

Literary and Historical Notes for Wednesday, July 18, 2007

C R U I S E N O R W A Y 2 0 0 7

It's the birthday of the novelist **WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY**, born in Calcutta (1811). Thackeray said, "There are a thousand thoughts lying within a man that he does not know until he takes up a pen to write." He's best known for his novel *Vanity Fair*; the story of Becky Sharp, who fights her way up through society by any means necessary and who delivers the novel's most famous line when she says, "I think I could be a good woman if I had five thousand a year."

It's the birthday of **JESSAMYN WEST**, born in North Vernon, Indiana, author of *The Friendly Persuasion*.

It's the birthday of the playwright **CLIFFORD ODETS**, Philadelphia, known for his plays *Waiting for Lefty* and *Golden Boy*.

It's the birthday of **NELSON MANDELA**, born in Cape of Good Hope, South Africa (1918). His father was the chief of the Tembu tribe.

It was on this day in 1925 that **THE FIRST EDITION OF *MEIN KAMPE*, BY ADOLF HITLER, WAS PUBLISHED.**

And today, the 18th of July, is believed to be **THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRE THAT BURNED ROME** in 64 AD, while the emperor Nero supposedly played his fiddle. In fact, Nero wasn't in Rome; he was away at his holiday villa on the coast, and when he heard about the fire, he rushed back to the capital and took charge of the operations.

The rumors about his playing his fiddle probably came from people in the Roman military who did not approve of Nero's artistic leanings. He'd come to power at the age of 16 and was the youngest ruler in the history of Rome. He was more interested in music and poetry than in battling the barbarians, and it was the lyre he played, not the fiddle, though his real passion was singing. He was also known to be a transvestite, which did not endear him to the soldiers.

One of the rumors being spread at the time was that Nero had himself had started the fire because he was disgusted by the architecture in Rome and wanted to rebuild the city. To bolster his own image against these rumors, Nero decided that the fire needed to be blamed on someone else, and he picked out the Christians who were generally loathed by Romans.

The religion of Christianity was only a few decades old when Nero singled it out. Nero rounded up Christians, who were torn to death by dogs, crucified, or burned at the stake.

Though most Romans at the time despised Christians, Nero's program of persecution went too far. It had the unintended effect of making people sympathize with Christians. And a little more than 200 years later, the emperor of the Roman Empire himself converted to Christianity, which became the dominant religion of Europe for more than 1500 years.

Having Children

by Barbara Tanner Angell

A siren goes by,
the scream cuts through me
even though my child is home.
For a moment I think...

Where am I?
In the middle of the night
a cry, dreamed
or heard, a wave washes
over the body of my child.
I have let her drown

or fall. She has fallen
from a high balcony
and I have let it happen.
Negligence. I feel
as if I'm plummeting...

Oh let this be a dream.
I'll be better next time.
I'll watch, I'll watch, I'll watch.

"Having Children," by Barbara Tanner Angell, from *The Long Turn Toward Light*. © Cleveland State University Poetry Center. Reprinted with permission.

INSIDE PASSAGES by Garrison Keillor

You meet people on a cruise. You stand around on the aft Lido deck and look at the scenery and people come over and strike up a conversation. I was brought up not to talk to strangers but thank goodness strangers talk to me. One woman said she came to Norway fifty-five years ago on her honeymoon and now her husband is gone and she's come back to remember that beautiful summer. Norway was less prosperous then and so was the young couple and so their accommodations were not so comfortable as the Veendam. They rented rooms in people's houses, many of whom spoke no English at all. Why had they come to Norway back in 1952? She looked out at the fjord for a minute and then said, "Because we had read about it during the war and they seemed to heroic to us."

John and Sandy are here, who are seeing impaired — he is blind and she is three-quarters blind, so he takes her arm and she leads him, her long collapsible white cane out in front — and they are always smiling. Robin and Linda and I were singing the other day in the atrium and we sang the song, "The Blind Man Stood In The Road And Cried," and I looked up and saw John sitting on the stairs and he was laughing.

