

**A HISTORY OF SCANDINAVIAN
STUDIES IN AMERICAN
UNIVERSITIES: TOGETHER WITH A
BIBLIOGRAPHY, NO.153,
MAY,1907**

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A History of Scandinavian Studies in American Universities: Together with a Bibliography,
No.153, May,1907 by George T. Flom

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PREFATORY NOTE

In the spring of 1906 the editors of *Symra*, Decorah, Iowa, invited me to contribute to the 1906 issue of that very meritorious publication an account of the study of the Scandinavian languages in American universities. The results of an investigation of the subject were then printed under the caption, *Nordiske Studier ved amerikanske Universiteter*, pages 151-180 of *Symra*. Requests that this article be made more accessible to English readers has seemed to warrant the reissue of it in the present form. The original article has been considerably enlarged, much new matter has been added as the result of renewed inquiries, and where errors have been discovered they have been rectified. In several respects the presentation of the subject here offered is entirely new. The addition of the Bibliography it is hoped will be welcome to those engaged in Scandinavian study.

To the many persons who so readily and courteously have furnished the facts sought I hereby acknowledge grateful thanks.

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A HISTORY OF SCANDINAVIAN STUDIES IN AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

This would seem to be a fitting time to take an inventory, as it were, of the work in Scandinavian literature and philology that has been and is being done in the colleges of this country. The teachers of these lines of study have had many difficulties to contend with in the past, and many who found in them their favorite field of activity have become discouraged; nor are the conditions at the present time by any means the most favorable. A more thorough acquaintance with the past and present status of this field of our scholarly endeavor should enable us to better meet the problems of the future. I do not here wish to forestall what may better be discussed later in this paper, but I may say that it has seemed to me that there has been too much isolation among the workers in our field, too little knowledge of one another's efforts, and too little opportunity for gaining such knowledge. In spite of difficulties and adverse conditions, however, there has been progress. The present writer shall be content if this retrospective survey may contribute something toward a fuller appreciation of our efforts and toward that fuller cooperation, for

which the time now seems ripe and which indeed the time now demands, if we are to accomplish what seems ours to do.

The presentation is necessarily somewhat statistical in nature. I have thought it desirable in all cases where possible, to specify texts and editions, amount of work done and length of courses. The different colleges are given in the order in which Scandinavian branches were there introduced. As far as I have been able to ascertain the facts, the equipment of the libraries will be given, the activities of the Scandinavian literary clubs in the different places and other facts of special interest. In the case of publications only partial mention will be made, as the Bibliography will here give the full data.¹

1. The first American college in which instruction was offered in the Scandinavian languages was New York University. The university announcement and records for 1858 give the name of Paul G. Sinding as Professor of the Scandinavian Languages and Literature. I have not been able to ascertain to what extent instruction was actually given, or how many students were registered for such work. Professor McLouth, the present head of the Department of Germanic Languages, writes me that he has not been able to find any definite statement regarding the courses Professor Sinding is said to have given, but he believes they were private courses for students not regularly matriculated. I also learn that the work was on the modern period and, as it seems, in Danish and Danish-Norwegian literature.

The attendance upon these courses was very limited and not such as to justify much hope for the future. Sinding's training and interest lay very largely in the line of history. In language and literature his equipment was not adequate to meet the demands of university instruction of even those early days in the history of American colleges. Even if the local conditions had been more favorable he was hardly the one to

¹ In the case of American translations of Scandinavian poetry the Bibliography is not intended to be complete.

have fostered a thriving, growing department. It would seem that the prospects might have been brighter, in view of the fact that there was in New York City, already at that time, a Scandinavian-American colony of considerable and steadily increasing numbers. In 1844 there had been organized a Scandinavian society under the name *Scandinavia*, the first of its kind in America. There does not, however, appear to have been much educational interest within this organization, the members of which, as pioneers and pathfinders in a new country, were undoubtedly more concerned with the more immediate needs of life than with higher education. It does not seem that there was any relation between the society and Scandinavian work in the University of New York, which the enterprising trustees had undertaken to foster. Nor, indeed, was the university itself ready at that time to further encourage the work. Professor Sinding published, while in the university, *A History of Scandinavia from the Early Times of the Northmen to the Present Day*, a very creditable work which passed through ten editions. In 1861 he resigned his post and returned to Denmark; Professor Sinding was born in Alsted, Denmark, in 1813.

2. The Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literatures in the University of Wisconsin was established in 1869. The first incumbent of the chair was Rasmus B. Anderson, who previously had been Instructor in Albion Academy at Albion, Wisconsin. Professor Anderson's predilections lay in the direction of Old Norse literature and Norse mythology. His knowledge of this field had been acquired almost wholly by private study, Luther College, where he had been educated, offering no courses in these lines. He had, however, there received excellent training in modern Norwegian and the classical languages. Professor Anderson had a class in Old Norse during the first year; in the years following courses were also given in Norwegian and Swedish. In 1876 he was promoted to Professor of the Scandi-

¹ The real founder of this society was a James Petersen, who is said to have been a *dane*. Among the original members were Peter Gildsig, who built the Gilsey House, on Broadway, N. Erlandsen, Harro Harring and Hans P. C. Hansen. See further *Chapters on Scandinavian Immigration to Iowa* by George T. Flom, Iowa City, 1906, pp. 116-118.

navian Languages. He resigned his position in 1884 to accept the appointment of Minister to Denmark.

