



Sons of Norway
HERITAGE PROGRAMS



MiniPresentation#48

THE TALL SHIPS

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At the 1986 celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Statue of Liberty, a phenomenon rarely seen in the United States occurred and was reported on by several of the television commentators who covered the event. When the parade of 22 tall ships—accompanied by a number of smaller vessels—came up the Hudson River, the usually impulsive, expressive and very verbal American public became speechless. Overwhelmed by the quiet grandeur of the majestic ships, the crowds watched in awesome silence. It was a historic moment.

In Norway, the tall ships are very much a part of the country's history, especially along the southern coastline. The era of the tall ships was beneficial to the local economy and many of the picturesque and beautiful towns in that area grew and expanded on the economic basis provided by the shipping business. Even today, people in that area lovingly refer to their part of the country as "the province of the shining white sails" and love to talk about the "good old days" when the tall ships carried Norwegian sailors to all corners of the world.

The types of tall ships that we see today were almost all developed to their present form during the last century. They are classified by their rigging. The archetypal sailing ship is the full-rigged ship—with three or more masts and a full set of square sails on each. If you replace the square sails of the after most mast with triangular stay sails, you get a bark. Continue to put such sails on all masts but the foremast, and you have a BARKENTINE. What the bark and the barkentine lose in power, they gain in ease of handling. Other well-known types of tall ships are the BRIG, rigged as a full-fledged ship, but with only two masts and the BRIGANTINE with square sails on the foremast and triangular sails fore and aft on the main mast. The SCHOONER is rigged with triangular stay sails on all masts. Sometimes a schooner will fly a square sail or two, but none of its masts will be completely square-rigged. Armed with this information, you may try your hand at being a connoisseur of tall ships the next time you see one.

Some of them—for instance the brigantine—can be handled by a relatively small crew. But in most cases, the sailing ships require many hands. The weight of a large square sail is well over a ton—not an easy thing to furl. Stay sails are lowered, so the crew has the advantage of gravity, but once down, the heavy canvas has to be hauled and folded, pounded and tied into bundles. It takes hard physical work to operate a tall ship, and part of the work goes on high up in the rigging.

Almost all of the sailing ships still in operation are training ships. Norway has three: Christian Radich, Statsråd Lehmkuhl (STAHTS 'rod LEM 'kuhl) and Sørlandet ('SIR 'lahn 'deh). They are called "school ships" by the Norwegians and offer 11-week-long courses for young people ages 15 to 18. The courses are very much sought after and have been extremely successful. The youngsters learn seamanship and discipline and in the summer, cruises are incorporated into the training program, offering the participants an experience of a lifetime. In 1957, the Norwegian school ship, Christian Radich, was featured as the main star in the movie "Windjammer"—a sweeping presentation of the world of the tall ships and the seven seas.