though most of these had emigrated at a young age.² Three had studied the Norwegian language at the University.³ Six had strong connections with the celebration, either being or having been on the committee.⁴ Yet another three were active in Norwegian ethnic organizations.⁵ I deliberately chose to interview people who knew the committee and its work and who could provide information that could not be found from the newspapers. It is basically an insider perspective as the informants were active on the committee, had affinities with Norwegian American organizations or institutions, or had close family ties to Norway. It would have been interesting to have included a non-Norwegian perspective to a greater extent, but that would have been beyond the scope of this thesis.

Only informants 14 and 15 did not have Norwegian ancestry. Informant 14 was married to a first generation Norwegian, while informant 15, who had Mexican ancestry, represented a Ballard organization on the 17th of May committee.

The Function of the Celebration

A ritual's function may fulfill the need of the present, and serve as a link between the past and the present. A ritual's *function* will contribute to create *meaning* for its participants and spectators.⁶

Which functions did the celebration serve for its participants? The parade was the largest, well-planned and spectacular part of the celebration, and the part of the celebration that my informants talked about most.⁷ The parade was described as exotic, with a distinct ethnic flavor, yet recognizable to other Americans in the traditional American parade form. Several informants highlighted *bunads* and *leikarring* dance as the most ethnic and exotic features.⁸ The parade was also described as "traditional American" including parade entities such as marching bands, floats or motorized units.⁹ In general, the informants emphasized the parade over other parts of the celebration. Because of its public display and the attention from

² Informants 4, 6, 8, and 10 emigrated before the age of seven. Informant 11 emigrated at age 17.

³ Informants 2, 4 and 5.

⁴ Informants 1,2, 4, 7, 8 and 15.

⁵ Informants 6, 9 and 10.

⁶ The ritual's function and meaning should be considered interconnected, as suggested by Maurice Bloch. See chapter 1, *Ritual –an Anthropological Approach*.

⁷ I did not ask specifically if they could discuss other parts of the celebration. The questions might have been more directed towards primarily discussing the parade, or the other informants might have found this the most relevant topic for discussion. The checklist of list of questions is listed in the appendix.

⁸ Informants 2,3 and 14.

⁹ Informants 1 and 8.

newspapers and spectators, many interviewees would probably consider it as the most relevant topic for discussion. In the following, I will discuss entertainment, competition, community and unity, socialization, and memory and identity, which are functional aspects the informants raised.

Entertainment

According to one informant there are two purposes to the entertainment side of the 17th of May parade. The first is embodied by the Norwegian ethnic organizations, which she considers to represent *the original meaning* of the celebration. Accompanied by typical American parade units, such as drill teams and marching bands, which represent the *function of entertainment*, the parade is able to excite the audience.

The bands and drills are mostly there for the entertainment, while the lodges..It's definitely important to have them there, because they're like the point of the day, Norwegian Independence Day, but they usually just walk, whereas the bands and drills perform.¹⁰

This informant suggested that the ethnic aspect by itself would not have the ability to be very entertaining, and would struggle to draw an audience; which was indeed the case for the late post-war celebrations.¹¹ The celebration must feel relevant and meaningful to its participants and spectators. It appears that the Ballard celebration has been able to excite a local audience without necessarily having a strong attachment to Norway or Norwegian America. One informant suggested two main attractions that bring people in beyond a connection to Norwegian America. Firstly, people may come for the ethnic distinctiveness; to watch the “beautiful costumes” and the presence of another close-by culture. Secondly, they may be attracted by the familiar parade form, which particularly would attract families with small children: “I mean a parade is a parade, and if you have kids you come and see.”¹²

The entertainment aspect was repeatedly stressed as an important draw, especially for children and families, but also on a general basis. Informant 2 explained: “I think everyone loves a good parade, and they usually have a lot of entities. It's a good time of the year, and it's just fun to celebrate...Norwegianess.”¹³ There seemed to be a consensus that it is not necessary to be familiar with Norwegian history or culture to enjoy a celebration, but it was assumed that people with some attachment to Norway may have a greater interest in the celebration, which could bring a deeper level of meaning for them.

¹⁰ Informant 9.

¹¹ See chapter 3.

¹² Informant 3.

¹³ Informant 2.

One informant, married to a Norwegian, distinguished between a celebration in Norway and Seattle. “It’s more of a show here, more different things going on. In Norway it’s just the schools marching, and that is not that entertaining to watch. For an outsider, anyway”¹⁴ This comment may support my assumption that the entertainment function and factor of recognition were important for maintaining an interest in the celebration. The informants seemed to agree that the entertainment aspect is an important function of the parade; without the excitement, it was hard to relate to the celebration. For non-Norwegian originated spectators, the entertainment aspect could enable these people to relate to the celebration as a whole. If the parade excited, more people would come to watch or attend. One informant seemed to consider the entertainment function fundamental for parade communication in America:

Americans wouldn’t relate to the type of celebrations you have for *Syttende Mai* in Norway, where people march with their class, their school. For a heritage festival you have to include both, ‘cause that’s how you relate. It must be a show¹⁵

In this connection, the celebrants were referred to as primarily American. Though initiated as a Norwegian national ritual, the function of the ritual and the meaning had developed along with its new group of participants. The majority of the participants was born, or had at least lived in America for several years, and had adopted both American *civic* principles as well as cultural preferences, such as the American type of parade.

Competition

Competition within the parade could be considered both as a part of the entertainment but also as an independent purpose. In each category, a unit may win a prize for putting on the best show. This created excitement and entertained the crowds. In addition it established a group dynamic within the units, which was boosted by this competitive aspect.¹⁶ In competing with other groups, a sense of inner stability and unity within the was created. A certain sense of unity, or an *imagined community* might occur as they march and perform well, hoping to win a trophy and achieving publicity for their organization. There might be an inner and exterior dynamic within the marching unit and across the units respectively. An informant described such competition as a characteristic trait of the American parade celebration:

¹⁴ Informant 14.

¹⁵ Informant 4.

¹⁶ This should be related to the ritual’s meaning side as a bond between the participants. See chapter 1, *Ritual- an Anthropological Approach*.

In Norway it's much of a children's thing. Like the tradition to get "pølse", "is". Here it is also a chance for people to display their talents. The floats and the marching bands. The chance to win awards and being part of a community¹⁷

Community and Unity

Through the above cited quote, a sense of belonging to a community was also expressed. The parade's function as a builder of community cohesion was repeatedly stressed in the interviews. The following quote may serve as an illustration:

I think the celebration brings people together. We obviously live in a different country, so it reminds people of their culture, how they got here and everything. Cause America is such a mixed country, ethnically. It's a community building. Ballard definitely takes pride in its heritage."¹⁸

This informant noted that Scandinavian ethnic history was a part of local community history in Ballard, which in turn is part of general American history. This was also emphasized by another informant: "For the Ballard community, it's a chance to celebrate its past. The Scandinavian community that was so dominant, for so many years."¹⁹ As the celebration was a public display in Ballard, it could be of interest for people with variously some attachment to Norway, Ballard or Seattle.

To a large extent, it seems that the local *Ballard* and ethnic Norwegian perspectives on the celebration were two sides of the same story. The celebration commemorated a Norwegian event generally, and recognized the local area's ethnic history specifically:

It's the Norwegians celebrating their independence. And here they were concentrated in Ballard, so both Ballard and the Norwegians are celebrating their history. That's why it is also called the Ballard parade, 'cause it takes place in Ballard. It brings the community together, and we all wanna feel connected to a community.²⁰

The Social Aspect

All informants pointed to socializing as an important purpose of the celebration. The social function could be addressed both from both a wide and general perspective and a narrow and specific perspective. First it is "fun event"²¹ that entertained and excited on a general basis. Second, it was a community event, which contributed to expressing a local identity. Third, it was a family event, where people brought their children. Lastly, it was an arena for people of Norwegian ancestry to meet and remember. As an example of wide and general interest, one informant remarked that the celebration was considered a good opportunity for informal business meetings:

¹⁷ Informant 5.

¹⁸ Informant 9

¹⁹ Informant 5

²⁰ Informant 14.

²¹ Description used by informant 1.

