

## **Manor Houses, Mansions and the Norwegian National Museum Concept. Commemorations of ‘the 400-year Night’**

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In Norway, manor houses, mansions and similar phenomena are repressed and underestimated, representing a culture which was not suited for Norwegian nation-building in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In its wider context the narrative of ‘the 400-year night’ has not been very central in the traditional narrative found in Norwegian museums. The history of manor houses and mansions can be divided into three phases; from the Medieval until 1660, from the Absolute monarchy until early nineteenth century and from early nineteenth century until to day. This article will focus museums, monuments and nation-building from the perspective of the backyard of national museums. It is represented by the narrative of a manor house, or rather a princely residence dating from the seventeenth century and turned into a monument and museum at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although the perspective is local, the questions and further work will hopefully be relevant to the complex and dissimilar group of manor houses and mansions on a national level.

## Introduction

Was it not one's plain duty to preserve visible memories from past times, and would it not be right to present to the public a picture of past generations daily life, in order to strengthen their national consciousness.<sup>1</sup>

The quote is taken from an article in the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History's (Norsk Folkemuseum) yearbook in 1945, which was dedicated the institutions 50 year's anniversary. Attributed to the initiator of the museum, Hans Aall, it illustrates not only his strong calling, but as well echoes a characteristic trait of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century conception of the tasks of a national museum in Norway. In 1894 Aall was travelling the valleys of mid-Norway searching for folk art objects. On his way he had his eyes opened to the fact that there were more to be rescued than artistic culture. He was confronted with 'a whole culture dissolving, and on its way to destruction and oblivion'. The same autumn he managed to gather people with influence in academic and governmental circles, and before Christmas they had founded Norsk Folkemuseum, a museum category which formed a prototype for cultural history museums in Norway until after the 2nd World War.<sup>2</sup>

This article will focus museums, monuments and nation-building from the perspective of another fragmented and forgotten culture. Represented by the narrative of a manor house or rather a princely residence dating from the seventeenth century and turned into a monument and museum at the beginning of the twentieth century. In Norway, manor houses, mansions and similar phenomena are repressed and underestimated, representing a culture which was not suited for Norwegian nation-building in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In its wider context the narrative of 'the 400-year night' has not been very central in the traditional narrative found in Norwegian museums. The history of manor houses and mansions can be divided into three phases; from the Medieval until 1660, from the Absolute Monarchy until early nineteenth century and from early nineteenth century until to day. Although my perspective is local, the questions and further work will hopefully be relevant to the complex and dissimilar group of Norwegian manor houses and mansions on a national level.

My starting point is as curator in charge of the project of restoring the Princely Residence of Larvik. It soon turned out that there is more into it than examining the condition of the solid walls made of timber and layers of colour built upon each others for centuries. Apart of having a complex restoration history, and as well being the subject of conflicting opinions and attitudes during the years, the building also have museum functions which to some extent are supposed to be continued.<sup>3</sup> Therefore we also need to plan for the re-organisation of the museum concept, which turned out to be complicated as well. Firstly, it was difficult to say exactly what constituted the museum. Should it be understood as a historic house converted to a museum? Or was it primarily a monument commemorating important historic events or persons?

And in that case; was it on a local, regional or national level? Or was the explanation a local cultural history museum? On one hand what we need to do is the usual museum job of new documentation, registration and interpretation in order to understand the building and its context. On the other hand we need to take into consideration the social, cultural and perhaps

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1 Kjellberg, 1945:2.

2 Pedersen, Roede, Lie Christensen 2003.

3 Aske and Brønne 2004.

political aspects and include reflections on values, institutional conditions and cultural meaning in society into the process.<sup>4</sup>

The broad approach opens up for a variety of sources presenting variations over the theme princely residence, monument and museum; notes, letters, instructions, reports, magazines, newspapers, works of history and topography and the like. At this stage the situation is more of a pre-study, rather than the actual study, exploring themes rather than actually analysing them in depth.

### 1660–1805. Memorializing the Dual Monarchy of Denmark-Norway

The challenge presented by this period is actually to understand how and why the building was erected. Today The Princely Residence of Larvik is known as one of the largest profane wooden buildings in Norway, with rare decorative paintings carried out by artists' who usually performed their skills in the halls and chambers of the king and aristocracy in royal Copenhagen. Even though the term 'manor house' has been applied for almost 200 years it is misleading referring to the dwelling house of the feudal lord of a manor. A more precise term would be 'the princely residence', which was the term actually used by the owners in the seventeenth and eighteenth century.

