

ADDRESS  
OF  
PRESIDENT COOLIDGE  
BEFORE THE  
NORWEGIAN CENTENNIAL  
CELEBRATION, AT MINNESOTA  
STATE FAIR GROUNDS  
JUNE 8, 1925



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RESOLUTION OF THE HOUSE, DECEMBER 15, 1925

HOUSE RESOLUTION 48

*Resolved*, That there shall be printed as a House document 20,000 copies of the address of President Coolidge before the Norwegian centennial celebration at Minnesota State Fair Grounds June 8, 1925, to be distributed through the House Document Room.

II



## ADDRESS

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Before the Norwegian Centennial Celebration, at Minnesota State fair grounds, June 8, 1925, at 2 p. m., President Coolidge spoke as follows:

How often in the affairs of this world a small and apparently insignificant occurrence turns out to be an event of great importance, carrying in its train a mighty influence for good or evil. Such importance always flows from the character of those concerned. The generations of the earth treasure the rude hut that sheltered the infancy of Abraham Lincoln, seek out the birthplace of Shakespeare, and give to the uninviting soil of Palestine the title of the Holy Land, all because certain obscure happenings in those places produced those who left a broad mark upon the future course of humanity. The character of the participants brought future fame. It is such an event that we meet to commemorate to-day. One hundred years ago a little bark sailed from Norway to America. It was almost unnoticed at the time, save for the daring and hardihood of its navigators, but it brought with it the representatives of a stalwart race, men and women of fixed determination, enduring courage and high character, who were to draw in their retinue a long line of their fellow countrymen destined to change the face of an area broad as an empire, direct the historic course of sovereign States, and contribute to the salvation of a great nation. These mighty works have been wrought because those Norwegian immigrants were well worthy to follow in the wake of the Pilgrim and Cavalier.

This celebration is most happily identified with the present year, which is an anniversary of notable events in the history of our country. We are rounding out a century and a half from the beginning of the American Revolution. It was a half a century from the days of Concord and Lexington to the beginning of that stream of immigration from Norway which was to help guarantee that the spirit of freedom which had been so triumphant in the Colonies should not be lost to the States.

When we consider the astonishing number of immigrants which the Scandinavian countries have contributed in proportion to their own population to making the body of American citizenship, we will appreciate the significance of this anniversary. It well deserves the consideration it is receiving here in this State which has so richly profited by a larger proportion of this north-of-Europe immigration than any other Commonwealth. Minnesota would not be Minnesota, the group of imperial northwestern States would not be what they are, but for the contribution that has been made to them by the Scandinavian countries.

Because of a profound appreciation of that contribution and of its truly national value I have found it an especial pleasure to come here and join in this commemoration. In the midst of loyalties that are all beyond possibility of question, it may be difficult to choose among the many national and racial groups that have sought out America for their home and their country. We are thankful for all of them, and yet more thankful that the experiment of their common citizenship has been so magnificently justified in its results. If one were seeking proof of a basic brotherhood among all races of men, if one were to challenge the riddle of Babel in support of aspirations for a unity capable of assuring peace to the nations, in such an inquiry I suppose no better testimony could be taken than the experience of this country. Out of the confusion of tongues, the conflict of traditions, the variations of historical setting, the vast differences in talents and tastes there has been evolved a spiritual union accompanied by a range of capacity and genius which marks this Nation for a preeminent destiny. The American people have commanded the respect of the world.

It is a good thing that anniversaries such as this are so widely commemorated. The next few years will be filled with a continuing succession of similar occasions. I wish that every one of them might be so impressively celebrated that all Americans would be moved to study the history which each one represents. I can think of no effort that would produce so much inspiration to high and intelligent patriotism. Occasions of this nature bring to our attention whole regions of the past that would otherwise remain unexplored, tend to be forgotten even by scholars, and pass entirely from the public mind. These incentives to special examination of particular historical phases teach us better to understand our country and our countrymen. Anyone who will study the institutions and people of America will come more and more to admire them.