I know of business establishments who invite their business associates to come and watch, just make a social thing out of it, have a few drinks, enjoy... I know they do it a lot in the fishing industry where there are a lot of Norwegians, but still.²²

In addition, as pointed out in the previous section, the event was perceived as an important local celebration, and the neighborhood was highlighted as the arena, with a focus on neighborhood shopping and family events in addition to the parade. The day should be packaged in a lighthearted and enjoyable form, which made it a good social event. One informant explained: “I think the function is to have a good time with your friends and family...and to celebrate the Norwegian Constitution Day, of course.”²³

It was also underlined that the celebration draws people of Norwegian ancestry to Ballard to meet other Norwegian Americans. One informant explains that he considers this to be relatively common among older Norwegian Americans:

I think a lot of people, like my grandmother, would go down there, and meet up with old Norwegian friends. Make a shopping trip out of it; buy things like *fiskepudding* or *geitost*, *spekekjøtt*, the traditional Norwegian food.²⁴

Both the food and Norwegian company encourages a group identity and a belonging. Old friends and traditional food could also be considered elements of an ethnic community and of past and personal memories.

Memory and Identity

One informant explained her opinion of the celebration of May 17th accordingly:

It's a chance to show my children an appreciation for their heritage. As they have gotten older and busier, the tradition is not hanging quite as tight, but when we have the time we always go. The *bunads* in my family will be worn with such pride that day. My oldest daughter has got one, and I will make my youngest one when she's a bit older. It's a sense of belonging.²⁵

To this informant, the *bunad* functioned a symbol of culture of origin. Similar to the 17th of May celebration as a whole, it was for festive rather than everyday use, in addition to being an ethnic symbol. It could function as a link to identification; by wearing a *bunad*, a person puts on an ethnic identity.²⁶

Another informant also stressed this family significance; he wished to teach his children about their origin. To a larger extent than the informant above, he appeared to stress

²² Informant 11.

²³ Informant 8.

²⁴ Informant 13.

²⁵ Informant 3.

²⁶ Alba 1990.

the importance of history; to learn what the celebration was commemorating. This educational aspect would be more clearly addressed through the luncheon than the parade, where the background for the celebration was stressed:

People come here with their parents and grandparents. I feel it's important our children know where they came from and what it is all about. They need to hear the stories about Norway, that great country that we came from.²⁷

The celebration was also described as a social arena for Norwegian Americans, in which Norwegian identity was emphasized:

Most Norwegian Americans I know come to see other Norwegian friends; it's just a place where everyone goes. But it also reaches out to the rest of the people. We are inviting them to be Norwegians for the day.²⁸

What does it mean to be Norwegian for the day? To some extent, it could be understood as part of the post-ethnic phenomenon.²⁹ From another viewpoint, it could simply be a way to open up and welcome a larger audience to the celebration. When asked about the expressive purpose, the informant explained that it means everyone "can fly the Norwegian flag and honor the day."³⁰ Everyone who wants to join the celebration is Norwegian for the day."³¹

This inclusive identity was also embraced in a commentary to an article in *Seattle Times*.

Half of, married to, or blood-linked to this country, who cares? It is about freedom and the expression of a culture that cares enough to continue encouraging an interest and a following of something that is important to them.³²

This universal and inclusive perspective was not embraced by everyone. Contrary to the post ethnic interpretation represented above, others argued that identity needed to be rooted in genuine ethnic history and memory. The following comment may serve as an illustration:

The Norwegian-American community is alive and thriving, and it is comprised of a lot of staunchly proud Norwegians who remember old Norway and appreciate the folkways and social mores of Norwegian society. I'm glad that there are people who appreciate our culture and language, but putting on a bunad and doing folk dances at the 17th of May parade does NOT make you Norwegian.³³

²⁷ Informant 1.

²⁸ Informant 8.

²⁹ Post ethnicity is an approach which considers ethnicity as a matter of choice rather than blood. An individual of mixed ancestry can choose what ethnicity she/he wishes to identify with. The assumption seems to be in line with Werner Sollors approach; if one feels ethnic, one is ethnic. See Sollors 1989 ix-xx.

³⁰ Informant 8.

³¹ Ibid.

³² http://community.seattletimes.nwinformant.com/reader_feedback/public/display.php?thread=125254&offset=0#post_452403.

³³ Ibid.

This commentator argued that ethnic identity is not rooted in ethnic symbols and festivity alone. To dress and celebrate ethnically was not sufficient; knowledge about Norwegian history and culture could bring the individual closer to understanding the significance of the day. The remark may imply that people who “remember old Norway”, which may seem to refer to people born in Norway who have emigrated to Seattle, have the most authentic appreciation and understanding. Genuine ethnicity could not be purely *symbolic*, but must be rooted in a personal attachment to the country of origin, it was implied. Acting Norwegian did not make a Norwegian.

The Meaning of the Celebration

What did the celebration mean to the individual? As incorporated into the section above there appeared to be assumptions that some have a more authentic or genuine understanding of what the celebration is about and what is “really” Norwegian.

Several informants explained that *tradition* was the most important reason for celebration. “I think it’s just become a tradition, that’s mostly why people are doing it. And of course they are happy to be a part of a tradition and happy to be Norwegian.”³⁴ For another informant, the opportunity to teach his children the significance of the day and to take part in the tradition in Seattle motivated him to be involved in the event’s organization.³⁵ Another informant, who also had a long history of being on the committee, explains that he personally considers the day an occasion to reflect upon “the *theoretic democratic ideals* which both the Norwegian and American constitutions are based on.”³⁶ These views echo the content of the speeches at the patriotic program.³⁷

The event has been arranged annually and has a relatively constant and recognizable form. It was an arena to express ethnic identity, and an important social happening for those involved in Norwegian American ethnic organizations. On an individual level, it may be a habitual tradition: “It’s just something that you do when you are Norwegian. We go to the luncheon and march in the parade.”³⁸

In another point of view, a sense of group identity and duty related to the celebration was suggested:

I celebrate because that’s what you’re supposed to do when you are part of a Norwegian organization. If you are a good member of the Norwegian organization, you do show up! The

³⁴ Informant 8.

³⁵ Informant 1.

³⁶ Informant 4.

³⁷ See chapter 4, section *speeches*.

³⁸ Informant 10.

motivation is merely to express Norwegian culture and loyalty to the people who have put a lot of work behind it. I really don't have any particular emotions, but I'm accused of not being very emotional, so that wouldn't be unique.³⁹

Maybe not surprisingly, the luncheon was described with adjectives such as "traditional" or "Norwegian": "My dad is obviously very Norwegian, so we always have his luncheon that we go to."⁴⁰ On the other hand, another informant, first generation Norwegian, explained that he and his family consider the luncheon merely an ethnic organizational event.

I know there is some patriotic event at the Sons of Norway Hall⁴¹, but that's mainly for the organizations, we go down to watch the parade if the weather is good, we are not that committed. But when we visit family in Norway, we have a large celebration. It is merely a matter of where we are at the time.⁴²

It seems that this informant considered the event to be of stronger importance to people who have an organizational attachment. To him, family roots were more important than institutional connections. Because he maintains connections with his family in Norway and frequently visits, he seems to have less need to invoke organizational ties to maintain links with the country of origin.

Some of the informants assumed that the day has another degree of importance or meaning for people who have grown up in Norway. To a certain extent, a sense of inferiority was suggested. Some informants imply that people who grew up in Norway have a more authentic understanding than others: "I think a lot of Norwegians who came here when they were older than I would have another feeling, cause I didn't grow up in Norway."⁴³

This sentiment was corroborated by another informant: "People who grew up in Norway have a whole other perspective than I have. They have their own sort of way. Not that they aren't welcoming of others, but they know what the day is really about"⁴⁴

Another informant appeared to agree that some of the celebrants understand the significance more than others. To him, a long history of celebrating the 17th of May, more than necessarily having grown up in Norway seems to make a difference. This informant expressed strong patriotic feelings about the celebration.

It's just a great day to express our pride of who we are and where we came from (...) the celebration is festive for everyone, but the older people know the real meaning. They know "Ja vi

³⁹ Informant 6.

⁴⁰ Informant 9.

⁴¹ The informant referred to *Leif Eriksson Hall* is owned by the *Leif Eriksson lodge*, which is an affiliate of the *Sons of Norway*.

⁴² Informant 11.

