

Norsk Høstfest, Minot 2006

Norwegian Landscapes in Retrospect

Ribbon Cutting Ceremony, Leif Eriksson Hall, October 11, 0915 a.m.

Dear friends, Norwegian Americans and fellow Norwegians.

It is a great pleasure for me to attend Norsk Høstfest here in Minot. I know that most of you are here because you have a special interest in Norway and the other Scandinavian countries.

Norsk Høstfest is indeed a clear evidence of a great interest in Norwegian traditions and customs. I also think you bear in mind memories or imaginations of the past and present Norwegian landscape.

The Norwegian landscape is definitely an important part of the identity shared by all Norwegians. The landscape also reveals traces of former generations. The landscape changes naturally and changing times mark the landscape.

Our surroundings reflect the impacts of political priorities and economic driving forces. Agriculture plays the key role in the development of landscape in Norway. It is therefore of great importance to understand the interaction between agricultural policies and landscape changes.

The effects of these processes can be described and documented statistically. But we have recognized that it is only through visualisation the consequences can be really understood.

This photographic exhibition will remind us of the landscapes of the 19th and the 20th century. Using a method based on finding old photographs and then comparing these with photos from today, taken from exactly the same spot, we can provide a visual demonstration of changes that have taken place. The photographs span 125 years of landscape history.

What might be interesting, and very different from the Mid-West, is that in Norway we find landscapes where the changes over the last 100 years are surprisingly small. We can find the same buildings on pictures from 2005 as we can see on pictures from the nineteenth century.

This is to a large extent a result of political priorities in Norway. Norwegian government has in the last decades developed a regional and agricultural policy with strong economic support to keep up and develop agriculture and local communities in all parts of the country.

But in general, landscape changes occur ever faster and are often more extensive than before, making new and bigger challenges for today's politicians. The changes may be considered as positive or negative, depending on the observers' personal point of view.

The landscape is an important part of the nation's identity and holds aesthetic, biological and cultural qualities. The landscape changes and its consequences are really a very important environmental issue. Therefore, the Government I am member of, will develop an active cultural landscape policy for the future.

I am proud of bringing you this exhibition. As a Norwegian American, you can in this exhibition make a travel back to the landscape your forefathers left as emigrants. But you can at the same time make a travel to modern Norway to-day.

I hope you will find the stories about landscape change in Norway interesting, thought-provoking or that you will just simply enjoy the photographs!

Thank you very much.