

Sailing of Aegir

Source: History of Norwegian Immigration to The United States From the Earliest Beginning down to the Year 1848 By GEORGE T. FLOM, Ph. D. (Columbia)

The Year 1837. The Sailing of Aegir.

The influence of Gjert Hovland in this new trend in the immigration should be noted. South Bergenhus now became the scene of immigration activity. At the same time it is to be observed that Hardanger had contributed its quota of immigrants in the exodus of 1836. The return of Knud Slogvig was noised far beyond the County of Stavanger. Among those who travelled long distances to see and talk with Slogvig and get personal affirmation of what reports had told of America, was Nils P. Langeland, a school teacher from Samnanger, one of the emigrants of 1837. Similarly Knud Langeland relates in *Nordmaendene i Amerika*, page twenty-three, how he paid a visit to Slogvig in the winter of 1836, and received from him assurance of what he had read[71] about the New World. Knud Langeland gives a most interesting account of how his interest in America became aroused; though a personal experience, it is undoubtedly typical of that of many a young man in Bergen and surrounding region at this time. As a document in immigration history, it is sufficiently significant to warrant quoting in considerable part. He says:

“Purely by accident I found in a friend’s library in Bergen a book by a German entitled *Reisen in Amerika*.... As this book contained some vivid pictures of the distant regions the traveller had visited, as well as of the impressions he had received of land and people in the new world, it was read with all the allurements of a novel. Here was given full information about the German emigration. With this description of travels in my pocket I went early one summer morning along the bay of Solem and up the steep ascent of Lyderhorn. Up there I read and dreamed of the new wonderful world far away to the west. The mist had sunk low over the fjords between the isles about Bergen, but up there around the tree-tops it was bright sunshine. It was the first time I had seen this glorious sight peculiar to mountain regions. If any prosaic nature ever received poetic inspiration and exaltation it was during this time, while my eyes beheld the sunlit surface of the fog and in the distance caught a glimpse of the sparkling shield of the North Sea, which seemed to rise to the height of the mountain.... And far out toward the west, thousands of miles out there, lies the land about which I am reading, lies the big, still so little known part of the world, with its secrets and its wonders. From that time I sought all books and descriptions of travel concerning America which I could get, and, together with an uncle of mine, I began to collect as much information about the new world, as well through books as through the verbal accounts from Stavanger people, which now began to be current in the district concerning Kleng Peerson’s emigration and return, without our yet actually thinking of emigrating. Through a kind friend’s help I was enabled in 1834 to spend six months in England, on which occasion I gathered a number of pamphlets and books about America and emigration from England. In this way more definite and more reliable information as to conditions in

America and the journey thither gradually spread in the vicinity. This seemed to discredit the many ridiculous and impossible stories now constantly set in circulation. Slowly but steadily the thought of emigrating to America took root; more and more joined the little group which now in earnest began talking of selling their homes and going to America. Then it was that the bishop of Bergen wrote a letter to the farmers of Bergen on the text, "Remain in the country; make your living honorably," whether he forgot it or did not regard it suitable to the occasion, he failed to quote the second commandment of the passage: "Multiply and fill the world." The latter the farmers had adhered to; most of them had large families, and since the land at home was filled, while they now heard that a large part of the new world was unsettled, they decided to disobey the bishop's advice and go to the new Canaan, where flowed milk and honey."

So far Langeland's account. While the evidence points to many causes as operating conjointly toward bringing about the departure, in the spring of 1837, of so many from Samnanger and from Voss, the influence of Nils P. Langeland, already mentioned above, seems to have been a special factor at this particular time. Nils Langeland was already then an elderly man. He had devoted his life to the cause of popular education, but the intolerant clergy of the time found him too liberal minded and continually put obstacles in his way. Although he was supported by a group of faithful friends, his usefulness was hampered; discouraged at last, he decided to leave his native country and go to America.

This was in the summer of 1836. In the fall of that year, Captain Behrens returned with the bark, Aegir, from America, whither he had carried a cargo of freight in the summer. Langeland's friends had already sold their homes and were preparing to emigrate. Hearing of this, Behrens decided to convert his bark into a passenger boat, and he offered to take them to America the next spring; the offer was accepted. While preparations were going on, the announcements of the projected sailing, which had been printed in the newspapers, led intending immigrants from other sections, also, to join the party. Among these was Ole Rynning, from Snaasen, in Trondhjem Province, of whom we shall speak more at length below.

On the 4th of July, 1837, Aegir sailed from Bergen with eighty-two passengers. Among these were Mons Aadland, Nils Fröland, Anders Nordvig, Ingebrigt Brudvig, Thomas Bauge and Thorbjörn Veste, all of whom had large families, and the following from Hardanger: Nils L. Jördre, wife and six children, and Peder J. Maurset, wife and child, from Ulvik Parish, and Amund Rosseland, wife and three children, Lars G. Skeie, wife and two children, Sjur E. Rosseland and Svein L. Midthus from Vikör. The last-named were the first to emigrate from Vikör. The party further included Halle Væte, wife and grown daughter, and the following persons: Odd J. Himle, Kolbein O. Saue, Styrk O. Saue, Nils L. Bolstad, Baard Haugen, John H. Björge, Ole Dyvik, all of whom were married, besides several single men, mostly relatives of the above, namely: Dövig, Bauge, Fröland, Nordvig, Hisdal, Tösseland, et al. Each adult paid sixty dollars (Norwegian specie) for passage, children under twelve paying half price. They arrived in New York eight weeks later. The journey inland was attended by numerous expenses for which

the immigrants were not prepared. When they had gotten as far as Detroit, the above-mentioned Nils P. Langeland found himself without the necessary means to continue the journey. His friends who had offered to pay his expenses as far as Chicago, at last became discouraged over the constant demands upon their funds and Langeland was obliged to remain in Detroit. Here, being a capable carpenter, he soon found work; later he removed to Lapeer County, Michigan, bought there 120 acres of land, plying at the same time the trade of a carpenter. Thus it came about that Nils Langeland became the first Norwegian to settle in the State of Michigan, though we have seen that Kleng Peerson had visited the state four years earlier. At least three others of the immigrants of 1837 located temporarily in the State of Michigan that year, namely, Ingebright Nordvig, Östen Espeland, who had come in Enighedden, and Thorsten Bjaaland. These went to Adrian, Lenawee County, but left again soon after. We shall meet Bjaaland again in La Salle County, Illinois, and on Koshkonong Prairie.