One reason that moved me to accept the cordial invitations to come here to-day was the hope of directing some measure of national attention to the absorbingly interesting subject of the social backgrounds of our country. The making of such a country is not to be told in any mere category of dates, battles, political evolutions, and partisan controversies. Back of all these, which are too often the chief material of history, lies the human story of the unsung millions of plain people whose names are strangers to public place and fame. Their lives have been replete with quiet, unpretentious, modest but none the less heroic virtues. From these has been composed the sum of that magnificent and wondrous adventure, the making of our own America. Somewhere in the epic of struggle to subjugate a continent there will be found a philosophy of human relations that the world will greatly prize. If we could seize and fix it, if we could turn it over, examine and understand it, we would have taken a long step toward solving some of the hardest problems of mankind.

It is not so many years since visitors from other quarters of the world were wont to contemplate our concourse of races, origins, and interests, and shake their heads ominously. They feared that from such a melting pot of diverse elements we could never draw the tested, tempered metal that is the only substance for national character. Even among ourselves were many who listened with serious



concern to such forebodings. They were not quite sure whether we had created a nation with the soul of a nation. They wondered if perhaps we had merely brought together a large number of people in a large place. Had these misgivings been justified when the hour of trial came, it would have meant disaster to us and to the world. But instead of crumbling into a chaos of discordant elements, America proved its truly national unity. It demonstrated conclusively that there is a spiritual quality shared by all races and conditions of men which is their universal heritage and common nature. Powerful enough to hold this people to a high ideal in time of supreme trial, why may we not hope that the same influence will at length reach men and women wherever they are found on earth? If fraternity and cooperation are possible on the scale of this continent among people so widely diverse, why not on the scale of a world? It is not a new thought, but it is a profoundly engaging one. I firmly believe it is more than a chimera. I feel it is possible of realization. I am convinced that our national story might somewhat help to guide mankind toward such a goal. Therefore, I urge the deeply thoughtful study and teaching of our history.

No country has a history which starts with its discovery or at its boundaries. For the real beginnings of any people we must go back to the beginnings of all peoples. From the tombs of Egypt and the sands of Mesopotamia men are now unearthing the records of civilizations so ancient that by comparison we think of the recovered wonders of Carthage as almost modern. But all that we shall learn from the glyphs of Ur, the tombs of the Pharaohs, and the monuments of Crete and Carthage is part of our own history, illumination for our to-days, guideposts on the way to our to-morrows. All the past lives in the present. All the works and thoughts of those who have gone before have left their mark on what we think and do.

These Norsemen whose beginnings in the United States we here celebrate have exercised a great influence upon our modern history and western civilization which it is difficult to match among any other like number of people. In many ways their influence upon northern and western Europe may be compared to that of the Greek states upon the civilization of the Mediterranean. They were the first deep-sea navigators. They pioneered the migrations which boldly struck across the western waters. They were at once the terrors of the Western Roman Empire and the guardians of the Eastern. The medieval Mediterranean was a happy hunting ground for them. They branded their name upon French Normandy, and from it descended upon Britain in the Norman conquest from which there was the beginning of modern English history.

But even before William of Normandy had conquered at Hastings, Lief the son of Erik, near 500 years before Columbus appears to have found the New World. Indeed, there seems little doubt that several centuries before Columbus saw the light of day there was born upon American soil, of Norse parents, a boy who afterward became so great a mathematician and astronomer that his studies may have contributed much to the fund of knowledge which helped Columbus formulate his vision of the world as we know it. Among the fascinating chapters in the history of the dark ages is the story of Iceland. As a little Norse Republic it maintained it-

self for several centuries as one of the real repositories of ancient culture in a world whose lamp of learning seemed near to flickering out. We have long known of the noble Icelandic literature which was produced during those generations of the intellectual twilight; but we know too little of the part which Iceland performed as an outpost of the sturdy northern culture in bridging over the gulf of darkness between the ancient and modern eras of history.

These sons of Thor and Odin and the great free North shape themselves in the mind's eye as very princes of high and hardy adventure. From Norway to Iceland, from Iceland to Greenland, from Greenland to the mainland, step by step they worked their way across the north Atlantic. They found the western ocean, and it was a Norseman who first traversed Bering Strait and demonstrated that there was no land connection between Asia and North America. One wonders whither these Northmen would turn for adventure if the earth should ever be so completely charted that exploration offered no more challenges. Within a very few years one of them first traversed the northwest passage from Atlantic to Pacific; and the same one, Amundsen, carried the flag of Norway to the South Pole; and now, within a few days past, he has been the first to make large explorations in the region of the North Pole in an airplane, tempting a fate which, as I write, is unknown.

One likes to linger over these tales of adventure and exploration. One of them has a special significance in connection with this celebration which entitles it to more particular reference. This, of course, is the voyage of the little sloop *Restaurationen*, which in 1825 brought the first organized party of Norwegian immigrants to this country. One reared on the New England tradition of the *Mayflower* will find all the materials for a new legend of pioneering in the voyage of the *Restaurationen*. She was a sloop of 45 tons, whereas the *Mayflower* was rated as 180 tons. The *Restaurationen* sailed from Stavanger, Norway, on July 4, 1825, with a desperately heavy cargo of iron and a party of 52 people. She came safely into the port of New York after a voyage of 14 weeks, which compares with 9 weeks required for the historic passage of the *Mayflower*.

The arrival of the *Restaurationen* created a sensation among those inured to the sea. It was claimed that she was the smallest vessel that had ever made the trans-Atlantic crossing. The New York authorities threatened to deny her the privileges of the port on the ground that she carried too many passengers and too much cargo. She was ultimately released, apparently through the influence of the Society of Friends. Most of her passengers seemed to have been members of a Norwegian religious community intimately related to the Quakers, and it appears that one of their reasons for coming to this country was that they had not enjoyed entire liberty of religious opinion at home. Thus the parallel between the voyages of the *Mayflower* and of the *Restaurationen*, despite that they were separated by more than 200 years, is impressive in several ways.

Almost without money or supplies, the little company of immigrants were taken in charge by the New York Quakers who raised funds to send them to Kendall, Orleans County, N. Y. There they secured lands and established the first Norwegian settlement in this country. It is a curious circumstance that although the Norwegians are among the greatest seafaring peoples, this party was composed

almost entirely of farmers, so that their first interest was to get land. And ever since, the greater share of Norwegians have come in search of homes on the land. These first immigrants having practically no money, bought a tract on the shore of Lake Ontario for \$5 per acre to be paid for in 10 annual installments. It is hard to realize that western New York so late as 1825 was so far on the frontier. Their land was heavily timbered, and they were compelled not only to clear it but to build their own shelter. The first house is said to have been a log cabin 12 feet square, with a garret. In this 24 of them lived for a time, the men seeking such scanty employment as was to be found in the neighborhood to support them through the winter. The only one in the party who could speak English was Capt. Lars Olson and he had remained in New York.

Despite poverty and hardships, the colony thrived, and its members were shortly writing letters back to Norway describing the opportunities of America and urging friends to come. From this beginning the stream of Norwegian immigration set in, but most of the later comers went much farther west. A few years after the settlement at Kendall another party went to La Salle County, Ill. Already the west was fascinating them and many of the original Kendall colony sold out and went on to Illinois. Thence the migration spread to other States of the middle west and northwest. Even before it was formed into a Territory, Iowa had received its first Norwegians, and from about 1835 they spread rapidly into Wisconsin, Minnesota, the Dakotas, and other States.

It is not possible, as it is certainly not needful on this occasion, even to summarize the story of Norwegian immigration. But it should be explained that while the settlement of 1825 in Orleans County, N. Y., was the first Norwegian settlement and represented the first organized immigration, these pioneers of the *Restaurationen* were not the first Norwegians to come here. Considerable numbers had come even before the Revolutionary War and some as far back as the earliest colonial years. There were Norwegians in both Army and Navy during the Revolution and the War of 1812. But the fact remains that the great movement which established Norwegian communities all over the northwest and contributed so greatly to the building of that part of the country began with the voyage of the *Restaurationen*. It is said that Norwegians and their descendants in this country are now just about as numerous as the population of Norway itself. Norway is credited with furnishing a larger number of settlers to the United States in proportion to its population than any other European country except one.