⁴³ Informant 8

⁴⁴ Informant 3

elsker” and what that means. The singing of the national anthems, the language, it’s all very emotional to me. Its way of keeping the spirit and patriotism for these two great countries alive.⁴⁵

This informant seemed to suggest that the celebration entailed meaning on two levels. The first being the general, which should be possible for anyone to grasp. The second would be *ethnic memory*. He appeared to hold the opinion that the stronger the attachment to Norway, the stronger the appreciation of the authentic meaning. This informant may imply that people who have maintained the Norwegian language and culture may be closer to a “real” understanding and meaning of the celebration to a larger extent than others.

As discussed in chapter 1, anthropologists argue that participants understand a ritual differently, depending on their level of involvement. Based on Clifford Geertz’ line of arguments, the participants with a strong connection to the celebration, either at the committee level or through a strong attachment to Norway, have a thorough understanding of the “meaning.” This is where the “real” rather than “shallow” play takes place.⁴⁶ It could seem that some of the informants share Geertz’ understanding of their own ritual. Contrary to Geertz’ view, Bruce Kapferer argues that too strong a connection may blind the participants to its significance. That is, people who are more distantly involved will have a more genuine understanding of what is really being celebrated. To pose a rhetorical question, when is an opinion or feeling about the celebration to be considered “real” or “correct”? Should the organizers intentions be considered more authentic than the spectators’ response? In my opinion, it is mostly a matter of perspective. The celebration could be understood as a Norwegian American event, reminiscent of the country of origin, as an ethnic celebration in America, or as local happening. The *meaning* should be related to the *function*. According to the interviewees, the celebration first and foremost meant tradition, entertainment and reminiscence about Norway and the historic Norwegian ethnic community in Seattle.

A Norwegian and/or an American Celebration?

There was wide agreement that the celebration consisted of a combination of Norwegian and American elements. An informant, who had participated in celebration as a child, explained that the number of American features in the celebration had increased in recent decades. “I think so many things have been added to our celebration, so it’s not that Norwegian anymore.

⁴⁵ Informant 1.

⁴⁶ See chapter 1, section *Ritual, an Anthropological approach*.

Maybe it's half Norwegian. But that's still pretty good?"⁴⁷ The rhetorical question could be a way of speaking, or a way of asserting the celebration's role as a Norwegian event.

Most of the informants asserted that the celebration should bring the two cultures together. It was a natural development for a celebration in America, it was argued. One informant considered that by making the parade open and inclusive, interest in the celebration was able to be maintained.

At first it was just the lodges and the Norwegians that belonged to them that marched, and now so many people are coming. I'm all for it. If it's gonna keep going you have to accept that. It couldn't all be Scandinavian and Norwegian. Whoever wants to be in it is welcome. I think it's great. We still have the Norwegian parts of it. The lodges. They are all Norwegian.⁴⁸

From another point of view, one informant had noted some discontent that celebration was not "sufficiently Norwegian." He argued that a celebration in America would necessarily adapt some American elements: "I think some people here think it should be a real Norwegian celebration and not an Americanized one. But this is America, and that way it's gonna stay."⁴⁹ Informant 7 appeared to hold some of the opinions that informant 6 criticizes. The former was dejected by the extent of other elements in the parade, which he believed overshadowed the Norwegian part:

The celebration is a great way to express Norwegianity, but the parade really hasn't got that much to do with Norway anymore. Like the fire engines. They are red, but that's about it! The parade could have accepted only Norwegian categories, but it has never been marketed that way. The Norwegian organizations cannot seem to get hold of new, young people, and the Norwegian part is so small; only a small part of those who march in the parade. It's unfortunate, now you just have to accept everyone because you want a parade.⁵⁰

Except for the informant quoted above, the other informants stressed that the parade was balanced, and that a combination of elements was desirable. Nonetheless, they appeared to agree that the event should be Norwegian enough for those who seek the Norwegian elements, yet American or familiar enough for everyone to enjoy. In the words of informant 4:

It is a Norwegian festival with an American flavor. You got flags, you got *bunader*, definitely more Norwegian flags than American. If you look at it, it might be more American than Norwegian. But you have the combination. It has become a huge community event.⁵¹

A Seattle Celebration?

Many of the informants explained that the long and uninterrupted celebration of May 17th had made it a recognized part of Seattle's community events calendar. A 17th of May parade as

⁴⁷ Informant 8.

⁴⁸ Informant 10.

⁴⁹ Informant 6.

⁵⁰ Informant 7.

⁵¹ Informant 4.

large as in Ballard was relatively unique, they explained.⁵² Some Norwegian American informants who had moved to Seattle explained that they consider the event to be a local rather than a typical Norwegian American event. One of the informants grew up in North Dakota, the state with the highest percentage of Norwegian Americans⁵³ and remarked that he was surprised that the event was so much larger in Seattle than in Midwest. This informant vaguely remembered going to an event which might have been a 17th of May celebration as a child, but did not regularly attend celebrations before he started studying Norwegian at the *University of Washington*.⁵⁴ The comparative low importance of the event outside Seattle was shared by another informant

I had not even heard about the 17th of May until I started college four years ago. But when I did, I was pretty surprised that this was not part of what I knew to be Norwegian. My parents and grandparents feel the same way, cause they obviously did not know about it either. But it's very funny for me to get to celebrate a new tradition.⁵⁵

The same informant suggested that the more recent influx of immigrants to Seattle and the Washington area has made the tradition stronger than compared to the Midwest. She further pointed to that the 17th of May celebrations in America have mainly been urban, located in areas that used to have a strong Norwegian American community.⁵⁶ A young informant who had grown up in Ballard explained that she had the impression that *Syttende Mai* was strongly associated with Seattle and Ballard, and she doubted that the celebration held a similar position in other parts of the US. "Honestly, I don't even know if they have celebrations outside Seattle. Here it is such a strong community even people who aren't Norwegian will celebrate."⁵⁷

Other informants stated that the *Syttende Mai* celebration was widely known as the *Ballard* parade, which indicates a strong local community connection with the celebration, or at least with the parade.⁵⁸ One informant believed that a large number of the parade spectators attend the celebration more casually than intentionally: "We know that people come. But we don't know if it is the same people. We can find a new 5000 people every year."⁵⁹ He believes that the people who attend regularly have some connection either to Norway or Ballard.

⁵² Informants 1,2 ,4,5, 8,14 and 15.

⁵³ Lovoll 1999: 305.

⁵⁴ Informant 5.

⁵⁵ Informant 2.

⁵⁶ Informant 2. Examples of urban areas with an historically strong Norwegian American community are Brooklyn, New York and Ballard, Seattle.

⁵⁷ Informant 9.

⁵⁸ Informants 4, 8 and 14

⁵⁹ Informant 7

As discussed in chapter 4, the parade has been a commonly used type of urban communication in America since the nineteenth century. This type of communication naturally required an audience, hence urban settings, where a large group of spectators could be found. As a result of increased interest in ethnic diversity from the 1960s, the ethnic parade and celebration may have also found favorable conditions in urban areas.

Other Ethnic Events

If non-Norwegians took part in the 17th of May celebration, it could be reasonable to assume that Norwegian Americans would also attend other ethnic celebrations in Seattle.

All the informants attested to be familiar with other ethnic events in the area. Several ethnic celebrations in Seattle were referred to. One informant mentioned “a Greek event,”⁶⁰ while another referred to “a Philippino happening at the beginning of May.”⁶¹ The events most frequently mentioned were the Irish *St Patrick’s Day* and the Mexican *Cinco de Mayo*⁶² as well as the Chinese New Year celebration. To start with the latter, three of the informants had watched celebrations and explained that they had gone for the cultural experience, entertainment and general interest.⁶³ One of them explained: “I just have an interest in what other cultures do for a celebration. Of course their history is different than ours, and it is interesting to see what they do when they are here.”

Some of the informants explained that they didn’t feel a connection to other ethnic celebrations, whilst for the 17th of May they had the heritage connection.⁶⁴ Another informant made a clear distinction between participation and observation: “I’d go to watch the parade for *St.Patrick’s Day*, but I wouldn’t march in it. I don’t connect myself with being Irish.”⁶⁵

On the other hand, the entertainment aspect and the food culture were pointed to: “Whether you are Irish or not, drinking green beer is fun to do. In my family, we had *corn beef* and *hashes* for *St.Patrick’s Day*, even though we are not Irish at all. But it’s fun.”⁶⁶ The food and entertainment aspects of *St. Patrick’s Day* and *Cinco de Mayo* were also brought up by other informants. One of them argued that the Norwegian Constitution Day has a wider range and a deeper meaning: “People do celebrate and go out for a beer, but it is mainly about

⁶⁰ Informant 11.

