



VESTERHEIM

The National Norwegian-American
Museum and Folk Art School

Vesterheim Presentations

To arrange for a presentation or ask a question, fill out the 'Schedule a Speaker' form at vesterheim.org.

Speakers*

Laurann Gilbertson, Chief Curator

Dale Goodman, Former Vesterheim Trustee

Martha Griesheimer, Coordinator of Volunteers

Chris Johnson, President/CEO

Jennifer Kovarik, Registrar and Youth Educator

Kate Martinson, Former Vesterheim Trustee

*As part of Vesterheim's response to COVID-19, staff travel is currently restricted. However, speakers are still available to speak to your group virtually through your organization's video conferencing program (i.e. Zoom).

Cost

All groups are encouraged to give a donation of \$100-\$150 to Vesterheim as an honorarium, but it is not required.

If speakers travel outside of Decorah, hosting groups are required to pay round-trip mileage at the IRS rate (currently \$.575/mile) and, for evening presentations, provide overnight accommodations (hotel or private housing).

Hva Skjer? What's On at Vesterheim

What's New at Vesterheim

Chris Johnson

There are always exciting things happening at Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum. Find out the latest news about exhibitions, events, and other programs.

Involve Me and I'll Understand: Engaging Youth at Vesterheim Museum

Jennifer Kovarik

Learn how Vesterheim is helping kids make sense of history and culture through hands-on, object-based learning experiences. Two innovative programs serve hundreds of third and fourth grade students throughout the school year by immersing them in authentic, meaningful, and fun(!) activities that utilize the museum's broad collections as a lens through which to view and better understand specific time periods or events in U.S. history as well as the numerous cultures that have contributed to American society. Activities may be adaptable for your community or organization.

Folk Art and Fine Art

Antique ID

Laurann Gilbertson

Bring a favorite piece and learn more about your Norwegian antique or family heirloom. Laurann Gilbertson will help you learn about your object's age, origin, and function. Please note that she cannot give valuations or appraisals.

Gifts from Norway

Laurann Gilbertson

Some of Vesterheim's most spectacular examples of folk art were sent as gifts in the 1920s and 1930s from Norwegian museums. "May these objects work so that the Norwegian-ness in you will not die too soon, and the connection with the homeland will because of this be tighter," they wrote. Learn about this generous gift of more than 400 artifacts in wood, wool, silver, and iron.

The History of Norwegian Sweaters

Laurann Gilbertson

Learn about the history of different types and styles of Norwegian sweaters, including Setesdal, Fana, Marius, and Olympic. Gilbertson will also talk about the symbolism behind some of the patterns and colors on sweaters made today. Be sure to invite your audience to wear their favorite sweater. Or look more broadly at Nordic knitting in the presentation *A History of Norwegian Knitting*.

Patterns of the New World: Quilts from Vesterheim's Textile Collection

Laurann Gilbertson

Can you imagine a time and place without quilts? It may be hard to believe, but few Norwegians in the nineteenth century had ever seen quilts. Immigrants to the United States needed quilts for warmth and to help their homes look more American. Quilts from Vesterheim's Textile Collection tell the story of the immigrant experience between 1860 and 1940. Enjoy the general program or focus in on religion in the presentation *Religion and Norwegian-American Quilts*. Both are thirty-minute presentations with slides.

The Power of Silver: Traditional Norwegian Jewelry

Laurann Gilbertson

For centuries, Norwegians have treasured the beauty of silver. Silver showed the prosperity of a family, and, according to folk belief, could cure sickness in humans and livestock, improve crops, and protect against storms and evil spirits. Brooches were more than simple shirt fasteners. This program (with slides) describes different styles of silver brooches, jewelry, and the beliefs surrounding this powerful metal.

Sacred Symbols: The Folk Art of Norway

Laurann Gilbertson

Learn about the many symbols that have come down from ancient times and how they were used in Norway in the nineteenth century. Many of the symbols, used on textiles, wood, horn, and other materials, fall into one of the following functions: good luck, fertility, protection, and linking the human and spiritual worlds.