The other morning, choir practice was scheduled at 7:30 a.m. and attendance was sketchier than usual, and only four tenors showed up. So we didn't sound quite right. But we went through fifteen hymns or so, plus "Dona Nobis Pacem," and wound up with "Nearer My God To Thee" and that last verse — "Though like

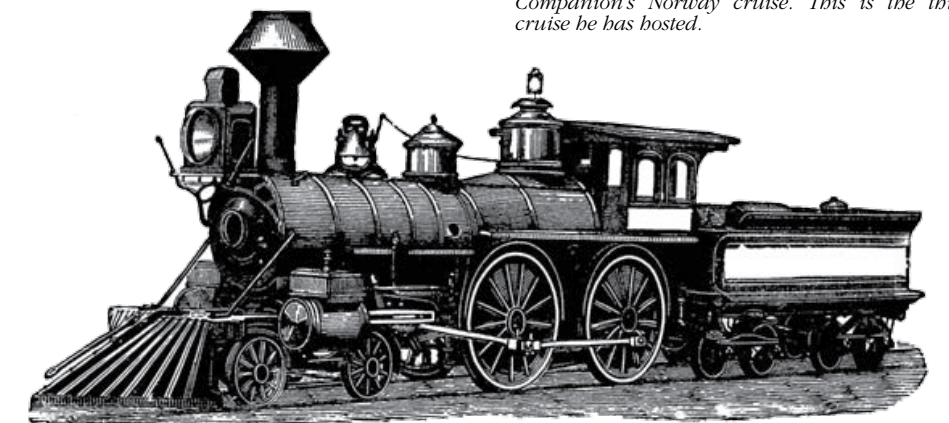
the wanderer, the sun gone down,
darkness be over me, my rest a stone"
— put us in a thoughtful mood, and we hummed a last verse, and sang our jolly Amen chorus, and went off to a day in Trondheim.

**I WAS BROUGHT UP NOT TO
TALK TO STRANGERS BUT
THANK GOODNESS
STRANGERS TALK TO ME.**

I got to meet Jo Ragnar in Trondheim who is with NRK, which is the big state-funded radio and TV empire with three radio channels plus the new digital radio service which now has begun broadcasting "The Writer's Almanac," its very first English-language offering. Jo Ragnar is a thoughtful young man, balding, bespectacled, and I plied him with questions, of course. Norway is a trilingual country — everyone must know Bokmaal, or "book language," which is basically Danish, and Nynorsk, which is a patriotic concoction based on the old pre-Dane Norse dialects,

which many Norwegians consider more beautiful though it is the primary language of only 15%. And then of course there is English, which children here start studying in the first grade and continue working with all the way through 12th. English is their ticket to travel the world and so they keep it polished up and in the summer when American tourists come, Norwegians brace themselves for the inevitable question: "I'm sorry, but do you speak English?" The answer is, "Most certainly yes." It is a little awkward when Norwegian-Americans come with a few words learned from Grandpa and a phrasebook and try to establish their bonafides, but the locals are very kind and can endure your bad Norwegian until you get tired and are ready to switch to English. I once came here and insisted on speaking Danish. The Norwegians could understand me perfectly and I couldn't understand a word they said. Nonetheless I persevered, like a deaf man talking to his cat. I'm smarter now. English is *godt nok*. Good enough.

Garrison Keillor is the host of Prairie Home Companion's Norway cruise. This is the third cruise he has hosted.



FIELD NOTES **Saving Norway's Rivers From Acid Rain** by Rich MacDonald

Decades before global climate change was in political vogue, acid rain was the scourge of the land...and lakes and ponds and streams and rivers. The rivers of Mandal, Kristiansand, and Farsund, once teeming with anadromous Atlantic Salmon, were particularly hard hit, with fish stocks plummeting to negligible numbers. The generally poor buffering capacity of the Norwegian soils and the acidic geology of the region were no match for the sulphur-based pollutants originating with European industry. By World War II, few anglers were taking salmon.

Liming has long been the tried and true method for restoring the pH of rivers to an

acceptable range, but it was expensive, labor-intensive, and produced results that were not long lived. By the mid-90s, new technologies for liming had been developed, making it more practicable to treat large areas. By 2001, approximately 320 kilometers of salmon-producing rivers were being treated on an annual basis. Today, many limed Norwegian rivers have a steady salmon fishery once again, but this has come at a cost: Nok 100 million (US \$12 million), to be exact. The Norwegian government has pledged to permanently monitor and treat most salmon-producing rivers...no small feat.

