

## The Battle for Bread



*Courtesy: Norsk folkemuseum*

During the years following 1815 the population of Norway grew at a rate never before experienced. The mortality rate dropped, so more children reached maturity. From 1810 to 1865 the population of the country increased from 882,000 to 1,7 million.

Great numbers of children were born in the 1820s. When these children grew up and had to support themselves in the 1840s, they were forced to join the ranks of the unemployed until they could find some sort of job. There was “a battle for bread”. In the 1850s new flocks of children were born and entered the labor market as young adults in the 1870s and 1880s.

Agriculture was the primary industry in Norway at that time. The dramatic growth in population demanded that available land had to be exploited as much as possible. During the first half of the nineteenth century agricultural production and the production in the fishing, shipping and lumber industries, increased greatly, but not sufficient to keep everyone above minimum subsistence level.

This is why 78,000 Norwegians emigrated to America between 1825 and 1865 hoping to make their fortunes.

## America Fever



*Courtesy: Norsk Folkemuseum*

From 1836 on emigration from Norway became a yearly phenomenon. That summer two brigs, *Den norske Klippe* and *Norden*, sailed from Stavanger with a total of 167 people. After 1843 more than 1,000 Norwegians emigrated every year.

“America letters,” communications back home from emigrated kin, former neighbors, and acquaintances, were the most common source of information about America. Famed writers like Gjert Gregoriussen Hovland, who emigrated in 1831 and settled in Kendall, told of equality and opportunity in America and gave advice and guidance. There were also guidebooks and personal visits by emigrated countrymen, such as Knud Andersen Slogvig. He served as leader on the brig *Norden* that sailed from Stavanger in 1836. The “America fever” as people called the urge to go to America, was spread by such literature and by the pressures from emigrated kin and friends to join them in America.

The migration moved north from Stavanger along the coast and inland to the upland communities. Most of them came from the inner fjord districts of western Norway and the central mountain districts. They were mainly farmers who had sold their small land holdings to finance their trip and younger sons of independent farmers unable to continue in familiar pursuits. In the 1850s and later, cotters and members of the lower classes in rural society joined the movement overseas. The emigrants were mainly family groups intending to find a permanent home in America.

## On Brigs and Barks



*Nordens Dronning built in the USA in 1856. In 1871 she left Stavanger with 398 emigrants on board. Courtesy: Stavanger Maritime Museum*

Most parties of emigrants after 1836 crossed the Atlantic on Norwegian brigs and barks. Kristiania (Oslo), Bergen and Stavanger became the most important ports of departure. Some went to the New World via Gothenburg on Swedish or American ships that transported iron, and others left from Le Havre in France.

During the 1840s Norwegian emigrant shipping companies came into existence. The repeal of the British Navigation Acts in 1849 permitted Norwegian ships to transport emigrants to Quebec and lumber from there back to Great Britain.

Almost all immigrants toward the end of the 1840s had landed in New York, but between 1850 and 1865 most went by Norwegian sailing ships to Quebec and from there to the United States. Between 1854 and 1865 90 percent of all Norwegian emigrants took this route. The voyage across was long, lasting two months or more depending on weather and wind, and strenuous, with unsanitary conditions, illness, and often several deaths during the crossing.