Scandinavian Modern Design in Norway

Laurann Gilbertson

Norway's contributions to the Scandinavian Modern Design movement were many, even though the artists and products were not as well known as their Danish, Swedish, and Finnish counterparts. Meet some of the most important designers of the mid-twentieth century and learn about their work in furniture, textiles, silver, glass, ceramics, and enamel.

All Tradition is Change

Laurann Gilbertson

Explore and expand your ideas of what is "tradition" and "traditional" while looking at historical objects and pieces made today by artists working "within the tradition." Examples are textiles from Norway and Norwegian America: weaving, quilting, embroidery, baptismal garments, and knitting.

Sigvald Asbjørnsen, Sculptor

Laurann Gilbertson

Based on the popular exhibition, this presentation explores the life and work of Norwegian-American sculptor Sigvald Asbjørnsen, who lived from 1867 to 1954 and was a well-known figure in Chicago's Norwegian art community. Sculptures (monuments, busts, reliefs, and interpretive works) are featured, along with the pastel drawings Asbjørnsen preferred in his later years.

Norwegian Folk Costumes: A Living Tradition

Laurann Gilbertson

Norway's tradition of colorful folk costumes is as old as the Middle Ages, and as young as the 1940s. Learn about the history of costumes from Hardanger, Telemark, Hallingdal, and many other regions of Norway. The forces of politics, fashion, and immigration have left their mark on this important part of Norwegian and Norwegian-American folk culture.

The Extraordinary Aprons of Evelina Grimes

Laurann Gilbertson

Aprons are usually utilitarian accessories, but a large number of aprons, now at Vesterheim, were made by one woman for the reasons of self expression and public entertainment. Evelina Oppegard Grimes was well known to Minnesota community groups in the 1960s and 1970s as the creator of “apron art.” The program introduces Grimes, then focuses on the themes and decorative techniques used on the 122 aprons.

Warmth and Color: Traditional Norwegian Coverlets

Laurann Gilbertson

In farm homes all across Norway, women wove warm, wool coverlets for their beds. These colorful coverlets, called åklær, were also used as wall hangings on festive occasions. They played important roles during baptism, weddings, and funerals. They came to America with the immigrants and were an important reminder of their life in Norway. The presentation is illustrated with images of many of Vesterheim’s 140 coverlets.

Weaving Bewitchment: Gerhard Munthe’s Folk-Tale Tapestries

Laurann Gilbertson

This slide presentation profiles Norwegian artist (landscape painter, muralist, book illustrator) Gerhard Munthe and his rocky road to tapestry design. Munthe was active at the time Norway was gaining independence from Sweden and his work was seen as being in a new “national” style. The tapestries woven from his designs became famous for the dramatic folk tales they depicted.

History and Culture

Unbending Purpose: Conflict, Controversy, and the Founding of Norwegian-American Lutheran Colleges

Jennifer Kovarik

“A hundred higher schools in a hundred years! That is the mark reached by the Norwegians in America.” Academies, preparatory schools, colleges, and seminaries were established in many Norwegian communities throughout the United States. Very early in their history, Norwegians in America agreed upon the need for schools of higher education; however, they could not always agree upon how and sometimes even where to do this. Learn about some of the nineteenth and early twentieth century doctrinal controversies and personal conflicts within the Lutheran churches that produced these schools and even helped some survive into the present day.

Careers of Service: The Norwegian Lutheran Deaconesses

Laurann Gilbertson

Deaconesses, women called to serve the church and humankind, come from a tradition dating from Biblical times to the Middle Ages. Their work was revived in Germany in 1836 and the “modern” diaconate spread to Europe and America. There were three Norwegian Lutheran Deaconess Motherhouses in America—in Brooklyn, Chicago, and Minneapolis. This slide presentation introduces audiences to the women who were deaconesses and their work in hospitals, church parishes, social services, and foreign missions.