The contact between the aristocratic milieu in Denmark and the Residence in Larvik<sup>5</sup> was direct. The first owner and his successors belonged to the highest social rank in Denmark-Norway<sup>6</sup>. The elected king Frederik 3 (1609-1670) strengthened his position during the wars with Sweden from 1657 to 1660, and in 1660-1661 hereditary and absolutist monarchy was introduced. The monarch's illegitimate son was knighted in 1656 and Ulrik Frederik Gyldenløve (1638–1704) was included into the inner circle of the Danish court, and he was also one of the king's close allies during the wars with the Swedish. In 1671 king Christian 5th (1666–1699) created a new order of nobility of earls and baronets open to the bourgeoisie. One of the first to be appointed was his own half brother, Gyldenløve, who was also Governor of Norway. His high position among the aristocracy in Denmark was reflected in his representational mansion in Copenhagen. The Earldom of Larvik was erected for Gyldenløve by his brother king Christian 5th in 1671.<sup>7</sup> The town of Larvik was founded the very same year as a direct result of the absolutist Danish monarchy, and continued to be Danish domain until 1814. The first Earl of Larvik, rarely paid visit to his residential town; however his Residence in Larvik surrounded by a magnificent formal garden reminded people on his existence, his princely power and status within the new upper class.<sup>8</sup>

David Cressy describes how governments in early modern England made calculated use of national memory for dynastic, political, religious and cultural purposes.<sup>9</sup> The following paragraph gives a glimpse into how Larvik and the Residence was the spot for establishing public memory of the king as ruler of the dual monarchy of Denmark-Norway in the seventeenth and eighteenth century.

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4 Amundsen and Brenna 2003.

5 Larvik is a coastal town approx 140 km south of the capital Oslo.

6 A brief summary on Norway's union with Denmark is available at Norway portal – Ministry of Foreign Affairs <http://www.norway.org/history/upto1814/>.

7 All together two earldoms and one barony were erected in Norway during the Absolute monarchy.

8. Blanning, T. W. C 2002. Gives an Presentation of 'the old regime' and its representational culture in *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture*.

9 Gillis 1994:61.

### *The Kings Entry*

One of the Residence's representative functions was to shelter kings, queens, counts and ambassadors at the ceremonial arrangement of what is called 'a joyous entry'<sup>10</sup>; the first visit of the ruler to one of his cities in the realm. During the actual period the residence was the scene for entries four times, in 1685, 1733, 1749 and 1788.<sup>11</sup> In local history the events are presented as colourful fragments from an exotic and remote time, and with no further explanation or contextualisation. However, in literature on baroque festivals<sup>12</sup> a king's entry is understood as a particular kind of festival taking place partly for the public and partly as private court entertainment. Typical traits for a festival are prayers and sermons, pageants, cannonades, music, drinking, feasting, firework, spectacles, firework, bonfires and joyful ringing of bells.

In 1746 the king Fredrik 5th succeeded his father Christian 6th and three years later he visited Norway. The prompts and instructions for the entry festival in Larvik clearly came from above, probably from the king and the government itself, and 'descending through the matrix of command'<sup>13</sup> leaving it up to the local officials to find practical solutions based on local resources and economy. The Residence was close to and in the axis of the main street with an open space in front of it, and presented enough space for the public to gather and to celebrate. The structure of the Residence and the town very closely linked together can easily be read, echoing the actual meaning of 'the Residence' and the political unity of the city and the court.<sup>14</sup> The pageant was one of the main public features of the festival. Late in the afternoon it moved slowly towards the Residence with the groups important to the prosperity of the small town, but as well to the monarchy: The busy business community, the miners, workers from the iron mill and the saw mill dressed in costumes or carrying symbols of their occupation. They were gathered *to be seen, not to see*. He that *saw* was the king, standing on the balcony in front of the Residence. The king would surly observe the representation of a small mountain gnome from the deep mines singing and making faces, and as well a savage dancing a rapid mountain dance.

'The court festivals served to represent symbolically 'a dynasty, a ruler, or a court by giving public expressions to the significance and the power embodied in these persons'<sup>15</sup>. The royal entry was a most effective form of royal propaganda 'neither royal proclamations nor official tracts could move the hearts of the people as much as ceremonies in which the king appeared in person amidst a décor carefully designed to project his idealized personality and the nature of his rule'.<sup>16</sup> In Larvik the king appeared in front of the public as ruler of the monarchy's most successful early-modern industries, and he added to peoples memory the absolute monarchy's Enlightenment inspired cosmopolite definition of Denmark-Norway as native country represented by typical Norwegian folk elements. Attaching national symbols or expressions to situations of allegiance and loyalty to the dual monarchy was absolutist propaganda at its peak.<sup>17</sup>

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10 Knecht 2004:19.

11 See e.g. Johnson (ed) 1923 and Swensen 1966:1-20.

12 See e.g. Wade 1996 and J. R. Mulryne, Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly. Margaret Shrewing (eds.) 2004.

13 Cressy 1994:63.

14 Daniels 2004:34 The capital city of a territory is called in German, the *Residentz* (that is the prince's seat) and the city and the court are, politically, one.

15 Daniel, 2004:33.

16 Knecht 2004:20.

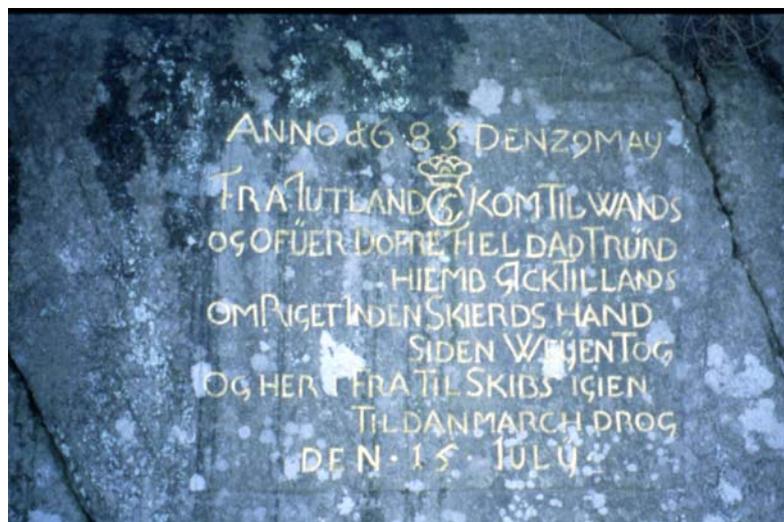
17 Rian, Øystein 2003. The Norwegian historian Øystein Rian explains how the the Danish government was very aware of the Norwegians national love for their country, and how this was actually used in propaganda to strengthen loyalty to the dual monarchy and its ruler.

The royal entries were commemorated in festival books, specially designed coins and medals, tapestries maps and drawings. In Larvik a local alternative of memorializing the events was invented, and verses were carved into a cliff opposite the Residence. The golden inscriptions paid tribute to the monarch *and* the national traits like steep mountains, deep forests, blank waters, purity and bravery. This kind of public memory was clearly a political construction, derived from the needs of the dynastic authorities.<sup>18</sup> 'Its primary features were imposed from above and mediated through magistrates and ministers, before being adopted and internalized by the people at large.'<sup>19</sup> And in the case of Larvik, like in early-modern England, we know very little about how the ritual commemoration of the elite was modified, contested and shaped by popular culture. In the introduction to *Commemorations* J. R. Gillies repeats Pierre Nora who:

Argues that prior to the nineteenth century memory was such a pervasive part of life - the "milieu of memory" is what he (Nora) calls it – that people were hardly aware of its existence. Only the aristocracy, the church and the monarchical state had need of institutionalized memory. Outside the elite classes, archives, genealogies, family portraits and biographies were extremely rare; and there was no vast bureaucracy of memory as there is today. Ordinary people felt the past to be so much a part of the present that they perceived no urgent need to record, objectify and preserve it.<sup>20</sup>

However, even in its own time the Princely Residence appeared as a monument carefully designed to commemorate the absolute monarchy of Denmark-Norway and its ruling kings.

