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Norway Day, May 17, 1893 at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago

This was the first of the special national days, and proved a great success. The 17th of May was chosen because it is observed in Norway as a national holiday in celebration of its Declaration of Independence from Denmark, May 17, 1814. This event, which put an end to a subjection of more than four hundred years, compelled Sweden to form a union on terms of equality. The Norsemen of Chicago therefore, re-enforced by many visiting countrymen from the Northwest and the adjoining States, in which the Norwegian element in population is a large factor, entered with patriotic zest into the celebration of this day. The general attendance was greater than at any time since the opening of the Fair, over thirty thousand people being present.

The dispersion of more than ten thousand Norwegians through the grounds, all gayly decorated with their national colors and wearing badges bearing the legend "May 17," gave a distinctly Norwegian coloring to everything. The program included a parade by the Norwegian societies of Chicago, a visit to the Norwegian building and exhibit, and an entertainment in Festival Hall. The parade, a picturesque feature of which was a company of young girls in peasant costume, attracted much attention as it moved along the route, with its three thousand men in line and with its flags all flying, among which were thirty fine silk banners. Arrived at Festival Hall, which had been decorated for the occasion with the colors of Norway, Sweden, and the United States, the huge audience filled the great building to overflowing.

The exercises, which were entirely in the Norwegian tongue, consisted of patriotic addresses, singing of national Songs, and playing by the Exposition orchestra of music by Norwegian composers, in which that of Grieg had an important part. Royal-Commissioner Ravn presided, and near him were seated on the platform Governor Knute Nelson, of Minnesota; Prof. Julius E. Olsen, of the University of Wisconsin; and the Hon. Rasmus B. Anderson, of Wisconsin, ex-Minister to Denmark. Prof. Olsen delivered the opening address on The 17th of May — Norway's Day of Independence, the Hon. Rasmus B. Anderson spoke on Norway of Today, and Governor Nelson paid an eloquent tribute to his countrymen in the United States. A telegram from New York announced that the sixty thousand Norwegians of that city were also celebrating the day. The Exposition grounds were brilliantly illuminated in the evening, and a banquet was given by Commissioner Ravn to distinguished fellow countrymen and other guests.