Rocks and Hard Places: Emigration through the Lens of Knud Knudsen

Chris Johnson, Laurann Gilbertson

Why do people leave their homes in search of a better life? Look for answers in the dramatic black and white photographs of Knud Knudsen, considered one of Norway’s most important early photographers. He often returned from his studio in Bergen to the village of Tokheim to capture scenes of everyday life. Despite the idyllic landscape, Knudsen’s work vividly shows some of the factors that led to above-average rates of emigration from this region.

The Story of the Impact of Norwegians and Sugar Plantations in Hawaii

Kate Martinson

Extraordinary as it might seem, Norwegians of both the upper and lower classes in the late 1800s played an important and interesting part in the wildly successful development of the sugar industry in Hawaii. The work they did and the dignity they exhibited make a compelling story.

Ruth Meier: The Anne Frank of Norway

Kate Martinson

Occupied WWII Norway has many stories of bravery, sacrifice and nobility. Ruth Meier, a Jewish teen fleeing from Vienna, found herself trapped by the Nazi regime in Norway. We know of her experiences through her diaries, letters, and artwork that survived. Her compelling story allows us to better understand Norway’s war years and the way that contemporary Norway has grappled with the events during occupation.

In Trunks, Hands, and Hearts: What Norwegian Immigrants Brought to the United States

Laurann Gilbertson, Jennifer Kovarik

Between 1825 and 1980, nearly one million Norwegians left for new lives in America. Consider the reasons for leaving, what they brought, and where they settled. Explore the immigrant experience through stories associated with artifacts in Vesterheim’s collection. This presentation can be customized with artifacts from your state.

The Sámi People of Norway

Kate Martinson

The indigenous people of the North, formerly called 'Laps', have an interesting story to tell of their history and current ways of life. The Sámi people have long lived across Norway and as far as Western Russia in an area previously known as "Lapland". These native people in Norway have taken a more respectful name, the Sámi. Their unique experiences include aspects of religious transition, stewardship of land and mineral wealth, survival after near devastation during WWII, and the development of a separate Sámi Parliament in Norway. They continue to herd reindeer, protect a unique language, and share their culture and customs. Learning about the Sámi people opens a new aspect of Norway and its history. (This presentation is especially fitting for the holiday season, as it can be linked to many of our own celebrations of Christmas.)

Vesterheim's Primstav Murals

Martha Griesheimer

The murals in Vesterheim's Gathering Room were created in 1999 by Norwegian rosemaler Sigmund Aarseth and Iowa rosemaler Sallie DeReus. The murals are an example of interior painting, relatively common in Scandinavia, in which every surface is decorated. The murals are inspired by the primstav, a calendar stick widely used in Norway during the Middle Ages. The initial purpose of the primstav was to help keep track of Saint's days and the church year when Christianity was adopted in the eleventh century. Over time, however, the primstav acquired worldly calendar associations that had to do with seasonal agricultural and domestic activities.

The Norwegian 'Mayflower': The Voyage of the Restauration

Dale Goodman

In the period beginning in 1825 and for about 100 years following, nearly 40% of the population of Norway – more than 800,000 Norwegians – immigrated to the United States. Most of those immigrants came for "economic opportunity," but the first immigrants – known as the Sloopers of 1825 – came for religious freedom. The voyage was three years in the planning by an alliance of Quakers and Haugean Lutherans. Beginning on July 4th, 1825, a 54-foot sloop named Restorasjonen (The Restauration) took 52 passengers on a 98-day journey from Stavanger, Norway to New York City. This presentation follows the story from its roots (in the Napoleonic Wars), through the voyage itself, the reception in New York City, and finally to the first Norwegian settlement in the United States in Kendall, New York.

Dating Historical Photographs Using Women's Clothing, 1860 to 1930

Laurann Gilbertson

Whether you're doing genealogy, or just trying to sort through your family's old album, this 45-minute slide program can help you assign a date to old photographs. Women's clothing styles have changed regularly and distinctly over time. By looking at a few fashion features, such as hats and dress sleeves, you can easily narrow down the date to a single decade.