⁶¹ Informant 6.

⁶² Mexican holiday, which commemorates the Mexican victory over the French Army at the battle of *Puebla* on May 5th 1862. It started primarily as a regional holiday in the region of Puebla, but has won recognition both in other regions and been adopted by Mexican Americans: It is marked by parades, music foods and costumes across America. It has become a larger in the US than in Mexico.

⁶³ Informant 5, 13 and 9.

⁶⁴ Informant 3 and 12.

⁶⁵ Informant 5.

⁶⁶ Informant 2.

the food and drinks. Our celebration has so much more for the entire family. It's festive and patriotic at the same time"⁶⁷

It was argued that *St. Patrick's Day* was the largest ethnic celebration across the country, but the Norwegian Constitution Day was referred to as a larger ethnic event in the Seattle area. Whether this was the case, or mainly a question of pride in their own celebration is uncertain. Undoubtedly, the celebration of May 17th held a lot stronger importance for these informants than the 17th of March did.

Informant 4 noted that Norwegian Americans have held quite extensive celebrations wherever they formed sizeable communities. He considered that the extent of the ethnic celebration is related both to the national holiday's prominence in the country of origin, as well as the size of the ethnic group and pride in their heritage. The other Nordic countries do not have the same traditions, nor did German Americans maintain celebrations after the World Wars, due to the negative connotations surrounding German nationalism and it's the associations with *the Third Reich*.⁶⁸

4th of July Celebrations

All my informants reported that they celebrated and acknowledged the 4th of July. They appeared to agree that the 4th of July is not as formal as the 17th of May, though many of the ideals were much of the same; nationality and identity.

One informant, whose parents were born in Norway, explained that her family never developed a tradition of celebrating the 4th of July, basically because it wasn't a tradition that her parents had grown up with.

For May 17th I think of celebration...even more so then for the 4th of July. Because of the costumes and festiveness (...) I didn't grow up with celebrating the 4th of July, so it hasn't been something I have pressed upon my family to do. Even though my parents were very proud Americans living here, it just wasn't something they grew up with.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Informant 1

⁶⁸ This should be related to Aagedal and Hovland 2001:8 As opposed to the other Scandinavian countries, where less than 7 per cent take part in official national celebrations, The Norwegian Constitution Day has a wide participation, where over 70 per cent participates in the 17th of May celebrations. This tendency may have been transferred to Seattle, and is further further supported by an ethnic community that accounts for more than half of the Scandinavian ethnic population. With regards to German celebrations, emphasis on the German nation has mainly been associated with Third Reich concept of national superiority. In addition to the defeat in the first World War and nativism of the early 1920s, German ethnic celebration would have poor conditions from th 1920s until the increased acceptance of the 1960/70s. Still, it may seem likely that the concept of the German nation has been toned down, and celebrations that have been maintained mainl revolves around *cultural elements* such as the *Oktoberfest*.

⁶⁹ Informant 3.

This informant's view was corroborated by several others in the opinion that the 4th of July has less of a ritual feel connected it compared to the 17th of May, though the celebrated ideals were much the same. Informant 9 explained it accordingly:

The 4th of July just isn't as big a deal, everyone just do their own thing, it's not like Syttende May where there is sort of...this is the way to celebrate. May 17th is definitely more of a community thing and a representation of culture for Norway⁷⁰

Another informant pointed to the equal ideals, but intoned that the degree of formality was the main distinction between the two national celebrations.

It's merely a picnic day. You don't get dressed up or anything, but it is the fireworks. You don't have that in Norway. But we are both celebrating our independence. But you guys celebrate in such a respectful way that I admire. We celebrate in a proud way. But yours is so much more formal.⁷¹

The two national celebrations were also described with the antonyms *passive* and *active*:

"The 4th of July is pretty public with flags and fireworks and all of that. But it's more of a passive experience. Whereas the 17th of May requires your participation; marching, singing, waving the flag."⁷² Some informants noted that the public celebration of the 4th of July has lessened in recent decades:

When I was a kid, the fourth of July was very important; it was picnics and parades, but now it's all gone. I never marched in one, but I watched it. The last time I saw a parade was 25 years ago. I don't know if there is anything downtown anymore, if there is, it is really small. On the 17th of May, there is a heavy emphasis on the patriotic feeling, but for the 4th of July, it's mainly just the fireworks and the flag.⁷³

From another point of view, a stronger political dimension in the public celebration of 4th of July was suggested, which informant 4 personally did not approve of:

There are parades, but there are almost always military bands. I think that the fourth of July has sort of been taken over by right wing patriotism, the military bands; soldiers marching...it gives a certain impression on a day like that, especially after the Vietnam War. I celebrate the ideals of the 4th of July, I just don't do it in an open way.⁷⁴

The use of Flags

A flag is designated to symbolize a nation, consequently the flag could represent what is associated with the nation. As discussed in the introduction, the flag can be both *civic* and *ethnic* symbol, depending on the context. The flag is also a political symbol. It might communicate a nation's abstract or practical core values, the ideals or practical government.

⁷⁰ Informant 9.

⁷¹ Informant 14

⁷² Informant 5.

⁷³ Informant 6.

⁷⁴ Informant 4.

In general, it is a symbolic representation of what the observer associates with a nation. From this point of view, it is a valuable symbol for analyzing understandings of national and ethnic identity at the micro level.

One informant explained that he gladly brings out both the American and Norwegian flags, both for the 17th of May and the 4th of July, which for him function as symbols, both of heritage and “the ideals that these countries theoretically represents.”⁷⁵ However, in combination with military bands, the American flag brings association of military politics that he dissociates himself from.

The connotation between the American flag and war was also pointed to by another informant:

I have strong associations with war and aggressive forces when I see the American Flag, but when I think of the Norwegian Flag, I have more peaceful associations. I think of the Nobel peace prize, negotiations that Norway is involved in, and the 17th of May.⁷⁶

A third informant explained that she considers the flags to represent associations with certain groups or political attitudes:

If I were in Norway on the 4th of July, I'm sure I'd celebrate, but I would never carry an American flag. I'm not really a flag bearing person (...) I would take the Norwegian flag ten times over the American... You see people who have big American flags on their cars or T-shirts, and I'm just *NOT* one of those people at all! Abroad, I think that people in general don't like Americans too much, but the Norwegians are really popular here in America.⁷⁷

These three informants implied that the American flag brings political connotations which they disapproved, whereas the Norwegian flag had more peaceful associations. Informant 2 implied that a national celebration with the Norwegian flag in America brought predominantly positive associations, whereas she suggested that the reverse celebration in Norway would be interpreted more negatively.

Could this interpretation of flags be fairly general? The use and interpretation of flags were not specifically addressed in the interviews; consequently the informants who brought up reflections on flags may have had very conscious opinion on the subject. As discussed above, some of the informants felt a need to distance themselves from “American values” when understood as military politics. As mentioned by informant 4, the connotation with war and imperialist politics was to a large extent brought to life during the Vietnam War; from this

⁷⁵ Informant 4.

⁷⁶ Informant 5.

⁷⁷ Informant 2.

perspective the use of American flags could be a way to express support or distance from right wing politics.

People who grew up before the 1960s might have developed different association with the flags. For newly arrived immigrants it could have been a way of expressing belonging to their new country. Judging from pictures and reports from the immediate post war celebrations, the American flag seemed to have been more common in the period up to the 1960s, when there still was a strong influx of new Norwegian immigrants.⁷⁸

One of the informants had an American flag displayed in her garden the day I interviewed her. She explained that her parents often put out the flags during her childhood, and she found that the flag “gave a nice color to her garden.”⁷⁹ This informant grew up during the 1930s and 1940s, and might have grown up with other associations and interpretations than people who are thirty years younger.

Another connotation of the flag could be as a symbol as a country’s “theoretical values”, as did informant 4. Informant 1 explained that the combination of the Norwegian and American flags was very emotional for him, and that they were a way of “keeping the spirit and patriotism for these two great countries alive.”⁸⁰ This appeared to be much in line with the Norwegian American self-image, most strongly imposed during the first investigated period.⁸¹

The use of flags would function primarily as a festive or decorative image, both for public holidays and private occasions such as birthdays or anniversaries. Some informants note that a remarkably high number of Norwegian flags can be seen in the Ballard area.⁸²

It appears that the Norwegian flag predominately was interpreted as an *ethnic* symbol, and to a much lesser extent as a *civic* symbol. But to an even stronger extent as an *ethnic symbol* as displayed in the public parade.

Nationality

On May 17th 2002, a commentary to the *Western Viking* called for a native to lead the 17th of May parade in Oslo: “Last year a foreigner marched in front of the 17th of May parade in Oslo. I assume that my wish that a native should lead the parade in the Norwegian capital this

⁷⁸ See chapter 3.

⁷⁹ Informant 10.

⁸⁰ Informant 1.

⁸¹ See chapter 3.

⁸² Mentioned by informants 1, 4, 8 and 15.

year is shared.”⁸³ It appears that this “foreigner” was Jamsheed Masroor, Norwegian Pakistani writer, who was a member of the 17th of May Committee in Oslo in 2001.⁸⁴

The choice of words used comparing the outsider to the national community is interesting. First a *native* could mean someone from the indigenous population of an area, which could refer to where a person was born in a *civic* sense, or ancestry in an *ethnic* sense. From this point of view, *Western Viking’s* correspondent could mean either a person born in Norway or a person with Norwegian ethnic origin. Second, the term *foreigner* is less ambiguous and is defined as “a person not native to or naturalized in the country or jurisdiction under consideration; alien.”⁸⁵ This definition is purely *civic* and would describe a person who does not judicially belong to the state of Norway. To this commentator, a person who has another ethnic origin than Norwegian is a foreigner in Norway, even though the person holds Norwegian citizenship. This should be considered an expression of the traditional civic/ethnic understanding of nationality. What criteria did the informants use in order to decide whether people are Norwegian or American?

Several interviewees emphasized that *nationality* was a category that reached beyond citizenship. Many emphasized aspects of culture, which in itself is broad concept. One informant argues “It’s not just that you are a Norwegian citizen. You have to take part in the culture as well, be a part of the community and appreciate the costumes and traditions”⁸⁶ Another informant agreed that immigrants must adapt culturally: “I think immigrants can become Norwegian, if they assimilate into the culture.”⁸⁷ These informants appear to suggest that history and tradition were the cornerstones of national culture.

It may seem that Norwegian national culture is interpreted primarily as ethnic culture rooted in ethnic symbols such as *bunads*, *lutefisk* or *Vikings*. In this case, these ethnic symbols are more commonly linked with Norway than with civic ideas. Again, this may suggest primarily a *symbolic ethnicity*.⁸⁸ The perception of Norway for many Norwegian Americans

⁸³ *Western Viking* May 17, 2002. page 2. My translation. Original “ifjor ledet en utlending an som frontspiss for 17.mai toget i Oslo. Tror ikke jeg står alene om å ønske at i år bør en innfødt person lede an 17.mai toget i Norges hovedstad.”

⁸⁴ Jamsheed Masroor was married to Rubina Rana, who in 1999 became the first leader of the 17th of May Committee in Oslo of immigrant background. A search in the Norwegian online media archive (A-tekst) show that no Norwegian newspaper mention Masroor’s or other “foreigners” marching in front of the *barnetog* in May 2001. This was apparently of larger importance to *Western Viking*. As Masroor was the only member of the 17th of May Committee whose name indicated an immigrant background, I assume he was the “foreigner” *Western Viking* referred to. <http://www.sak.oslo.kommune.no/dok/Bys%5C2001%5CKOUK%5C0000059814-2-WSG-2-82-0.htm>.

⁸⁵ www.dictionary.com

⁸⁶ Informant 15.

⁸⁷ Informant 12.

⁸⁸ See chapter 4, *Ethnic revival or Symbolic Ethnicity*.

may be rooted in memory and tradition before the time of immigration, as an *imagined home country*.⁸⁹ One informant explained the conflict between her childhood memory and the contemporary development of immigrants coming to Norway.

I suppose its natural progression that immigrants come to Norway and celebrate their culture. To me, it sort of ruins the picture of my childhood, of what Norway was like, but that's just a childhood memory and not a reality. So I would have to accept it.⁹⁰

Two other interviewees showed disapproval of how Norway was changing, and explained that they no longer considered the Norwegian capital to be thoroughly Norwegian: "If you want to meet the real Norwegians you have to go out of Oslo. The city does not represent the rest of the country very well."⁹¹ The other informant expressed herself more directly: "When I go to Norway, I want to meet real Norwegians. There is not much Norwegian about Oslo. The city is full of graffiti, chewing gum and immigrants."⁹² For these two informants, modern city culture and multiculturalism seemed remote from what their conception of "the real Norway." One informant severely criticized the image of contemporary Norway from what she believes was a traditional Norwegian American point of view:

A lot of people are so remote from Norway today. They think that everyone wears *bunad*, eat *lutefisk* and *lefse* everyday, no jeans, no immigrants. So far from how it actually is. And still *they* believe that they are more Norwegian than a lot of people who actually live there⁹³

This informant argued that the myth or expectation of the country of origin is in many ways at odds with reality in contemporary Norway. She believed that many people fail to accept that much has changed from the time they emigrated.⁹⁴

Other informants commented on the ambiguity between Norwegian Americans and immigrants in Norway in their form of attachment. Informant 8 believed that the attachment is equal, but on different levels:

I think they are equally Norwegian. Someone born there will speak fluent Norwegian and will learn all the history, which people here will not know unless they are very interested. Yet they may look very Norwegian. It's very strange."⁹⁵

Another informant lists identification on a personal level as most important.⁹⁶

⁸⁹ Kjeldstadli 1998.

⁹⁰ Informant 3.

⁹¹ Informant 1.

⁹² Informant 14.

⁹³ Informant 2.

⁹⁴ Again, this should be considered connected with the *imagined home country*.

⁹⁵ Informant 8.

I guess legally, a person born in Norway would be more Norwegian than a person born in America with Norwegian origin. But I think it is mainly a question of cultural connections, what the person feels as their homeland or home culture would count more.⁹⁷

What they Label Themselves

With one exception⁹⁸ all the informants under thirty explain that they describe themselves as “Norwegian” rather than “Norwegian American”. None of the interviewees in the group over seventy labeled themselves “Norwegian”, even though they were all born in Norway and emigrated at a young age.⁹⁹ Of the five informants that were born in Norway, two of them defined as “Norwegian Americans”, another two as “American” and one as “Norwegian.”¹⁰⁰ Except for informants 14 and 15, all the other informants described themselves as “Norwegian” or “part Norwegian.”

Informant 9 suggested that there has become a colloquial tendency in America to categorize people into nationalities based on their ethnic origin. However, when abroad this categorization would not apply in the same way: “Here, I will say Norwegian, cause people go around and ask “what are you?” But when I’m abroad, I always say American. I consider that a question of where were you born.” Informant 6 is aware of the tendency and noted that “people here say nationality when they mean ethnicity.”¹⁰¹ Informant 5 does not use the term “Norwegian American”, but combines the definitions in his own self image.

I would guess I’m both Norwegian and American. Definitely want to be Norwegian, but when you go to Norway, you realize that you are not as Norwegian as the people around you. Here the term Norwegian American or African American is a connection to your past. And I guess that connection is what make people celebrate on the 17th of May.¹⁰²

It may seem that the description “Norwegian American” was most frequently used before ethnicity became a stronger agenda in the 1960s, and may bring connotations of ethnic enclaves. It could seem that it has become more widespread that individuals choose ethnic description, depending on the context or occasion. When asked if they were both Norwegian and American, all the informants affirm this. Informant 7 describes it accordingly:

⁹⁶ This should be related to the third and subjective dimension of Østerud’s definition of the nation. See chapter 1, *What is the Nation*

⁹⁷ Informant 5.

⁹⁸ Informant 13.

⁹⁹ Informant 6 came to America when two months old. Informant 8 emigrated at the age of six, whereas informant 10 arrived at the age of two.

¹⁰⁰ Informants 8 and 10 labeled themselves Norwegian Americans, informants 4 and 6 preferred American, whereas informant 11 considers himself Norwegian: “I grew up in Norway and came to this country when I was seventeen. I am Norwegian. I make no secret about it.”

