

NEW LAND, NEW LIFE!

Norwegian Immigration in Minnesota: 1825-1925



Norwegian Language

Norwegians attempted to maintain cultural autonomy in “Little Norway” colonies in Minnesota with their own Norwegian rural dialect, church, and school.

While most nineteenth century rural Norwegian immigrants and their offspring spoke the rural dialects of home. The Dano-Norwegian literary language (Bokmål) was used by Lutheran pastors and professors at St. Olaf College. Because Denmark had ruled Norway from 1380 to 1814, the written language naturally absorbed Danish language forms and spellings. After the adoption of the Norwegian Constitution in 1814, nationalism grew as did interest in local Norwegian language/dialects. Norway and Sweden shared a king from 1814 to 1905. The three languages have many similarities.



“Welcome” in Norwegian.
Photo by Ronald Stow

Norwegian-Minnesotans maintained the form and spelling of the older Dano-Norwegian language. In Minnesota churches, pastors that emigrated from Western Norway brought with them distinct dialects.

In America, there was pressure to learn English in public schools and political pressure in wartime. The descendants of Norwegian immigrants gradually reduced use of spoken and written Norwegian.

Some communities, institutions and groups continued the use and study of the Norwegian language as a source of cultural pride and connection. Spring Grove, Twin Valley and Fertile, Minnesota have had some of the highest percentages of fluency. In 1910, South High School in Minneapolis was the first public high school in America to offer a foreign language course in Norwegian. Mindekirken Lutheran Church and Augsburg College of Minneapolis, Concordia College of Moorhead, Concordia Language Village (Skogfjorden), and St. Olaf College of Northfield, and Norwegian fraternal societies, like Sons of Norway, have offered Norwegian instruction. Over eight thousand Minnesotans continue to learn and use the Norwegian language.

Comparison of the Scandinavian Languages

| | | | |
|---|----------------|--------------|---------------|
| <u>English:</u> Give us this day our daily bread. | <i>church</i> | <i>book</i> | <i>school</i> |
| <u>Norwegian:</u> Gi oss i dag vårt daglige brød. | <i>kirke</i> | <i>bok</i> | <i>skole</i> |
| <u>Danish:</u> Giv os i dag vort daglige brød. | <i>kirke</i> | <i>bog</i> | <i>skole</i> |
| <u>Swedish:</u> Ger oss denna dag vårt dagliga bröd. | <i>kyrka</i> | <i>boken</i> | <i>skolan</i> |
| <u>Icelandic:</u> Gefa oss i dag vort daglegt brauð. | <i>kirkjan</i> | <i>bók</i> | <i>skóli</i> |

Norwegian Expressions

| | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| Akkurat | God dag! |
| (Correct) | (Hello) |

| | |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| Takk! | Ha det bra! |
| (Thanks) | (Farewell) |

| | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Vær så god! | Fint vær i dag! | Det er Moro! | Ja/Nei! |
| (Help Yourself) | (Fine weather today) | (That’s fun) | (Yes/no) |

