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Keynote Address

Leif Erikson Plaza Unveiling

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Dear supporters of Leif Eriksson as an explorer of Vinland and being the first European arriving in America:

It is a great honor for me here in Seattle to represent Norway and the City of Trondheim—a Norwegian town that was called Nidaros when it was the Royal City of Norway from 997 to about 1220 if we follow the saga text. I am also proud to have been able to follow the Leif Eriksson route to Vinland in modern times, from our starting point in Trondheim in 1997, via Greenland in the year 2000, over to Newfoundland in 2013, and back to Seattle now in 2014.

This famous statue of Leif Eriksson here in Seattle is one of 19 memorials venerating this famous man in Europe and America. In Norway we have two monuments. The most recent one, a copy of this famous Seattle statue, was unveiled in 1997. Iceland has two statues, one being a gift from the U.S. in 1930. Greenland has one, which is a replica of this impressive Ballard statue.

Here in America you have 11 statues—nine in the U.S. and two in Canada. The U.S. has also two busts of Leif Eriksson—one in Seattle and one in Cleveland, Ohio.

New York established a Leif Eriksson Park in 1925, finished with a plaque made by August Werner in the 1930s. This famous

Norwegian-born professor at the UW thus started his Leif Eriksson-project about 30 years before his famous statue here in Seattle was unveiled in 1962. Werner also used the original Norse name of Leif Eriksson on his statue here at Shilshole and called him Leiv Eiriksson. As a professor he also knew that horns on Leif's helmet would be wrong, because such a helmet belongs to the Bronze Age.

My work with this Leif Eriksson-project from Norway to America started in 1991, when the former sea captain Willy Mørch and I succeeded in changing the starting point for the Viking ship copies *Oseberg*, *Saga Siglar* and *Gaia* from Bergen harbour to the port of Skipakrok in Trondheim, on their way from Norway to Washington, D.C. It was the famous Viking ship specialist and adventurer Ragnar Thorseth who was in charge of this trip, which was to land in Washington, D.C., on October 9, 1991—Leif Eriksson Day in the U.S.

When I presented my booklet “Leiv Eiriksson and the Royal City of Trondheim” in Washington, D.C., on that day in 1991, I had the idea that we needed Leif Eriksson memorials in Trondheim, Greenland and Newfoundland to mark this important link between Europe and America.

In 1994 I was a visiting professor in Seattle for a second time and had a meeting and a dinner with Kristine Leander about this plan. She took the idea at once, and unbelievably enough, in 1997 a copy of Werner's famous Leif Eriksson statue in Seattle was unveiled in Trondheim, with 500 names of Scandinavian emigrants to America on a plaque. This fact made this statue an important monument of emigration.

Unveiling this statue in Trondheim was such a great adventure for my Norwegian-American cousin, Alf—greater for him than seeing the famous Indoors cathedral in the same city. My uncle and his family moved from Norway to Duluth in 1923. In his upbringing in America, Alf learned about Leif Eriksson when he went to school, and in Duluth they celebrated Leif every year on May 17.

The Werner statue in Trondheim was unveiled for a second time with 500 new names on it in the year 2000, to celebrate 1,000 years since Leif Eriksson landed in Vinland on his way from Trondheim to Greenland.

In the year 2000 another copy of the Leif Eriksson statue was installed in Greenland, and in 2013 we unveiled a copy of Werner's statue in L'Anse aux Meadows in Canada. This is unbelievable, but true. Thank you for this marvelous job, Kristine, and I also thank all other members of the Leif Eriksson International Foundation for the work they all have done together. You have all helped us to mark a connection between Europe and America from the year 1000.

Let us also today remember that in 1964 the U.S. Congress authorized President Lyndon B. Johnson to proclaim October 9 as Leif Eriksson Day in the U.S. The date is linked with the first ship of emigration that sailed from Norway to America, which left the city of Stavanger on October 9, 1825.

This departure from Norway really happened before Leif Eriksson attained the fame that linked him to the emigrated Scandinavian population in America.

Let us now briefly explore why Leif Eriksson became so important in America as well as Norway before 1900 and onward.

In the late 19th century, American historians started to group Americans as “Colonists” and “Real Americans.” The latter group included those whose relatives immigrated before 1776, and this honor was especially linked to the Pilgrim fathers.

In this context, Leif Eriksson became more and more important for Americans of Nordic origin. Leif now became a symbol telling that Norse Vikings had been in America long before the Pilgrim fathers and even 492 years prior to Christopher Columbus.

Leif Eriksson, who called himself a Greenlander, was also widely used after 1814 in the Norwegian nation-building process. Norway was at that time in a royal union with Sweden, and before that time the Norwegians had been governed from Copenhagen for more than 400 years.

Norway needed, in other words, a nation-building process after 1814 to create a nation with a language of its own and a history it could be proud of. The Norwegians therefore turned back to the Norse period in their history, when the Norwegian kings controlled most of the so-called Saga area, including Iceland and Greenland.

In the 1890s the person with the Norse name Leiv Eiriksson emerges, in Norwegian history research and textbooks used in schools, as a hero in a national understanding. Leiv Eiriksson is also given a face to look at in that time, thanks to Americans with a Scandinavian background.

1892 was the year of Columbus in America, and that year a sealed national competition for nine artists was carried out in Norway.

They were asked to paint a picture of Leif Eriksson on his way to Vinland. This painting was actually ordered by Americans of Scandinavian origin in Chicago.

The artist Christian Krogh won the competition. He painted a picture that was five meters long and three meters high with the title *Leif Finds America*. In 1893 this large painting was sent to the famous World's Fair exhibition in Chicago. In 1901 Chicago also unveiled a statue of Leif Eriksson, which was number three in the U.S.

If we look at Krogh's painting today, we can see that he follows the sagas of Olav Trygvason and Erik the Red. Both these sagas tell us that Leif Eriksson sailed out from Nidaros or Trondheim and found Vinland on his way back to Greenland. This saga text is also confirmed in a letter written by the archbishop Adam of Bremen in 1070.

There is another so-called Vinland Saga, which does not connect Leif Eriksson and Trondheim at all. This is the Saga of the Greenlanders, written in either Greenland or Northern Iceland. In this saga, Leif Eriksson's discovery of Vinland is described as a more planned voyage than in Erik the Red's and Snorre's sagas.

The Greenlanders' Saga tells us that the Icelander Bjarni Herulvsson sailed off course on his first voyage from Iceland to Greenland. He then reached a new country in the west that no one had ever seen before. But Bjarni and his men did not make any attempt to land there. Fifteen years after this, Leif Eriksson bought Bjarni's ship and set sail to the west in order to find the country Bjarni had seen. Leif finds it, goes ashore and becomes the

discoverer of Vinland. The distance from Greenland to America is very short if you sail across the Davis Strait, as Leif might have done in this saga version.

I am very proud of the fact that Anne Stine and Helge Ingstad also are central persons in our celebration here in Seattle today. They really started the process that made L'Anse aux Meadows a National Historic Site in Canada and a place also on the UNESCO World Heritage list. Anne Stine was a clever archaeologist, and she was responsible for the excavation in Newfoundland in the period from 1961 to 1968. Without doubt Anne, together with Helge Ingstad, followed the saga of the Greenlanders when they went from Greenland to Helluland, Markland and Vinland. L'Anse aux Meadows is, according to my view, the place where Leif Eriksson had his "Leifsbudir" or stalling place. Vinland is much more than Newfoundland. The excavations in L'Anse aux Meadows from 1973 to 1976 and in 2000 and 2002 have, in a way, confirmed this.

The first statue of Leif Eriksson in America—and the world—was unveiled in Boston in the year 1887. This was the first recognition of a non-British ethnic group by the Anglo-Saxon element. Thus the statue became a symbolic bond between America and Scandinavia, between pilgrims and Vikings. There are three main persons behind this first statue of Leif Eriksson: Rasmus Anderson, professor at the University of Wisconsin, Ole Bull, the world-famous Norwegian violinist, and Eben Norton Horsford, educator, inventor and chemist at Harvard University.

Anderson himself started the whole show by beginning to lecture about Leif Eriksson in 1869. He was at that time deeply influenced by the Romantic movement and the Danish scholar C.C. Rafn.

Ole Bull, on the other hand, had probably never heard of Leif Eriksson and the Norse discovery of America before he met Anderson. Bull saw, however, the enormous propaganda value of Leif Eriksson and a statue of him on American soil. When Bull moved to Boston in 1876, the Leif Eriksson campaign became an absorbing passion with him. The same year a memorial committee was established. Out of the 54 committee members, Anderson, Bull and Horsford were the real leaders.

Without these three men, the first American statue of Leif Eriksson would not have been a reality in Boston in 1887.

As mentioned earlier, Rasmus Anderson was professor at the University of Wisconsin, and he succeeded in erecting a statue of Leif Eriksson in Milwaukee some weeks after the first statue was unveiled in Boston in 1887. Joseph Gilbert was the donor of the second statue of Leif Eriksson in America, and it was easy for Professor Anderson to say yes to a copy.

As a result of the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago, a Viking ship museum was established in the city and, as mentioned before, the third statue in the world of Leif Eriksson was unveiled there in 1901.

Duluth also has a replica of a boat called *Leif Eriksson* that was built in Korgen, Norway. This 42-foot replica sailed from Bergen to Boston in 1926. In June 1927 this ship was greeted by a crowd of about 10,000 when it arrived in Duluth. In 1929 it was purchased by the Norwegian-American Bert Enger and placed in a newly established Leif Eriksson Park that is still there. In 1956 a Leif Eriksson statue was also unveiled in this park.

Seattle and Newfoundland have also copies of Viking ships. The *Nordic Spirit*, now at the Nordic Heritage Museum in Seattle, was made around 1800 for fishermen in the northern part of Norway. It underwent restoration in 2008–09 as part of the centennial observation of the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Expedition that took place in 1909. This small “Viking ship” could not sail from Norway to America, but it is constructed in the same way and is a replica of a Northlands boat.

The larger Viking ships in the U.S. today are kept in Chicago and Duluth. Canada has also a large Viking ship at L’Anse aux Meadows that was built in Iceland just before 2000.

There is no denying that the three copies of the Werner statue, from Trondheim via Greenland to Canada, never would have been where they are today without the enormous work of the Leif Erikson International Foundation. I therefore have to thank you all again for the marvelous job you have been doing to make this new saga trip from Europe to America possible. Thank you also for inviting me on this wonderful Seattle trip to make this keynote address about Leif Eriksson while standing here in this marvelous new place for August Werner’s famous statue from 1962.