¹⁰¹ Informant 9

¹⁰² Informant 5

Of course I'm American. But I have my family roots all the way back in to 1698 in Norway. I know all their names, what they did. Back from way before America was even founded. The Constitution and everything. So that's where my roots are.¹⁰³

Summary and Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, the celebration has been addressed from a micro level. The informants I interviewed either had Norwegian heritage, were married to a Norwegian or members of the 17th of May Committee.

The informants agreed that one of the main functions was to entertain; at the benefit of both the Norwegian American community as well as the local community. In addition, the celebration brought up memories from similar childhood celebrations as well as reminiscences of the old country. The event also seemed to engender different levels of meaning, in which *tradition* was listed a particularly important factor. Some informants pointed to an authentic or “real” level of meaning; which seemed related to their degree of affiliation to Norway and the background for celebration. The celebration was inclusive; in accordance with the post ethnic approach it was even argued that “everyone is Norwegian on the 17th of May”. However, there seemed to be an assumption that some were more “Norwegian” than others, had a deeper understanding of the commemoration of the celebration or more authentic Norwegian identity. The celebration had both become more open and grown considerably since it was moved to Ballard. Yet parts of the celebration were as exclusive as ever.

With regards to immigrants in Norway, different opinions were expressed. Some informants stated that a multicultural Norway was remote from their concept of Norwegianess. On the one hand, cultural integration was alluded to. Some argued that immigrants in Norway were as equally Norwegian as Norwegian Americans, but in different ways. Finally, the concept of identity was pointed to. It appears that the meaning of continuing the celebration was related to a *connection* with the past and ethnic identity. *Ethnic identity* in America appeared to hold a stronger degree of importance than the attachment to the country of origin.

¹⁰³ Informant 7

6

CONCLUSION

You have to remember that this is not a Norwegian event. It is an American celebration of a Norwegian event. So it's a Norwegian American celebration. Not completely Norwegian, not fully American.¹

As made clear in this quote, the celebration is an amalgam of both Norwegian and American elements. Throughout the thesis, I have set out to answer this main question: *Why have Norwegian descendants maintained the tradition of celebrating the Norwegian national day in Seattle?* To approach this, I initially posed four sub-questions:

- *To what extent has the celebration been an expression of attachment to Norway and of ethnic nationalism?*
- *What concepts of the Norwegian and American nations and Norwegian ethnicity are expressed by the Norwegian Americans who celebrate the Norwegian Constitution Day?*
- *How have Norwegian and American national symbols been used and interpreted in the festival?*
- *What has been the function of the celebration?*

The first three questions relate intrinsically to the celebration as event, whereas the last sub-question and the primary question are overarching and address the celebration's broader *function* and *meaning*. In the following, I will give an outline of elements, structured after the research question. I will start by outlining the three questions that was related to the celebration before i will approach its overarching aspects.

Attachment to the Country of Origin

In the earliest part of the period investigated, the role of the celebration in demonstrating sentiments of attachment by Norwegian Americans to their country of origin appeared self-evident. In the immediate post war years *Washington Posten* proudly presented *that* the national celebration was more "Norwegian" than in Norway and that it would be difficult to teach the Norwegian Americans of Seattle anything new about their country of origin.

¹ Informant 4

Attachment to the country of origin was implicit, and it appears that the need to establish a bond in the celebration was not much of a priority.

In the second period, the patriotic program placed more emphasis on links to Norway. This was manifested by inviting Norwegian cultural or political personalities to deliver the speech of the day. The *root metaphors* in the speeches were for the most part traditional and drawing on somewhat political rhetoric, bringing attention to the original reasons for celebration. Democratic or *civic* national values were articulated, as well as shared national core values between Norway and America. From this point of view, attachment to Norway was more explicitly embedded in the patriotic program in the second part of the period of celebration under discussion than in the former.

Even though the attachment to Norway was more explicit in the patriotic program in the second period than in the first, the principal part of the celebration was the parade; both in numbers, publicity and focus. The parade contained a majority of elements that were categorized as typical of an American, with a focus on ethnic elements. The categorisation as *Scandinavian* rather than *Norwegian* may suggest an ethnic identity, rooted in the role in America more than the attachment to the country of origin.

Concepts of the Norwegian and American Nations

The *combination* of Norwegian and American elements was accorded high importance in the first period. One of the most regular speakers at the event emphasized the important contribution of prominent Norwegians, both in Norway and worldwide. Norwegian heritage and *character* were identified as elements that qualified the Norwegians as “better” Americans. An analogy that was used as an illustration of the conception of the two nations as a mother and a wife; a symbolic representation of national attachments based on *roots* and *choice* respectively.

Rather than express dual national identity which was characteristic of the first investigated period, the celebration in the second period was touted as *Norwegian*. The inclusive approach applied both to the celebration and the celebrants as illustrated in the phrase “Everyone is Norwegian on the 17th of May.” Building on the line of arguments from the previous section, my assumption is that the national categorization was more of an expression of ethnic pluralism in America rather than an expression of attachment to Norway. This assumption appears supported by the informants. The informants older than seventy were more liable to use the term *Norwegian American* rather than the one or the other. A majority of the informants describe themselves as *Norwegian* rather than *American*. Many of them explain

that they only define themselves as Americans when abroad, and that the ethnic badge sets the individual apart in a pluralist society. This approach appears to be in line with Fredrik Barth's boundary approach and the constructive perspective; only when abroad, does the American category apply. Within the American context, it is an informal way to be set apart.

Even though the *Norwegian* category was understood as pretty open in the American context, many of the informants were more restrictive when it came to include immigrants to Norway in their concept of Norwegianess. Cultural aspects were pointed to as main distinction. As *ethnic symbols* gradually had gained a foothold as markers of Norwegianess, it may seem reasonable that many Americans of Norwegian origin would find it difficult relate to a concept of Norwegianess rooted in another structures than their familiar symbols.

Other informants pointed to an equal, but different concept of inclusion in the Norwegian categories; for Norwegian Americans mainly based on history, culture, and a mutual past, for immigrants in Norway based judicially on a contemporary attachment and participation in Norwegian society at large. The subjective dimension was also pointed to; the country that the individual identifies most closely with, counts as the home land.

National Symbols

In the initial period, national symbols served as a means to communicate a mutual heritage and stress identification with America as the new home country. Traditional Norwegian folk songs were performed and a *combination* of Norwegian and American patriotic songs was given. Because the celebration *ended* with unison singing of the American national anthem, my interpretation is that the initial intentions were to maintain the idea that their Norwegian heritage contributed to shape their character but American was their future identity.

Some of the symbols were used throughout the period, but their connotations appeared to have changed. *Bunads* and *leikarring dances* initially appeared to be expressions of a common heritage between the celebrants; suggesting a belonging to an *imagined community*. The expression contributed to an inner group dynamic. In the second period these have also been a way to express an *ethnic identity* to an interested audience. The expression also communicated a message to the larger society.

The use of the *Norwegian flag* may serve as an even clearer illustration the transition of the celebrants' self image. In the first part of the period, the Norwegian flag was accompanied by the American flag as a rule rather than an exception. This should be considered a visual sign of the idea of dual national identity; which was also proclaimed in the

speeches. In the second period, the Norwegian flag was displayed primarily by itself. My assumption is that there has been less need to stress identification with America in later years because this connection had become self-evident. If we accept this, the Norwegian flag should be considered principally a marker of *ethnic identity*, rather than a *civic* symbol. Throughout the program of events, the presence of the two national flags supported the same assumption.

In contrast to the *barnetog*, which was an adaption of the practise in Norway, my argument is that parade was arranged in accordance with an American tradition, but possessed an ethnic character.² The parade was a means of displaying *ethnic identity* through a well known and characteristic form. I have argued that the parade is practised in line with American tradition. The American parade has ritualistic components, functioning as an *American ritual*. Ironically, the essence of the celebration was becoming more Americanized but with a stronger emphasis on the country of origin; through the use of *ethnic symbols* within a national ritual form.

The Function of the Celebration

In the first period investigated, the main intentions behind the celebration appeared to be to strengthen confidence about their Norwegian origins and to contribute to the creation of a Norwegian American identity.

