



Sons of Norway
HERITAGE PROGRAMS



IdeaBank#6

LEIF ERIKSON DAY CELEBRATION

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1983

Agenda from Heritage Programs

Background materials suitable for use in connection with Leif Erikson Day speeches.

**Sample of proclamation used in the State of Minnesota, and of
proclamation by the President of the United States.**

Guide for Forming Local Independent Leif Erikson Day Committees

PURPOSE:

1. To encourage all local municipalities, cities, states, provinces, and countries interested to recognize and affect legislation to annually (perpetually) proclaim October 9 as **LEIF ERIKSON DAY**.

2. To perpetuate the annual celebration of **LEIF ERIKSON DAY** by publicizing this event and encouraging the general public, business organizations, local municipalities, clubs, fraternal groups, and schools to celebrate this day annually. Also to publicize this event by contracting all the various news media and all the printers of calendars, requesting their cooperation.

3. To encourage annual celebrations of **LEIF ERIKSON DAY** to be for the purpose of civic improvement, fostering better citizenship, for charitable causes, and to encourage all individuals and supporting organizations to plan suitable ceremonies and programs of a cultural and educational nature to emphasize all that is good in their various ethnic backgrounds.

4. To generate the interest of every citizen and every member of each supporting organization in the common goal of publicizing and celebrating **LEIF ERIKSON DAY** and to help each organization strengthen itself by encouraging its members to support these purposes and actively take part in annual celebrations of this day.

5. To promote the color blue as a sign of recognition of this event and as a symbol of loyalty, and to encourage others to also promote this color, and request everyone to wear and display the color blue on **LEIF ERIKSON DAY**, October 9.

6. To annually award a citation to a person or persons who has shown a devotion of and has worked hard for civic improvement, cultural advancements, and/or charitable causes.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership on this Local International Committee is open to any individual or organization that indicates their interest and willingness to support and actively fulfill the purpose of this committee. Each state or province, and each city and town, is urged to form a local independent committee using this purpose as a guide.

FINANCES

Funds for printing, mailing, and publicity purposes for this committee are to be derived from voluntary donations, from individuals, and supporting organizations.

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Does your state have legislation which will perpetuate **LEIF ERIKSON DAY**? If not, introduce a bill to annually proclaim October 9 as **LEIF ERIKSON DAY**.

PROPOSAL:

In keeping with the annual presidential proclamation authorized by the United States Congress in 1964 proclaiming October 9 as **LEIF ERIKSON DAY**, we hereby propose:

A SKÅL TO SCANDINAVIA WEEK

Sunday, October 9 thru October 15

- October 9*Skål* to **LEIF ERIKSON DAY**
- October 10*Skål* to ***DENMARK DAY**
- October 11*Skål* to ***FINLAND DAY**
- October 12*Skål* to ***NORWAY DAY**
- October 13*Skål* to ***SWEDEN DAY**

*Countries listed alphabetically

The purpose of this proposal is to encourage the annual celebration of October 9 as **LEIF ERIKSON DAY** and encourage such celebrations for the purpose of civic improvement, fostering better citizenship, and for charitable causes. This is a day to uphold our American traditions of freedom for all, equality, justice, loyalty, humanity, opportunity, and an occasion to sponsor or support educational, scientific, cultural, charitable, and social service projects.

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Anyone interested in this proposal or any portion of it is urged to take part in any way they may wish. The following are some suggestions that may be followed:

- 1. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES:** Support and help to promote *Skål* to Scandinavia Week, display posters, banners, and flags during the week. Proclaim October 9 as **LEIF ERIKSON DAY**.
- 2. SCHOOLS AND INSTITUTIONS:** Post pictures and displays, feature lessons about each country on the day designated to it, and about the Viking era on October 9.

3. **TORES AND RETAIL OUTLETS:** Post pictures and displays, feature products of each country on the day designated to it, or feature products from all Scandinavian countries during the entire week. Display products such as furniture, glass, silver, pewter, clothes, etc. Dress display window mannequins national costumes.

4. **RESTAURANTS AND HOTELS:** Post pictures and displays, feature *smörgåsbord* and Scandinavian dishes. Try to specialize in a dish from each country on the day designated for that country. Scandinavian cookies and Danish pastry always are a hit.

5. **NEWSPAPERS, PERIODICALS, RADIO, TELEVISION:** Feature articles and programs during the week concentrating daily on the country which is being saluted that day. Print **LEIF ERIKSON DAY** on all calendars.

6. **FRATERNAL SOCIETIES AND COMMUNITY CENTERS:** Plan social events and benefit programs during the week that are Scandinavian oriented.

7. **TRAVEL AGENCIES:** Promote *SKÅL TO SCANDINAVIA WEEK*.

8. Promote and encourage everyone to display and wear the color **blue** on **LEIF ERIKSON DAY**.

9. Information about Scandinavia and posters may be obtained by writing to the Scandinavian Consul offices in your area or in Washington, D.C.

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The **LEIF ERIKSON DAY** celebration features a benefit dinner with the recipient of the **LEIF ERIKSON DAY CITATION AWARD** as the guest of honor. The following list of past recipients of the award by Hartford Lodge No. 474 is included to give an idea of what categories of people might be honored.

Past recipients of this award include:

- **John K. Hagen**, Past President, Sons of Norway International
- **Dr. Einar Bredland**, Professor Emeritus, Westminster College
- The Honorable **Hubert H. Humphrey**, Former Vice President of the USA
- **Dik Browne**, Cartoonist, Hagar the Horrible, for Cultural Advancement
- the Honorable **Dr. Edvard Hambro**, Former President of the United Nations General Assembly, as a Humanitarian
- **Liv Ullmann**, Actress, for Cultural Advancement and as a Humanitarian
- **Egil Olsen**, Past President, Sons of Norway International

Sample Proclamation Used in the State of Minnesota:

WHEREAS: Leif Erikson, the son of Greenland's first colonizer, continued the tradition of the Nordic seafarers by helping to expand mankind's knowledge of previously uncharted territory and by enhancing the European culture in the New World; and

WHEREAS: The adventures of Leif Erikson gave rise to the great medieval sagas, some of the finest literature of their period; and

WHEREAS: Americans have a rare opportunity to view the original saga manuscripts and to pay special tribute to the people and accomplishments of the Nordic countries through exhibits in Scandinavia today; and

WHEREAS: As a mark of respect of the courage of Leif Erikson and his Norse followers, the Congress, by joint resolution, authorized the President to proclaim October 9 in each year as Leif Erikson Day.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Rudy Perpich, Governor of the State of Minnesota, do hereby proclaim Sunday, October 9, 1983, to be **LEIF ERIKSON DAY** in Minnesota.

Sample Proclamation Used by The President of the United States:

Nordic stories passed through the ages tell us of the Viking, Leif Erikson, and his explorations across the North Atlantic. One of the most daring of the great Norse adventurers, he may have been the first European to discover our continent. Scandinavian tales tell us of a cargo of timber and wild grapes he brought from North America to his home in Greenland more than four centuries before Columbus.

Above all, Leif Erikson was an explorer and he has come to symbolize mankind's efforts to push back his frontiers, master the elements, and conquer his fear of the unknown.

In honoring him, and in honoring the Nordic people whose achievements have continuously enriched the Western World, we also honor the act of discovery.

As a mark of respect to the courage of Leif Erikson and his Viking followers, the Congress of the United States, by joint resolution approved September 2, 1964 (78 Stat. 849, USC 169C), authorized the President to proclaim October 9 in each year as **LEIF ERIKSON DAY**.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby designate Friday, October 9, 1981 as **LEIF ERIKSON DAY**, and I direct the appropriate government officials to display the flag of the United States on all government buildings that day.

I also invite the people of the United States to honor the memory of **LEIF ERIKSON** on that day by holding appropriate exercises and ceremonies in suitable places throughout the land.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this sixth day of October, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-one, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and sixth.