Professor Anderson did efficient pioneer work in furthering the study, in this country, of the literature and the mythology of the Scandinavian North. He was a man of aggressive temperament and untiring industry. He was inspired by genuine enthusiasm for Norse antiquity and succeeded in creating a real interest in the field he represented. Professor Anderson frequently lectured on Scandinavian topics and he is the author of several works which appeared between the years 1873 and 1883. Among these may be mentioned a translation of *The Younger Edda*, 1879, and of F. Winkel Horn's *History of Scandinavian Literature*, 1883. Best known perhaps is Anderson's *Norse Mythology*, 1873, which, though largely an adaptation of Peterson's *Nordisk Mytologi*,¹ Copenhagen, 1869, showed an appreciative insight into the subject and gave promise of more independent work in the future, a promise which, however, was not realized. It should be added that Professor Anderson published in 1881 a very good translation of Björnson's *Synnöve Solbakken*, which is by far the best, and in fact the only readable translation into English of *Synnöve Solbakken* that we have. For other publications by Anderson see Bibliography. Professor Anderson built up a fair Scandinavian library, the nucleus of which was formed by Ole Bull's gift of his own private library, in which the Icelandic saga literature was especially well represented.² To this was added at various times by private gifts and by university appropriation.

Upon Professor Anderson's resignation in 1884 Julius Emil Olson was appointed Instructor in the Scandinavian Languages and German. During the first year Mr. Olson had a class of ten in Old Norse. Courses in Old Norse have also been given frequently since, although Professor Olson has stressed more especially the modern literature,³ his favorite field of study being Nor-

¹ Translated into Norwegian by F. Winkel Horn Kristiania, 1866-1867, and into French by Jules Leclercq, *Mythologie Scandinave*, Paris, 1886.

² See *Smara*, 1906, p. 82, article by Jua! Diserud.

³ While Professor Olson is of Norwegian descent, this is due largely to local condition, of which one has been that the Scandinavian students in the University have always been largely of Norwegian parentage. The demand for courses in Swedish has been limited.

wegian and Danish literature and Norwegian history. Professor Olson was in 1887 made Assistant Professor and in 1892 Professor.¹ He has every year had several classes in Norwegian and Danish literature and in recent years also in the *Landsmaal* literature. He has given lectures on Wergeland, Ibsen, Björnson, Garborg, Per Sivle, Oehlenschlaeger, Tegnér and other Scandinavian authors.

In 1898-1899 a class in Old Norse read Sweet's *Icelandic Primer* and part of Vigfusson and Powell's *Icelandic Prose Reader*. This course was also given in 1905-1906 with the substitution of Nygaard's *Udvalg af den norrøne Litteratur* for Sweet's *Primer*. A course in the Swedish language is given every year, together with the reading of Tegnér's *Frithjofs Saga*, Runeberg's *Fänrik Ståls Sägner* and Vinsnes och Aanrud's *Svenske Digtere*. In the history of the literature the work is based on Warburg's *Svensk Litteraturhistoria*. The classes have met twice a week. Besides these two courses, instruction has for some time past generally been given also in the following subjects: 1, Björnson's *Synnöve Solbakken* and Gunderson's *Norske Digte*, three times a week; 2, Kielland's *Skipper Worse*, twice a week, and reading of Holberg's comedies and three of Oehlenschlaeger's dramas outside the classroom; 3, Ibsen's *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*, studied both from the linguistic and the literary side, two hours a week; 4, a survey of Scandinavian literature, twice a week through the year; 5, a more critical course in the Scandinavian drama once a week. Professor Olson writes me, that during the current year, he has had a class of fifty students in the lecture course in Scandinavian literature (course 4 above). In the first of the above courses special stress is laid on Björnson's stories and their significance for the development of Norwegian literature since 1857. A course is also offered in the *Landsmaal* literature, the University of Wisconsin being the only college in the country offering instruction in that subject.

The departmental library is especially complete on the side

¹ Begin in that year also relieved of the work in German.

of the modern literature. There are complete editions of all the best known Norwegian writers and the following Danish writers: Oehlenschlaeger, Baggesen, Ingemann, Hans Christian Anderson, Fru Gyllembourg, Grundtvig, Henrik Hertz, Goldschmidt, Paul Möller, J. L. Heiberg, Paludan-Müller, P. A. Heiberg, and Carsten Hauch. The Norwegian Society, *Nora Samlag*, holds regular meetings through the school year for the discussion of subjects in Norwegian literature or history. English or any of the Scandinavian languages may be used. On special occasions musical programs have been rendered. The membership of the society, I believe, is about seventy-five.

Professor Olson's literary activity has been devoted particularly to Norwegian history and modern Norwegian language. He is the author of a *Norwegian Grammar and Reader*, Chicago, 1898. An annotated edition of Ibsen's *Brand*, to be published by The John Anderson Publishing Company, Chicago, is at present in the course of preparation. He is also the author of the article on 'The Northmen' in *The Northmen, Columbus and Cabot*, published in 1906 by Charles Scribner's Sons, as Volume I in *Original Narratives of Early American History*. For other publications see Bibliography. He has lectured frequently on Scandinavian literature under the Extension Department of the University, or in individual lectures, on history or literature. Professor Olson, who is of Norwegian parentage, was born in Cambridge, Wisconsin, in 1862, and was educated in the University of Wisconsin.

3. The year in which the Scandinavian Department was established in the University of Wisconsin an instructor in Scandinavian was also appointed in Cornell University, Ithaca. David Willard Fiske was the appointee and his title was Professor of North European Languages, which included the Scandinavian languages and German. Professor Fisk, whose special interest lay in Old Norse and Icelandic and who possessed a broad knowledge of the literature of the Northern countries, devoted most of his time to Scandinavian. From the beginning he gave lectures and conducted courses in Old Norse as well as Modern Norwegian and Swedish. In 1877 Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen became