

FAMILY BACKGROUND: Born Oyvind Olsen on November 5, 1887, in Laksevaag, Hordaland, Norway. Laksevaag means salmon inlet and is on the north edge of Bergen. He anglicized his name to Irving shortly after he arrived in America; used Irving on naturalization papers also.

Olsen is the most common name in Norway, but the -sen spelling is Danish. The Swedes still use -son and the Icelanders still have the old naming system, -son and -dottir. Icelandic is more like old Norse.

SCHOOL: Irving had seven years of education plus 'middelskole' where he had English, German, and math. He took the ferry (10 minute ride) from Laksevaag to middelskole in Bergen.

Irving lost his mother before he was 10; his father remarried. His stepmother had a son who attended a private school and was one year older than Irving. So Irving was asked if he wanted further education also, to which he replied 'yes. So I had a good education including German, English and a lot of math. And, I'm very thankful for it'.

PARENTS: Mother had many children and actually died of childbirth eight days after the youngest boy was born. There were eight children in all: Hilder (1882), Erling (1884), Ragna (1886), Irving (1887), Sigrid (1889), Aslaug (1891), Tryg(g)ve (1892), and Harald (1899). There were also two children that died before the age of one. Only Irving and Aslaug in Norway are alive now.

At least five of the children immigrated to America, but not all stayed. Hilder, Erling, and Ragna (1896) emigrated before Irving (1907), and Aslaug came about 1917.

Erling was a mechanic who went to sea for 18 months. He, and other crew members, jumped ship in New York and didn't enter the US legally. Irving did and has the papers to prove it.

FATHER: Kristian Olsen 'was a very clever mechanic, very good with his hands'. He worked at Laksevaags maskin (?), a nearby shipyard that built five steamships a year. He began work at 14 years old at the shipyard, worked 61 years, and died at age 84. When mother was alive, he was the foreman, later becoming the plant superintendent.

GRANDPARENTS: Kristian's parents were Lars Olsen and a Lambertson woman who lived in Bergen, but Irving doesn't know if Kristian was born there. He knew the grandmother, but the grandfather died accidentally.

There was a drydock by the Laksevaag shipyard. Coincidentally both grandfathers fell into the dry dock and Grandfather Olsen was killed. His grandfather Fuglum broke his arm and couldn't use his hands anymore. He was then given a security job checking people at the gate to the dry dock.

FAMILY HOME: After the fire in Laksevaag, they moved to a small community of 25 homes, Nygaardsvik. Irving was about four and remembers this time because he used to go down to the water and collect (?), small creatures with four-five legs. The walk to the shipyard was quite far for father, so they moved closer - to a street called the 'rope walk'. At the top of this old street there was a large circle where horses went round and turned a wheel that spun rope.

They lived in this rented place until 1898. The landlord didn't like to have such a large family in his house, so mother found another house to rent. This small house was near a farm and had two bedrooms upstairs and two rooms down. In Norway at that time, people only moved in spring or in fall; and mother died early in 1899. But the family moved in the spring of 1899 to the housemother had rented. Father remarried three years later to Kristine Lambertson, who was actually a first cousin. Kristian's mother and Kristine's father were sister and brother. Irving's mother was Georgine Elisabeth Fuglum; the family name was Georg.

SCHOOL: Many people in Bergen at that time went to school for seven years. Those who could afford it went on to Bergen middelskole. He finished middelskole (the same school his half-brother attended) in 18 months at the age of 17. He had been confirmed rather late at age 16 in Laksevaag.

WORK: After school Irving worked two years in a men's clothing store in Bergen selling hats, shoes, *etc.* Tourists were big business, and whenever Germans or Americans came into the store, Irving was called upon to wait on these people. So, he had some exposure to these languages. He understood enough English so that at Ellis Island, the customs officer used him as a go-between for the other Norwegian immigrants.

EMIGRATION: Irving immigrated in 1907 to Boston where his older sister Hilder was working as a domestic. When their mother died, Hilder ran the house for the father. But when he remarried, she got a housework job in Bergen. There she became acquainted with Soeren (Sam) Hammer (?) who had lived in America. When he returned, she emigrated with him under the impression they were engaged; but that didn't work out. Soeren actually married his younger sister Aslaug who immigrated to America 10 years later.

They returned to Norway after 10 years of marriage where he died. His parents lived outside of Bergen where they owned a lot of land. Some of the land was leased to people who built houses on the land.

Three older kids had already immigrated to America when Irving left. He remembers that this was one of the few times his stepmother showed any affection. He'd gotten on with her very well - better than her own son; ran errands, laced up her high top boots daily, always did what she wanted. When he said good-bye to her, 'she put her arms around me and cried and told me I'd always been so good to her. I'll never forget it.'

Irving thought he'd only be gone five years; nearly everyone planned to return to Norway.

WORK: When he arrived in Boston in 1907, he got a job at Tailby-Mason Pharmaceutical Company where Soeren Hammer worked coating tablets. This company was owned by Tailby, a pharmacist, and Mason, a salesman. Soeren had a falling out with Mason and left the company. Mason then learned about coating tablets from another pharmaceutical company and proceeded to teach Irving. Irving experimented and perfected the process; 'got the

trick of putting the color on the tablets'. After that, the job was all Irving's.