It is frequently noted regarding immigration that the newcomers from Europe commonly sought climatic conditions here like those in which they had been raised. So the Scandinavians are found chiefly in the northern parts of this country. About 80 per cent of the population of Norway is agricultural, the remainder maritime and industrial. These proportions are closely carried out in the occupational distribution here. A great majority sought the land, but considerable numbers have always followed the sea. Some of the coincidences in connection with this migration are oddly interesting. Thus we have noted that the little sloop *Restaurationen*

brought a cargo of iron; to-day Minnesota has more Norwegians and produces more iron ore than any other State. Again, Norway is a land of wonderful fresh-water lakes, and it is closely matched by Minnesota.

There is one phase in the story of immigration which seems always to characterize it. Once the tide had set in from a particular European country, the movement thereafter has invariably been encouraged by the early comers. Not only did they urge relatives and friends in the old home to come, but they devoted their new-found prosperity to help them. On this subject there is an opportunity for some useful historical research. In the pre-Revolutionary days immigration to America seems to have been encouraged from the other side, partly from political and partly from business motives. The colonizing countries of Europe competed to control the best parts of the New World by occupying it with their colonies. Immigration was encouraged both by the Governments and by companies of merchant adventures. At that stage of the movement, of course, the colonies possessed no wealth to help their friends to come. But after the Revolution the situation greatly changed. New political conditions made this country more attractive than ever before, and developing wealth and opportunity emphasized its invitation. So we find the people of our Republic deliberately and consciously encouraging the movement in this direction. There is opportunity for a much more detailed examination of these factors in the European migration than has yet been undertaken. It would be a profoundly interesting contribution to the story of this greatest of all migrations that humanity has ever accomplished if we could know more of the precise motives which have animated it.

The contribution of this country to financing immigration of the last century and a third has certainly run into hundreds of millions of dollars, perhaps into billions. It has had a profound social influence, both here and in Europe. Its economic consequences could hardly be overestimated. A detailed inquiry into these facts should include a close consideration of all the great migrations which have marked the distribution of men throughout the world. Man seems to have been from his beginnings the most migratory of animals. His earlier movements appear to have had their chief motive in adventure and the desire to find the regions where existence was most comfortable. There could hardly have been a very serious pressure of population, for it is only in recent historic times that this factor has existed. Some very early migrations were doubtless due to climatic or other physical conditions. Later on political, social, religious, and economic reasons caused the movements. Some went forth to make conquests, others were driven out by conquest. The children of Israel migrated into Egypt to escape from famine. They left Egypt to escape from bondage and to recover their religious liberty. The old Romans and Phœnicians were great colonizers, the Romans from imperialistic motives and the Phœnicians from desire to extend their trade. The European migration to the American Continent represented in its various phases all the causes that have operated through the ages to bring about such shifts of population. In the beginning there was chiefly the motive of exploration and adventure. Later came the desire to be freed from onerous clerical or political restrictions. Then, with the realization of America's



enormous resources, there was the wish to share in its developing riches. Only in the later stages of the movement did the people of this country reach their hand of welcome to the friends across the Atlantic, both urging and assisting them to come.

Though I make no pretense to deep studies in the subject, yet I have been impressed that in this last regard the shift of Old-World peoples to this side of the Atlantic was perhaps unique. From the time when their fast-developing institutions of popular government, religious freedom, and intellectual liberality had begun to take definite and attractive forms, the people of the Colonies took a new interest in inducing their European relatives to follow them thither. They engaged in an inverted crusade, a conquest without invasion and without force. The new country offered not only material opportunities, but possibilities of a spiritual and intellectual emancipation which they ardently wished their friends on the other side to share. Citizenship in the New World meant something that it had not meant in the Old. It was seen that the New World offered something new. There was increasing realization that many burdensome traditions and institutions had somehow been shed. Here at last the individual was lord of himself, master of his own destiny, keeper of his own sovereignty. Here he was free.