In the second period, it became more important to emphasize affinities to Norway in the patriotic program. This was by way of the patriotic program and the invitation of prominent Norwegian speakers to deliver the speech of the day and serve as *Grand Marshall* of the parade. Greetings from the King of Norway and American Presidents suggested a need for recognition at the highest level of authority, both from Norway and America. The role of the *Honorary Marshall*, recognizing the contribution of the Norwegian American community to civic life was of symbolic importance, but not yet comparable to that of the prominent guest from Norway. decision to instigate a *barnetog* in 1959 re-established a tradition from Norway. The marching route between *Seattle Center* and *Norway Center* might suggest a dual identification; these locations imply a link between Seattle and Norway respectively.

Ballard, both as the setting for celebration and as the historical location of the Norwegian American community, has functioned as the arena of connecting the city of Seattle, the Norwegian American community and Norway; a much stronger and physical manifestation of these connections than the previous *barnetog*.

² A similar description is also used by Odd Lovoll, who characterized the celebration of May 17th in Seattle as “an American festival with an ethnic flavor.” (Conversation June 10, 2009).

Informants emphasized the social and entertainment functions of the parade. It appears to represent memory and identity as well as ethnic pluralism, wrapped up in a light-hearted and popular form of communication. The recognizable form was able to attract those beyond the Norwegian American community and the ethnic symbols could function both as markers of identity and indicators of American diversity.

The 17th of May was a social event that encompassed all the different Norwegian organizations and so it also functioned to unite Norwegian immigrants and descendants in the Seattle area, and reinforced the Norwegian American identity in Seattle. Throughout the period investigated, most of the ethnic organizations involved dramatically changed function. As discussed in chapter 2, an important role after arrival in the country was to create a safety net, help members find jobs and provide for the sick and elderly. The function of these organizations changed during the period under discussion from a means to help survive to an expression of community identity. Norwegian American organizations that ceased to have relevance for Norwegian American identity either disassociated from the 17th of May Committee, or might have ceased to exist altogether. The temperance organizations may serve as an example of this.³

If we return to Turner's approach, it may be argued that Norwegian Americans were in state of liminality in the first years ; *betwixt* and *between* Norwegian and American identity in the earlier years, before an *ethnic* identity was established. The bond or *communitas* between the Norwegian Americans have changed from a *normative* state in the initial phase, to a *spontaneous communitas* on a particular day, as people sharing Norwegian identity or at least having a desire to come together to celebrate the 17th of May. Here one can distinguish between the levels of involvement. As illustrated in the model in chapter 4, I would argue that the further away from the core, the more informal the attachment. On the other hand, those involved more spontaneously are also verbally included as illustrated through the phrase "everyone is Norwegian on the 17th of May." On this particular day "everyone" can be "Norwegian" in joining the celebration. This outline leads us to approach the main question.

³ In 1914, three temperance lodges were associated with Norwegian ethnic organizations. In 1959, the Baltic lodge was affiliated with the committee, but is not mentioned since. This may be an indication of the disappearance of the organizational link between temperance and ethnic organizations as the temperance issue gradually became less of a debated issue.

Why have Norwegian Descendants in Seattle Maintained the Tradition of Celebrating the Norwegian Constitution Day?

I would argue that *relevance* would be the most critical aspect to consider. Both the commemoration, but perhaps even more importantly the modes of communication used must seem pertinent to the celebrants. The *symbols* must endow meaning and be appropriate to the nurture of an ethnic identity. The Norwegian flag and *bunads* appear to have maintained strong footholds as expressions and markers of belonging and ethnic identity.

In order to understand why the celebration has been maintained, it is necessary to consider transitions at a time when it was struggling to be continued. During the 1960s, there was disagreement about whether the celebration should set out to reminisce about the country of origin, express bonds to contemporary Norway or be a social and entertaining happening, and to what extent it was it possible to combine these.

It was decided to incorporate a growing number of American elements in the celebration, which appeared to have appealed to a larger audience. At the same time, the *object* of celebration, the Norwegian Constitution and the gradual path to independence became more explicitly emphasized as the reasons for celebration, though primarily within the patriotic program, which only a small fraction of the total celebrants attended.

I would suggest two main reasons why the celebration has been maintained. First, the dynamic character and inclusive approach, as it has changed in accordance with attitudes from the general society.⁴ Second, it commemorates an event that has been seen to combine easily with American ideals. Following the emergence of the new ethnicity, it is even better equipped to endure as an expression of American ethnicity. At the same time, it has remained a *key symbol*, both in Norway and Seattle. By continuing a celebration that has a key role in the motherland, a bond of attachment to the country of origin is indirectly expressed.

For the American context, the parade expression with an ethnic character had become more relevant, both as a form of festivity and as a celebration of ethnicity in itself. It sums up Norwegian American ethnic culture through ethnic symbols such as Vikings, bunads and leikarring, as well typical American parade units. To be maintained, the symbols must remain relevant and communicate meaning. When no longer relevant, the symbols must be replaced or new ways of expression found.

⁴ Sørensen 1998 and Hovland and Aagedal 2001 suggest that national building process and celebration of national days accordingly have better opportunity to succeed with an inclusive approach. See chapter 1.

Micro Perspectives on the Celebration: 1945-2009 and the Future

After the celebration moved to Ballard it was promoted both as a local community event and an ethnic community event. The event has been inclusive in that everyone who wants to join the celebration is welcome.

The informants were generally positive to the wide embrace of the celebration; they have all grown up in America, and some Americanization of the event would be natural. The celebration had become part Norwegian, part American. In the parade, the Norwegian units have accounted for between a third and a fourth of the size of the parade since its inception. Several informants pointed out that many of the Norwegian ethnic organizations represented on the committee have struggled to recruit new members, with consequences for the future of the Norwegian constitution celebration.⁵ One subject is very pessimistic about the organizations' ability to attract a new generation of members:

They [the organizations] don't know what to do with modern culture, they just remember Norway the way it was a hundred years ago. It is only traditional music, traditional dancing. It is so disconnected from everyday life. And because they no longer can attract the young people, they may eventually disappear.⁶

This subject foresees limited viability for the ethnic organizations that participate on the 17th of May committee. Undoubtedly, these organizations will at some point need to adapt to ensure the event remains viable and relevant into the future.

The solution might be to bring more organizations outside of the ethnic circle onto the committee and increase the celebration's status as a whole community celebration. A second would be to broaden eligibility for organizations even further. *The Leif Eriksson Lodge of Sons of Norway* changed its eligibility requirements from being a male Norwegian by birth, to being of Norwegian descent to Norwegian by descent or choice.⁷ A commentary in *Western Viking's* centennial edition argues that one of *Sons of Norway* biggest challenges is to build on traditions from the past while at the same time present a program "vital enough to appeal to the fourth and the fifth generation descendants."⁸ It could be necessary for many organizations to broaden their horizons even further. A third option would be a larger involvement of academic institutions, such as the *Scandinavian Department of University of*

⁵ Informant 2, 7, 9 and 11.

⁶ Informant 7

⁷ In 1914, *The Leif Eriksson Lodge* was open to Norwegian born, and men born in America by Norwegian parents (Fest Program 1914:42) By 1965 eligibility was open to anyone of Norwegian background (*Western Viking*, May 7, 1965, page 6). The *Sons of Norway* charter from 2006 claims eligibility to "any men and women of Norwegian or other Nordic birth and descent, and their affiliates through marriage

http://www.sofn.com/content/about_us/Charter_Constitution/Charter_const.pdf

⁸ *Western Viking* May 17 1989. Page 43.

Washington and the *Pacific Lutheran University*. *The Nordic Heritage Museum* has been involved since 1982. Gans suggests that ethnicity festivals (May 17th) and museums may be the best means to reconstruct imitations of past ethnic culture.⁹ Academic and cultural institutions may propagate well the original reasons for celebration and historical context, but broad community connections, fun and lightheartedness and wide community recognition will be more difficult to preserve.

In Seattle, there appears to have been a division between the academic and the ethnic community. In 1979, *Western Viking*'s editor Henning Boe was frustrated that the students of *University of Washington* did not attend the patriotic program: "What is the excuse? Are they too "good" because they are students at the UW? Or isn't the program good enough. If so, they should join in to ensure it would reach an "academic level"¹⁰ Informant 4 explained that one of the main distinction within the Norwegian institutions in Seattle was between "town" and "gown"; ethnic and academic community. One of his main desires was to breach this distinction.¹¹

Most likely, the chosen path would not involve choosing one type of institutions over the other. It may be reasonable to expect an increased participation from academic institutions associated with Norway as well as community or local organizations, in order to maintain the celebration. Again, it must be considered to what extent the event should be exclusive, harking back to Norway; or inclusive, appealing to all Americans to a larger extent than before.

⁹ Gans 1979:453 (1995 epilogue to 1979 article)

¹⁰ *Western Viking* May 25, 1979. My translation. Original phrase: "Hva er unnskyldingen? Er de for "fine" for de er studenter ved UW, eller er ikke programt godt nok? I så fall bør de bli med for å få det opp på et "akademisk" nivå.""

¹¹ Informant 4.

Epilogue

This thesis has given an outline of how Norwegian Americans expressed bonds of attachment to their country of origin; while gradually becoming more integrated into American society. An overarching objective has been to address immigrants' attachment to the country of origin and adaption to the host country from a wider perspective. Initially, the plan for this project was to carry out a comparative analysis of the Norwegian Constitution Day with the celebration of the Pakistani National Day in Norway. This soon proved to be too ambitious in the scope of a master's thesis, and I chose to focus solely on Norwegian Americans in Seattle.

Since the 1960s, Norway and other European countries have witnessed waves of immigration from other countries. With the passing of time, immigrants are no longer "foreigners," but a part of their new home land. Simultaneously they may identify both with their country of origin and their country of residence. An interesting approach for further research may be to consider how and why do immigrant and ethnic groups in Norway express attachment to their country of origin.

Similar to the USA in the early 1900s, critical voices currently warn that Norwegian majority culture is threatened by minority culture.¹² Though the harshest critics may not have a wide support, the public debate on integration and adaption is flourishing at this time of writing. Further research on the field would contribute with empirical evidence to the debate, and widen the perspective.

In this thesis, I have outlined how the celebration of May 17th changed from being an arena where ethnic group confidence was developed into being . It was *described* as both American and Norwegian in its initial period in the early 1900s, and it was *performed* as more American in the final period. The phrase "Everyone is Norwegian on the 17th of May" entailed that Americans might also be Norwegian.

This approach would not apply for the Norwegian context. It may be too inclusive or farfetched to assume that "everyone can be Norwegian." However, the category of who and what is Norwegian may become more open and dynamic. My research has lead me to conclude that the Norwegian ethnic identity in Seattle has become an expression of American pluralism. Perhaps Norwegian Pakistani identity may also be an expression of pluralism within the Norwegian context?

¹² As an example of a debate August 2010, Christian Tybring-Gjedde and Kent Andersen from *Fremskrittspartiet* (the Progressive Party) asserted that the original Norwegian culture was endangered due to an increasing number of immigrants and the development of ethnic enclaves in the Norwegian capital. To believe in successful integration was naive, they argued. Multiculturalism might eventually tear Norwegian culture apart. Online article: <http://www.aftenposten.no/mening/kronikker/article3783373.ece>

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Informant 2	May 7 2009
Informant 3	May 13, 2009
Informant 4	May 19, 2009
Informant 5	May 22, 2009
Informant 6	May 26, 2009
Informant 7	May 29, 2009
Informant 8	June 2, 2009
Informant 9	June 4, 2009
Informant 10	June 8, 2009
Informant 11	June 11, 2009
Informant 12	June 11, 2009
Informant 13	June 11, 2009
Informant 14	June 30, 2009
Informant 15	July 2, 2009

Conversations

Jim Vatn, parade chairman	May 5, 2009
Thomas Stang, former Honorary Consul	May 7, .2009
Laila Sharpe, 2009 17 th of May Committee chairman	May 17,.2009
Jake Moe, publisher of <i>Norwegian American Weekly</i>	May 22, 2009
Honorary Consul Kim Nesselquist	May 25 2009
Supplementary e-mail correspondance with Nesselquist	Jan 26 2010
Professor Odd Lovoll	June 10, 2009

¹ The informants are presented in chapter 5.

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Appendix

Timeline¹

Year	Chair	Speaker
1945	Andrew Haug	August Werner
1946	T.Gronning	Arthur B. Langlie
1947	Clarence Lirhus	Paul Berg
1948	Thor Bjornstad	Henry M. Jackson
1949	Edgar Pederson	Arthur B. Langlie
1950	Andrew Bjerkeseth	Arthur B.Langlie
1951	Albert S. Ryland	August Werner
1952	Frode Frodesen	Henry M. Jackson
1953	Einar Anthe	Wilhelm Morgenstjerne
1954	Harold Eastvold	Trygve Svare/Consul C. Stang
1955	Inga Frodesen	Arthur B. Langlie
1956	Roland Aske	Cyrus E. Albertson
1957	Harald Eastvold	Olaf Anderson
1958	Harald Eastvold	Henry M. Jackson
1959	Harald Eastvold	Herman Tønnesen
1960	Sigurd Holm	Trygve Svare
1961	Edgar O. Pederson	August Werner
1962	Edgar O. Pederson	August Werner
1963	Edgar O. Pederson	General Consul in San Fransisco
1964	Edgar O. Pederson	Robert Mortvedt
1965	Edgar O. Pederson	August Werner
1966	Edgar O. Pederson	Richard G. Christiansen
1967	Edgar O. Pederson	Reidar Nielsen
1968	Edgar O. Pederson	Hallvard Lange
1969	Edgar O. Pederson	Ambassador Arne Gunnereng
1970	Arne H. Tvete	Ralph Cohen
1971	Arne H. Tvete	Ambassador Arne Gunnereng
1972	Consul Thomas Stang	Ambassador Ole Aalgaard
1973	Irving Rodley	Reidar Dittmen
1974	Alf L. Knudsen	Ole Bardahl
1975	Alf L. Knudsen	Erik Bye
1976	Erling Berg	Robb Mattson
1977	Erling Berg	Gunnar Malmin
1978	Halvor Ryan	Charles Royer, Eilert Eilertsen ²
1979	Anne Marie Steiner	Ambassador Knut Hedemann
1980	Edward Egerdahl	Ingvild Raum
1981	Edward Egerdahl	Trygve Solhaug
1982	Terje Leiren	Rolf H. Jensen

¹ Based on the overview in 2009 Program: 29-36.

² Mayors of Seattle and Bergen accordingly.

1983	Terje Leiren	Rolf H. Jensen
1984	Don Meberg	Orm Øverland
1985	Don Meberg	Gen Consul John Bjørnebye
1986	Ruth Wangen	Laura Wollan
1987	Ruth Wangen	Ambassador Kjell Eliassen
1988	Jim Vatn	Jan Otto Johansen
1989	Jim Vatn	Jens Book-Jensen
1990	Terje Leiren	Ambassador Kjell Vibe
1991	Christine M. Anderson	Consul General Dag Mork Ulsnes
1992	Christine M. Anderson	Ingmar Ljosnes
1993	Jim Vatn	Consul General Bjørn Kanavin
1994	Jim Vatn	Marvin Wiseth
1995	Lois Prideaux	Paul Dietrichson
1996	Lois Prideaux	Consul General Hans Ola Urstad
1997	Karen Abelson	Ole Didrik Lærum
1998	Karen Abelson	Ambassador Tom Vraalsen
1999	Terje Leiren	Odd Lovoll
2000	Terje Leiren	Rolf Kristian Stang
2001	Arlene Templin	Anne Kathrine Slungård
2002	Arlene Templin	Consul General Janne Julsrud
2003	Jim Vatn	Robert Sørлие
2004	Consul Thomas Stang	Thorhild Widvey
	Vice Consul Kim Nesselquist	
2005	Consul Thomas Stang	Consul Gen. Are-Jostein Norheim
	Vice Consul Kim Nesselquist	
2006	Consul Thomas Stang	Sven Ludvigsen
2007	Dale M. Pederson	Kristian Helleland
2008	Dale M. Pederson	Hanne Krogh
2009	Laila Sharpe	Ambassor Wegger Chr. Strømmen

Consuls

1941-1967 Christen Stang

1967-2007 Tom Stang

2007- Kim Nesselquist

Checklist of questions

- When did you start celebrating the 17th of May?
- What does a typical 17th of May look like to you?
- What does the th 17th of May mean to you?
- What do you think is the function of the celebration?
- Are there other ethnic events in the area? Do you attend any of these? Why/ why not?
- Do you celebrate the 4 of July? What is similar and different compared to the 17th of May?
- What do you associate with Norway?
- Would you characterize someone born in Norway by immigrant paraents as Norwegian? Why/why not?
- What nationality do you describe yourself as belonging to?