Background Materials Suitable for use in Connection with Leif Erickson Day Speeches

Although a great many people still are not fully informed of the fact, the discovery of the North American mainland by Leif Erikson is one of the best-documented historical events from the Viking age.

For centuries prior to the year 1000, the Viking Norsemen had sailed their proud ships into practically all ports of the known Western World. Records of their exploits at sea are found in the ancient sagas. History has shown that these sagas were fairly accurate historical records and that they were not fanciful fairy tales—even if the details weren't always correct. In making his voyage of discovery, Leif Erikson was not acting blindly—he had the records of Bjarne Herjulfson, who first saw these distant shores after he had been driven from his course during a voyage from Iceland to Greenland.

In this way, Leif Erikson was in a different position than Christopher Columbus, who rediscovered the New World 500 years later. About Columbus there is an old story: “When he started, he didn't know where he was going; when he got there, he didn't know where he was; when he returned to Spain, he didn't know where he had been.”

Columbus—regardless of what he might have learned about the earlier Viking voyages to an unknown world—convinced Queen Isabella of Spain that he could find a short way to reach the Indies. When he landed on a small island (now believed to have been Walling's Island in the Bahamas), he thought he was in the Far East and this belief persisted among the Spanish explorers who followed him and explored much of the Western World.

The main chapter in the story of Norse colonization in America is that of the discovery of a pre-Columbian settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows on the northernmost tip of Newfoundland. The Norwegian explorer, Helge Ingstad, and his crew excavated house sites and boat sheds there, and among the finds was a bronze, ring-headed pin of the late Viking type. This site is today officially recognized as a Norse Viking Age settlement, and is definite proof that the stories of the Sagas are true. Ingstad's findings are presented in his

book, “Westward to Vinland,” where he follows Leif Erikson from the Norse settlement in Greenland to the wonderful land in the west.

The statement by early historians that Leif Erikson’s discovery of America brought no results is not quite true. The Vikings from Greenland and Iceland did not stop with the first voyages of discovery. Positive efforts to colonize the new land were made, and contacts with America—particularly from Iceland and Greenland—continued for nearly 400 years.

We can only speculate about what happened to the Norse settlers in Vinland. Did they all go back to Greenland? Or did they make Vinland their new homeland? Early Spanish explorers reported the natives of this area to be of an unusually fair complexion. Does this mean that Norsemen and Indians not only existed side-by-side, but that the newcomers blended with the original population? We don’t know.

As we today observe the annual Leif Erikson Day, we are not paying tribute merely to a dangerous voyage made by a courageous Norwegian-Greenlander about the year 1000. We are paying tribute to all of the exploits of the Viking voyagers of the past one thousand years, and to their descendants who settled and developed wilderness areas from Shetland, Orkney, and Faroe Islands to Iceland and Greenland, and who made the first settlements and explorations of the North American continent.

As descendants of the ancient Norse Vikings and the hundreds of thousands of Norwegian emigrants who settled the new lands of the United States and Canada in the 19th century and 20th century, we can point with pride to the contribution which we have made to the building of the Western World. We are in truth heirs of the Viking pathfinders and pioneers. We continue to carry on their traditions. We are still engaged in the big task of building the western culture and civilization. We have much to offer in the rich heritage of our Norwegian culture.

There are greater frontiers than ever, although they are not physical in the sense of the American frontier of the 19th century. As citizens of the New World, we have a responsibility to continue our untiring efforts in exploring these new frontiers and in helping to make our new lands better and stronger—economically, physically, and culturally—as we face the critical

problems of the twentieth century.

From: Heritage Programs Department
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REFERENCES TO LEIF ERIKSON'S VINLAND VOYAGES ARE FOUND IN THE FOLLOWING BOOKS:

“Heimskringla” by Snorre Sturlason

“The Northern World” by David Wilson

“The Viking World” by James Graham-Campbell

“Westward to Vinland” by Helge Ingstad (available in many U.S. and Canadian libraries)

“A Brief History of Norway” by John Midgaard