With the eighteenth century's epoch of intellectual liberalism there came yet more sharp realization that the new country was not bound to ancient manners and prejudices, and that therefore it offered to the common man a better chance. Here he might realize that ideal of equality which by this time was so generally finding a lodgment in European minds. This spiritual evolution moved rather slowly during the first two-thirds of the eighteenth century. The Seven Years' War, or as we commonly call it, the French and Indian War, was for the Colonies a period of rapid awakening and realization. They began to find themselves, to formulate more definite aspirations for their future. But it does not appear that this new conception of American destiny began in any important way to be shared in Europe until the Revolution, independence and the establishment of the Federal Government forced it upon the old countries. Then a new idea began to fix itself in the European mind. The new country was seen as an essentially vitally, basically different conception of human relationships. It appeared not merely as a new country, but as a different kind of country. It was considered not only different from Europe, but different from any earlier social creations. The European peoples had been greatly stirred by the intellectual awakening of the eighteenth century, and the liberals among them had been deeply disappointed at the seeming meager results which accrued from it. We may well wonder what would have been the fate of Europe after 1815, if the liberalism of both England and the Continent had settled down to disappointment and cynicism. We can not doubt that during this period, say from 1815 to 1848, the beacon which they saw had been lighted over the western Atlantic was a lamp to the feet and a hope to the hearts of liberals throughout Europe.

Within this period immigration from the north and west of Europe was not only rapidly building this country into numbers, wealth, and authority in the world, but it was having a tremendous reflex upon Europe itself. But for American example and influence

the democratic movements of 1832 and 1848 in Europe might have been long postponed. The broadly democratic evolution which swayed Europe so greatly in the latter half of the nineteenth century might have failed entirely.

In the period we have been discussing nearly all the immigration to the United States was from northern and western Europe. Through its reactions upon Europe it gave constant encouragement there to liberal thought and action. In this country, by gradually giving the North a great preponderance in numbers, it hastened the downfall of slavery and helped rid our institutions of that great and threatening anomaly.

These Northmen, one of whose anniversaries we are celebrating to-day, have from their first appearance on the margin of history been the children of freedom. Native to a rigorous climate and a none too productive soil, they had learned the necessity for hard work and careful management. They were moved by that aspiration for a free holding in the land which has always marked peoples in whom the democratic ideal was pressing for recognition. Eager for both political and economic independence, they realized the necessity for popular education, and so have always been among the most devoted supporters of public schools. Thousands of them volunteered in the service of the country during the Civil and Spanish Wars, and tens of thousands in the World War. The institutions and the manners of democracy came naturally to them. Their glory is all about you, their living and their mighty dead. They have given great soldiers, statesmen, scientists, educators and men of business to the upbuilding of their adopted country. They have been rapidly amalgamated into the body of citizenship, contributing to it many of its best and most characteristic elements. To their adaptability the Nation owes much for its success in the enormous process of assimilation and spiritual unification that has made our Nation what it is and our people what they are.

Although this movement of people originated in Norway, in its essence and its meaning it is peculiarly American. It has nothing about it of class or caste. It has no tinge of aristocracy. It was not produced through the leadership of some great figure. It is represented almost entirely by that stalwart strain who make the final decisions in this world, which we designate the common people. It has about it the strength of the home and the fireside; the family ties of the father and the mother, the children and the kindred. It has all been carried on very close to the soil, it has all been extremely human. When I consider the marvelous results it has accomplished I can not but believe that it was inspired by a Higher Power. Here is something vital, firm, and abiding, which I can only describe as a great reality.

An enormous power has come to you, but you are charged with equally enormous responsibilities. Those responsibilities you have never failed to meet, that power you have never failed to sanctify. Therein lies the sole title to all the glory you have achieved in the past and therein will lie the sole title to all the glory that you will achieve in the future. Believing that there resides in an enlightened people an all-compelling force for righteousness, I have every faith that through the vigorous performance of your duties you will add new luster to your glory in the days to come.

Our America with all that it represents of hope in the world is now and will be what you make it. Its institutions of religious liberty, of educational and economic opportunity, of constitutional rights, of the integrity of the law, are the most precious possessions of the human race. These do not emanate from the Government. Their abiding place is with the people. They come from the consecration of the father, the love of the mother, and the devotion of the children. They are the product of that honest, earnest, and tireless effort that goes into the rearing of the family altar and the making of the home of our country. They can have no stronger supporters, no more loyal defenders, than that great body of our citizenship which you represent. When I look upon you and realize what you are and what you have done, I know that in your hands our country is secure. You have laid up your treasure in what America represents, and there will your heart be also. You have given your pledge to the Land of the Free. The pledge of the Norwegian people has never yet gone unredeemed.

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