The tablets were composed of medicine, alcohol, and water to bind, punched out, and then coated for palatability and storage purposes.

The Pure Food and Drug Act went into effect in 1906; labels had to list the real ingredients and could claim no cures. Irving's background in math was discovered, and he was given the job of figuring tablet dosage (eighth, quarter, half grain) of narcotic medicines.

After several years in this position, Irving became superintendent of the shop. In addition it was his responsibility to keep triplicate records of the narcotic products; morphine, opium, heroin, and (?) were weighed and monitored monthly, and a report was sent to the federal government.

When his boss died and the firm was sold, Irving retired at the age of 70 and moved to Seattle.

NORWEGIAN ORGANIZATIONS: Irving was very active in Boston with Norwegian affairs. The oldest Norwegian Society, 'Den Norske Forening', was established around 1850 for men; later, women joined also. A second larger but younger organization was 'Norumbega'. Irving could write both languages (correspondence in English and minutes in Norwegian) and served as secretary many years for both groups. Eventually the two organizations disbanded due to decline in membership. The Sons of Norway is still active in Boston.

Irving joined the Good Templar Society in Boston in 1907 when he first arrived; he had belonged to this group in Norway. He joined the other two organizations in 1910; meetings were held in Cambridge.

THE NORWEGIAN OLD PEOPLE'S HOME IN BOSTON: The various Norwegian societies began plans for the one hundredth birthday celebration for 17th of May 1914. In addition to festivities, the groups decided that Boston needed a Norwegian Old People's Home. After collecting money from bazaars, etc., they purchased a 17 room Boston mansion in 1920. This mansion in the Dorchester section was used as a home until 1934 when a new brick home with 20 rooms and a basement was built in West Roxbury in southwest Boston.

In early years the Scandinavian groups met in Central Square in Cambridge and later on Bradley (?) St. When the mansion was purchased, they met at the Home.

The groups involved with acquiring funds for the Home were the ladies organization (sewing circle), Norumbega, Norwegian Society, and Sons of Norway.

Individual people involved were Irving himself who was chairman when the Home was dedicated. Karl Moeller (?) was the original secretary of the Norwegian Society, the job Irving acquired when he retired. Mr. Bergman (?) was also a leader. The meeting to disband was held under Mr. Bergman because Irving was hospitalized and unable to attend. He'd suffered a heart attack from the physical strain of carrying 5-gallon pails of sand to his home from a

nearby sandpit. He had a severe pain by his heart, which soon left.

The main reason why the Norwegian societies disbanded was that emigration had stopped. The second generation Norwegians (young people) weren't interested and membership dropped.

Important contributions, holdings, and people in the Norwegian societies. There may be a painting of Bjoernstjerne Bjoernson by ?sta Hansteen in their holdings; this portrait was given to Den Norske Forening by the artist in the 1880's.

The records of Den Norske Forening and Norumbega are in the safe in the Old People's Home. An important contribution of these groups was to provide sick benefits up to 80 days.

Mr. and Mrs. Sundlie were very active; he was chairman of Den Norske Forening for many years and she was chairman of the Ladies Aid Society.

Mr. Sutud (?) was another active chairman. All were organizers of the Old People's Home. This Home was for only Norwegian people at first; later the charter was changed to include all nationalities.

THE NORWEGIAN COMMUNITY IN BOSTON: The Norwegian language was used very little - even in Irving's own home. His children understand Norwegian but can say only a few words. There was a place, probably Jewish, where lutefisk and dried fish were sold. The Norwegian paper Nordisk Tidende was published in New York; wasn't sold in Boston. Irving received it by subscription.

RETURN TRIPS TO NORWAY: Irving has visited Norway five times, the first time in 1957 - 50 years after emigration - and the last in 1975.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY: He married his first wife, Marie Berg (Norwegian), on July 4, 1914; she was doing housework in Boston. They had two children, Edith and Harald (Hal).

(An aside - the 17th of May was celebrated annually in Boston with a concert and dance.)

Irving married his second wife, Konstanse (Constance) in 1961 after Marie died. They had known each other as children in Laksevaag. But before Irving emigrated, Constance had moved to Bergen, which was her father's headquarters as a ship captain. After Irving was widowed, he corresponded with his 'earlier sweetheart' and invited her to accompany his sister on a trip to America. She came and 'she didn't go back' - except after marriage.

OTHER REMINISCENCES: Because of his Norwegian work in Boston, Irving was decorated by King Haakon of

Norway in July 1939. The medal - the Order of St. Olaf - was presented by Mr. Ursia (?) of the Norwegian Consul.

Irving was also on the admittance committee of the Old People's Home; interviewed the applicants. Tells a story about one poor lady. He is very satisfied and happy that he could help poor, elderly people.

Snakker litt norsk - Bergen dialekt. 'Bergen har ni (?) dialekt.' Upon being asked where one comes from, the Bergeners reply with an old saying, 'ikkje fra Norge, fra Bergen'. Being so near the ocean, Bergen people had a close connection with peoples from the Viking times, so Bergen is a little different.