

Carl G. O. Hansen

by Odd S. Lovoll

Carl Gustav Otto Hansen was born March 16, 1871 in Trondheim, Norway. He died June 10, 1960 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He was a Norwegian-American newspaperman, musician and writer.

Parents: Head clerk Sivert Christian Hansen (1839 - 1872) and Marit Megrund (1842 - 1927).

Married August 12, 1892 with Amalie Marie Edsten (November 20, 1871 – April 22, 1945), daughter of furniture merchant Aaron Henry Edsten (1837-1917) and Johanne Larsdatter Rognerud (1829 -1916).

Carl G. O. Hansen, which became his pen name, was for many years a central figure in the Norwegian colony in Minneapolis, working as a journalist and choir director and as a driving force in the flourishing Norwegian-American social scene. In his 1956 book My Minneapolis he gave an insightful detailed description of the town, the Norwegian element there over the past century and his own activities since moving to the emerging city in 1882.

Hansen was born in Trondheim, the youngest of five children. He lost his father when he was 16 months old. In 1881 his mother took him and the other children to Walnut Grove, Minnesota, where her parents and siblings had emigrated in 1879. In the spring of 1882 she took the children with her to Minneapolis, where she supported herself – as she had done in Norway after she was widowed – by producing knitwear. In 1887 she married Halver Olson from Verdalen.

Staying with an uncle and aunt, Hansen was struck by what a Norwegian environment Minneapolis was. "My aunt," he writes, "sent one of the kids out to do some shopping. Some things were to be purchased from Haugen, some from Tharaldsen and some from Olsen & Bakke It certainly sounded like it was a Norwegian city." It was in this heavily Norwegian immigrant community that Hansen made his mark and served as a leading personality. His first job, when he was 12 years old, was as a clerk in one of the nearby shops.

Other than three years of study in Latin, Greek, history and composition at Augsburg Seminary in Minneapolis from 1887 to 1889, Hansen was self-educated. He worked for a time in a print shop and later opened his own place.

In 1897 he found work as a translator at the *Minneapolis Tidende*, a newspaper that published daily and weekly editions in Norwegian and had a wide circulation outside of Minnesota. It was here that he would work, first on the editorial staff and from 1923 onwards as the chief editor until the newspaper went out of business in 1935.

As editor he wisely kept the *Minneapolis Tidende* neutral on questions of religion, displayed no party colors and supported no candidates. He was the editor of the newspaper *Skandinaven* in Chicago from 1935 until 1937 when he became its entertainment editor. From 1939 until his retirement in 1954 he was editor of the *Sons of Norway*, a magazine for the organization of the same name. In 1945 he published a detailed history of the Sons of Norway from its establishment in 1895 until 1945.

Hansen had a great interest in music, especially in male choral singing. As early as 1887 he was a member of the *Nordmennes Sangforening*, and from 1912 to 1944 he directed the Norwegian Glee Club of Minneapolis while also being actively involved in the Norwegian Singers Association of America. Starting in 1898 he edited a music section in the *Minneapolis Tidende*, where he especially kept readers informed of the Nordic music scene. He also arranged for reviews of Norwegian literature, and the newspaper had contributions on Norwegian cultural life and community issues in general. He himself wrote short pieces for a variety of publications about subjects that included the Norwegian-American press, pioneer days, and music.

Hansen proposed teaching Norwegian in high schools and at the University of Minnesota. He was a keen advocate for the recognition of October 9th as an official Leif Eriksson Day, took part in the annual May 17th celebrations and was an active participant in Norwegian social life. He was a onetime president of the Norwegian Society of America and a founding member of the Cod Club, a dining club for men.

Carl G. O. Hansen was made knight, first class, in the royal order of St. Olav in 1923 and received the St. Olav medal in 1939.

Works

Books

- *History Of The Sons Of Norway. An American fraternal organization of men and women of Norwegian birth or extraction*, Minneapolis 1944.
- *Sons of Norway Songbook* (with F. Wick), Minneapolis 1948.
- *My Minneapolis. A Chronicle of What Has Been Learned and Observed About the Norwegians in Minneapolis Through One Hundred Years*, Minneapolis 1956.

Posthumous Papers

- “Carl Gustav Otto Hansen Papers”, five boxes on file at the Norwegian-American Historical Association (NAHA), Northfield, Minnesota.

Sources and literature

- *HEH* 1955
- C. G. O. Hansen: *My Minneapolis*, 1956 (see above in Works section)
- various articles in Norwegian-American newspapers
- archival material at the NAHA (see above in Works section)