As a result of the efforts to restore the

chemistry of Norwegian waterways to support salmon, there have been some unexpected, and not altogether desired, side effects. In some areas, primarily along the shorelines of ponds and lakes, there has been an explosion of plant species that prefer more basic soil chemistry, changing the vegetative landscape. Some scientists have also claimed that liming waters will reduce any natural resistance native stocks may have to acid conditions. I imagine there is a Lutheran lesson here: maybe something along the lines of no good deed goes unpunished.

See the APHC naturalists throughout the day in various locations throughout the ship. Check HAL schedules for the most up to date listings.

PASSENGER NOTES

This morning I saw many puffins and learned that while cute, they're a little greedy. Each seemed to dive for a fish about 1 1/2 times its body length —*Kenalyn*

Our Ancestral Home — Why did my grandmother leave Sandnes in 1903 and sail across the Atlantic to join her uncle in Williams, Iowa? I can only speculate that life in the U. S. looked pretty darn good. She imagined a life of possibilities. She married a Swede and she bore two children. (This turned out to be an important event for me.)

The ship's manifest records that Ina Gurina was 18 years old, single, and not a criminal. She denied incarceration in an asylum, or that she was a polygamist, and that she was carrying any disease that might wreak havoc in the U.S. According to the 1910 census she still could neither read nor write English.

Four years before my father died at 91, he received an unusual visitor. Thor, a cousin from Sandnes, tracked down my father to a retirement home in Des Moines after a three-year quest. This visit brought great joy to my father.

On this trip, in Kristiansand, I will meet my cousin Thor for the first time. We will eye each other with that certain gaze, as if to say, "Are we really related? Are those my father's eyes I see across the table?" (Fortunately, Thor hates lutefisk.)

In Oslo, we will meet Kendra, her husband

Christer, and their 7 year-old son, Audun. Kendra is from a small rural town near our home in Illinois. Not too long ago she was our county fair queen. She found a job in Norway, met a young man, fell in love and stayed. From all accounts, she enjoys a life that any American would envy. I wonder if her grandchildren will return some day to visit their grandmother's rural Illinois home. Perhaps they'll meet at the Abraham Lincoln Museum, in Springfield, have a latte in the deli and sit across the table and think, "Is that Kendra's smile I see?"

Perhaps now we have reached an age when like the salmon we return to the streams of our forefathers and mothers. In the pristine air, the beauty of the fjords, and the cascading waters we recognize for and instant our ancestral home.

I have never been to Norway, so let me personally thank Garrison and *A Prairie Home Companion* for making this invitation so appealing that I...just had to go back. — *Dennis Backstrom*

The guide on our trip yesterday talked quite a lot about the social system in Norway. He told us that farm animals must be given a 6-week holiday every year. Really? My Norwegian cousins drove into Trondheim today for lunch and a visit. Nils Johan is a dairy farmer. He confirmed that his cows are let out to graze freely for 6 weeks every summer, as required by law. What a country! — *Pamela Kildahl*

Here I am...in Trondheim, in the Crow's Nest at 7 a.m. The sun is trying to break through and so am I.

I have gone within as I slept last night and left behind the yellow, red, and orange sunset and the laughter created by storytelling and entered the mystery of the night.

Now, I re-enter my world on the *Veendam*. Showered, dressed, and on automatic pilot I find my way easily to the Crow's Nest to begin my day. Here I am.

I am ready to break through and be present with myself and others in our journaling group. I am relaxed, grateful to be on this journey, and interested in what serendipities this day will present. I am relieved I have another day sans telephone, internet, cleaning, and all the routines back home.

I love this vacation time to just be, explore, listen, wait, and discover the gifts of today and relationships.

I am waking up and I am surfacing from the mystery of the night to engage in the mystery of the day. Here I am. —*Nancy Anderson*

Editor's Note: *Join Phebe Hanson in the Crow's Nest each morning for journaling and gentle stretching and in the evening for "Wind Down and Write" in the Lido. Her final workshop, "My Father the Norwegian Exile" takes place today.*

Got Notes? Drop 'em at the HAL front desk—4:00 p.m., no later. Please.

THE BOOK NOOK by Marcia Pankake

Immigrants Write Home

Land of Their Choice: The Immigrants Write Home

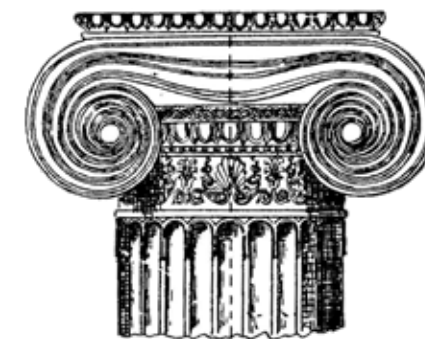
edited by Theodore C. Blegen
University of Minnesota Press, 1955

Their Own Saga: Letters from the Global Migration

edited by Frederick Hale
University of Minnesota Press, 1986

The first forty-six immigrants from Norway to the U. S. arrived in New York from Stavanger on Oct. 9, 1825, setting off a flow that became a torrent of 29,000 people (more than 1% of Norway's population) in 1882. Norway lost 800,000 people, Europe's highest rate of emigration. Immigrants' letters home, published in local newspapers, generally encouraged more migration. "Here it is not asked, what or who was your father, but what are you?" wrote one Chicago immigrant. Blegen publishes a wide variety of letters from the 1820s through the 1870s, including those from the "Norwegian Mark Twain," Frithjof Meidell, who wrote that the hedges in Springfield, Ill. were of bacon and tobacco, making it comfortable to lie in the shade and smoke, and that Norwegian servant girls were quickly changing their names from Aase, Birthe, and Siri to Aline, Betsy, and Sarah and liked to "have a little Miss in front of their names." Hale includes letters from the 1880s to 1920s from Norwegians who settled all over the world. At least three other books also reprint immigrants' letters.

Marcia Pankake is a retired librarian and long time editor of Prairie Home publications. She can tell you anything you might wish to know about "Kristin Lavransdatter."



VIKING NEWS by Christina von Nolcken

VIKING WOMEN

As we have seen, Odin had only derogatory things to say about women (although he was almost as promiscuous as Zeus was in ancient Greek tradition). In fact, women in Viking society enjoyed considerable power and prestige, holding complete authority over household matters and supervising the thralls and free servants (Viking society depended on slave labor). If literary sources are to be believed, Viking women also made sure that their men got on with their various blood feuds. They also occasionally traveled with their men and shared in the spoils: we have a story about Freydis, the wife of one of the early voyagers to America who, in a scheme to get hold of a ship, supervised the killing of all the men in a neighboring group and herself took an axe to its five women (actually, Freydis seems to have been a perfectly nice person). In real life, Viking women were, among many other things, expert weavers, responsible for making not only all their families' clothes but also the enormous, brightly-colored sails that drove the Vikings' longships.

Christina von Nolcken is the PHC Norway Cruise Viking expert. She's collected an anthology of Viking texts now available for overnight lending at the Information Desk in the lobby.

THINGS OVERHEARD

"I wanted so much to lose weight on this trip." —woman at the dessert bar

"I don't even know how to gamble but I'll try." — man in the casino

"I know a guy who used to burp 'Buick.' Once in a while he'd get 'Le Sabre' in there, too." — over lunch in the dining room

"Wonder if Mr. Keillor knows he was wrong about that." — Wajang Theatre

"Wow, there sure are a lot of know-it-alls on this boat." — in the elevator

"Yes. I am a little tired. I was up doing karaoke last night." — room steward to passenger



CAN'T GET ENOUGH?

Take some home.

WE HAVE CDS, BOOKS AND DVDS FOR SALE.

Quantities are limited.

You Really Ought to Know

Please note that still photography is permitted for personal use only. No flash or video allowed. And one more thing — when taking a photo during a performance, please respect your fellow passengers by not standing in front of anyone during the show.



APHC Camera Club

Calling all shutterbugs!

Drop off your digital photo cards to the APHC Info desk in the lobby before 4:30 p.m. each day and we just might add them to a slide show. Digital images only, please, in RAW or JPG formats.

Card Formats Supported: Compact-Flash, Memory Stick, Memory Stick Duo, Memory Stick PRO, Memory Stick PRO Duo, SmartMedia, MMC, SDHC Card, miniSD Card, SD Card, xD-Picture Card.