



Sons of Norway Bremerton Oslo Lodge 2-035

22Aug 1935 – Today!



Bremerton’s Oslo Lodge 2-35 was created during the Great Depression when the community’s main industry, Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, was actually going through a period of expansion in building our nation’s military fleet. It was one of the shipyard’s civilian employees, Al Blomlie, commuting from Tacoma, who recognized the need for a lodge in this Norwegian-populated area.



He used the local telephone directory to begin its members’ list. The first two calls were to Sten and Thora Aksdal and then Ragnvald ‘RK’ and Sofie Andersen who both excitedly began the process of inviting their neighbors, friends, and family to create a new Sons of Norway lodge.

Today, we still have the three families’ descendants as current members as well as their old neighbors’ and friends’ offspring. We are a lodge of longtime heritage.

< Alma Bockelie with her mother, Thora Aksdal and two of their descendants.

Forty-nine members signed our charter on August 22, 1935. By 1940, Bremerton had the principal naval shipyard on the West Coast and the only one with the capacity to handle aircraft carriers and battleships. Our membership kept growing as workers migrated to the Kitsap area. The lodge chaired war bond drives, collected food, new and used clothing, and money to aid Norwegian relief and Camp Little Norway in Toronto, Ontario. As WWII ended, however, the shipyard’s mission changed from repair work to the deactivation of the Pacific Fleet vessels thus causing the community’s work force to go from 32,500 to 9,000 workers. Oslo Lodge was left with only 42 members and decided to disband, but the stubborn few voted the lodge to continue. The Korean War brought the industry’s employment back up again - the lodge flourished - and then down again where there was another talk of disbandment. The few continued. The second generation then took over the lodge administration and the work of their parents and, in 1985, we had over 800 members.

Today the lodge faces a recession in both economy and in membership. It’s difficult to keep up with the maintenance of the lodge, and our first, second, and third generation Norwegians are becoming fewer and fewer. We have the advantage of living in a Scandinavian-known area; however, in the last 40 years our Norwegian population has dropped from 34% to only 5.5% in Bremerton. Oslo Lodge membership today is around 300 with about 65% Norwegian.

The following history will explain how we survived and how we will continue to survive.



A war surplus building was purchased in the late forties at the same time as their next door neighbor, Olympic College, was being built. The building was a small two-story block structure on a 254’ x 120’ lot.

In the fifties, sixties, and seventies, additional rooms were added. Today’s Oslo Lodge has three main rooms, each with full kitchens.

The smallest of these has a cozy fireplace and carpet flooring, while the other two rooms have dance floors - one includes a stage. The lodge is in the center of the city next to the Warren Avenue Bridge where averages of 31,000 vehicles pass by the building daily. A long standing agreement allows the lodge to use Olympic College’s main parking lot for large functions.

One of the smarter configurations Oslo Lodge developed in 1945 was a strong building association, a corporation in itself under the state of Washington. Its purpose is to provide, maintain, and operate the building and facilities necessary to carry out the fraternal and related activities of the lodge and its members. Fifteen elected directors meet monthly for this purpose, employing a lodge manager whose main function is to coordinate hall rentals and normal office and custodial duties. Once a month lodge members join the directors of the building association in maintaining the lodge. Anything from scrubbing chairs, pulling weeds, fixing faucets, moving furniture, and cleaning out storage rooms are completed by many in the morning with an afternoon lunch. The Building Association joined the local Chamber of Commerce and, by keeping the rental rates affordable, it has seen an ever-growing increase in business, school, church, and ceremonial rentals.



This leaves the general lodge membership focused on Scandinavian culture, heritage and socializing. The long dignified monthly General Meetings are a thing of the past - the meeting days were changed from Fridays to Thursdays to accommodate more rental business, and the officers walked away from their high back chairs.

31 lodge officers are elected each year through a nominating committee inviting everyone to take on some responsibilities. The Board of Directors handles all business dealings and details of the budget and by-laws annually approved by the membership. Members are informed of any changes or updates by a short review of the committees at the monthly general meeting and in the monthly newsletters. The General Meetings begin with a great potluck, then a planned cultural or social program before the members get down to a friendly and short business meeting. Those with birthdays during the month are responsible for desserts and clean-up, plus each must give a dollar to the birthday club while a raucous Happy Birthday is sung by the membership. Social events for the membership and the public are arranged, usually on the weekends, for entertainment and fundraising purposes.

Most importantly, the lodge has had a strong Ladies Club since its inception in 1935. All female members of the lodge are automatically members – no extra dues. Monthly afternoon luncheon meetings are held for their entertainment. Their purpose is to assist the lodge gain desired improvements, to take part in charitable works, and to meet the social needs of the members of the group. They are constantly involved with projects and events. Monies made in their fundraisers, including the delicious Christmas-time home-baked Scandinavian cookies, are passed onto the Building Association or the General Lodge membership when needed.



Cookies, ready to be sold at the annual Lutefisk Dinner and Ladies Club Bazaar – always held on The first Sunday in November

Forty-eight presidents have led Oslo Lodge. The tradition allows the president to serve for two consecutive years and the vice president to be voted in when the maximum time is completed. This procedure has worked well. Our current administration is split between longtime generations of families and new members of the community. It allows new ventures to merge and the experienced to provide caution.

Oslo's members have also served in numerous District and International offices. We have had four "Man/Woman of the Year" and six "Lodge of the Year" awards for our District Two 4-state area. We have also been honored with three "International Lodge of the Year" between the countries of Canada, Norway, and the United States.

Two important functions the lodge has supported for many years are its local scholarship program and its youth camp program. In 1963, member Sam Fitz Sr had his 89th birthday, and the crowd of 260 members and friends wished him well by establishing a local scholarship program for the lodge. This program is ongoing and has given scholarships to around 150 members and descendants. The contribution the lodge has collected provides the program's continuance for many more years.

The other program Oslo Lodge members have supported is the Gordon Memorial Fund, created in 1981 in memory of Ed Gordon, longtime member and leader of the lodge, to award annual assistance for young people to attend District 2's three heritage camps. This program is also self-supporting and has been very worthwhile for the more than 300 youth who have participated.

Youth royalty has been celebrated in the lodge since 1956. Boys and girls can apply to be King, Queen, and Princess annually. They participate in local events, fundraisers, and celebrations.



The main fundraiser for Oslo Lodge is the annual Lutefisk Dinner and Ladies Club Bazaar...always on the first Sunday in November when Daylight Savings Time ends.

December 12, 1935 was the first lodge dinner served to a full house at the ticket price of 50-cents for adults and 25-cents for children. Fredrica Olsen, the lodge's first president's mother, actually soaked the lutefisk for many of the early dinners at her home.

The lutefisk is now purchased from New Day Fisheries in Port Townsend, and the cooks have the equipment and experience to make the dinner one of the best in the area. Swedish meatballs, boiled potatoes, carrots, lefse, and dessert compliment the delicious stiff-dried cod soaked in lye.

Members and the public enjoy the historical significance of the much-loved Norwegian art, artifacts, and heirlooms that decorate the rooms at Oslo Lodge: In 1996 fylke banners were constructed and surround the Viking Ballroom. There are also large shields hung on the stage wall that are taken down during parade season and decorate our Ormen Lange Viking ship. A giant map of the Scandinavian countries, acquired through the Sons of Norway General Heritage and Culture Fund Grant, is displayed prominently. Numerous weavings and historical art decorate the hall with an almost life-size wooden cutout of Pillar Guri standing next to the stage protecting our Charter.

The display cases are changed seasonally with one section prominently given to our two internationally-known rosemalers, Lois Clauson, Marilyn Hansen, and their students.



In the Fireside Room large rosemalt wall insets, designed and painted by Marilyn Hansen, decorate the cozy room where the Al Blomlie Library is located. Members enjoy the library's wealth of Norwegian biographies, fiction, history, travel, and reference material including hardanger, rosemaling, cooking, genealogy, language, and music. Two member authors, Leif K Karlsen (deceased) and Olav Brakstad have published books on Norway. Many use the library's contents to participate in the Sons of Norway Cultural Skills Program. The annual "I AM NORSK" genealogy seminar, held the first Saturday in May and open to the public, was created from the Cultural Skills Program. Informal Hardanger and handwork support is still available every Tuesday around noon. Rosemaling classes are given both during the day and in the evening.

The Ormen Lange Viking ship was built in 1958 by dedicated members of the lodge to use in the surrounding communities' parades. It was reconstructed in 1982 and is quite impressive with its hand-carved dragon head that snorts and shoots out dangerous-looking smoke to the delight of spectators at parades. At one time the float was used in 8 parades during the year including Seattle's Seafair and Portland's Rose Parade. Currently it is used in the local community parades in Bremerton, Poulsbo, Silverdale, and Port Orchard.

The Sports Directors of the lodge have promoted the International Sons of Norway Sports Medals program since its inception. A great number of members have been honored with the Gangmerke, Sykkelmerke, Skimerke, Idrettsmerke, and Svømmemerke medals. The West Sound Senior Games began in the community in 2004 and members of the lodge continue to participate as athletes and officials. The Kitsap BlueJackets have also used volunteers from the lodge as hosts for their baseball season.

Through the years, Oslo Lodge has participated in many other community affairs in the Kitsap and Mason county areas. The local *Kitsap Sun* and the Kitsap Newspaper Group continue to promote the lodge's functions. The lodge has also promoted themselves at fairs and festivals. Monetary and labor donations have been made to many community causes, such as Harrison Memorial Hospital, Bremerton Community Theater, the former Evergreen Park Swimming Pool, Memorial Stadium at Bremerton High School, Headstart Development Center, Bremerton's Downtown Carillon Bells, Kitsap Regional Library, Bremerton Police Department's K9 Drive, Special Olympics, the county's three food banks, AARP, Adopt-A-Highway, Bremerton High School Arts, etc.

On a fraternal level, Oslo Lodge consistently donates money to the Sons of Norway Foundation through fundraisers. District Two's Trollhaugen Lodge, nestled in the beautiful Cascade Mountains, was built in the seventies by a number of Oslo's members, and adult scholarships are offered to partake in the wonderful annual Trollhaugen Adult Retreat weekend requiring the participant to bring back ideas and discussions to the membership. An annual average of 40 pounds of stamps for Tubfrim has been collected by the lodge for many years.

When Oslo Lodge members are asked what the best part of their lodge is, a resounding answer is always 'the friendly people'. There's a lot of pride, laughter, conversations, hard work, and pinching pennies constantly going on at this wonderful lodge overlooking Sinclair Inlet in the Puget Sound. Come visit!!

