

Norwegian Royal Visit 2011

VESTERHEIM NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN MUSEUM

HONORARY CHAIR, HIS MAJESTY HARALD V, KING OF NORWAY



VESTERHEIM: PRESERVING A HERITAGE. CONNECTING US ALL.

Norwegian immigrants called America their *Vesterheim*, their Western Home. It was a home they shared with immigrants from many other countries. Today, we still share that Vesterheim.

Just as Norwegian immigration to America was peaking in 1877, Norwegian Americans began collecting and preserving objects at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, documenting their chapter of the immigrant story, and making them pioneers in the preservation of cultural diversity in America.

That early collection has grown into the most comprehensive museum in the United States dedicated to a single immigrant group. Today this national treasure uses the Norwegian-American experience as a lens to explore the diversity of an immigrant nation. With 16 historic buildings in its main complex, which occupies most of a square block in downtown Decorah, Iowa, Vesterheim Museum houses over 24,000 artifacts, which include large samplings from the fine, decorative, and folk arts, and the tools and machinery of early agriculture, lumbering, and other immigrant industries.

Out of approximately 17,500 museums in the United States, Vesterheim is one of only 776 that are fully accredited by the American Association of Museums. *USA Today* has named Vesterheim one of “ten great places in the nation to admire American folk art.”

But Vesterheim is more than a world-class museum preserving the artifacts of the past. It is a cultural center dedicated to preserving living traditions by offering classes in Norwegian folk art and special programs for both children and adults. The museum also hosts special events, lectures, and exhibitions throughout the year.

Visitors to picturesque Decorah cross Vesterheim’s threshold into a world of nautical daring, prairie plunder, and deep-seated faith. The Main Building, built in 1877 as an elegant hotel, is organized on a grand scale around the immigrant theme, from life in Norway, through the Atlantic crossing, to life in America, with complete Norwegian and pioneer homes and a breathtaking ship gallery three stories high.

In addition to the Main Building, there’s a restored stone mill dating from 1851, filled with the wonderful and often curious tools and machines that helped build a new home in a new world, and 12 other historic buildings that together comprise what may be the earliest Open Air Museum in America.

The Westby-Torgerson Education Center, once a nineteenth-century factory, has been beautifully renovated to meet Vesterheim’s education needs, and the Bauder-Landsgard Collections Study Center is a state-of-the-art facility for researching and preserving museum treasures, housing almost half of the museum’s artifacts when they are not being exhibited.

Each year, Vesterheim plays a major role in Decorah’s annual celebration of Scandinavian heritage, Nordic Fest, on the last full weekend in July. During Nordic Fest, the museum’s *National Exhibition of Folk Art in the Norwegian Tradition* draws hundreds of contributors and visitors from throughout the country. Vesterheim also sponsors two other annual events, *Syttende Mai*, Norway’s Constitution Day on May 17, and Norwegian Christmas on the first full weekend in December. The museum is open year round.

ON THE WEB AT VESTERHEIM.ORG

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