**Fig. 1.** Inscription celebrating King Christian 5<sup>th</sup> of Denmark-Norway 1685.



### 1805–1900: Irregular Memories and Hidden History

The 434 years of union between Denmark and Norway came to an end in 1814. The Danish king was forced to cede Norway to the king of Sweden. During a short intermezzo Norway took the opportunity to declare independence and adopted a Norwegian constitution based on

18 Oluffsen 1791. In 1790 the Danish agricultural economist Oluf Oluffsen visited Larvik. He refers to a marble monument commemorating the last Earl Christian Conrad Danneskold Laurvig and how the monument had been stormed by the mob.

19 Cressy 1994:71.

20 Gillis 1994:5 f.

American and French models. It was formally adopted on the 14<sup>th</sup> of May 1814 and the Danish crown prince Christian Frederik was elected king on may 17<sup>th</sup> 1814. The same autumn Norway was forced into union with Sweden lasting until 1905. This period gave rise to the Norwegian romantic nationalism cultural movement as Norwegians sought to define and express a distinct national character. It was as a result of this movement the long period in union with Denmark was referred to as the ‘400-year night’.

In 1805 the last earl of Larvik was no longer able to take the economic responsibility for his earldom, and it was handed back to the king. The earl, Frederik Ludvig Ahlefeldt-Laurvig kept the Residence as private property until 1813, when he arranged for his highest officials to buy it. Some years after, the town decided to purchase the building for various purposes: Classrooms for private and public schools, flats for the headmaster and the vicar, a theatre and last but not least premises for the new town hall. In order to finance the refurbishments, remaining objects from the era of the earls were sold on two auctions. The gardens were rented out to a local gardener and later laid out for sites to public buildings like schools, prisons and a sports-hall. It seems like the town’s motivation for taking over the building was solely functional, as it could give space to house functions essential for a town with newly won independence.

‘History is serious matter, memories are of a different kind’<sup>21</sup> – and it seems like the memorializing of kings, which helped shaping the identity of the earls (as noble aristocrats) fragmented. The representation of ‘the old regime’ lost its power. As a consequence the Residence could no longer function as symbol and monument. Or could it be that in some way irregular memories and narratives survived among groups in society?

One obvious option was amongst the group of men who, even though they were strained and provoked by the aristocratic power of the earls, as well balanced their professions, culture and economy upon it. In Larvik as in many other Norwegian towns the years following 1814 was a difficult time. Firms and businesses faced liquidation, and made way for new investors, a new generation of capitalists who often came from foreign countries.<sup>22</sup> Could it be that they deliberately rescued the Residence (as this old generation still kept high political positions in the local society) from falling into the hands of ‘new money’? The old building was clearly not suited for its new functions, but in the course of 100 years it was renovated, reorganised, maintained into something that could fulfil the wishes and needs of a democratic town, building its new identity. The transition can be traced in municipal executive work when refurbishment was claimed for, either from the headmaster or from the vicar.<sup>23</sup> Whether or not it also represented something more is uncertain, but should not be excluded from further investigations.

Going through other sources, examples tell that the towns aristocratic past was not completely forgotten:

One example goes back to 1796 and was written by the vicar Andreas Schelven (1738–99). This was the very first printed description given of the earldom called: ‘Noget om Laurvigs Grevskab I Agershus Stift’. It was published by ‘Det topographiske Selskab’ (The topographic society). The Society’s ambition was to map Norway. The members signed a declaration that they would contribute to encourage the society, and thereby give an example of patriotic zealousness to the best of the native country. In his letters to the society Schelven declare patriotic attitudes and says he is honoured to be a member. In 1798 he handed in a description of Laurvig Earldom; its administration, history, geographic outreach, rivers and lakes and so on. In an attachment he outlined the family tree for the founder or Laurvigen

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21 Eriksen 2000:5.

22 Eliassen 2007:243 ff.

23 Hesselberg 1921. The Residence is mentioned almost every year and sometimes several times 1821–1900.

Earldom, known as one of the earliest examples of genealogy in local history tradition. Whether Schelven did this on his own initiative is not known. The fact that he was employed by the earl himself, who had helped him when he was a young student in Copenhagen by giving him the position as 'Informator' (house teacher) for his youngest daughter (Schelven actually lived in the earl's palace), might have had some influence on his pioneer work.<sup>24</sup>

Another example is found in *Norsk Penning-Magazin* in 1836. The magazine was an early example of press freedom and the cultural movement growing stronger in the second half of the century. It was meant for public education and the authors were officials, theologians and students. An objective and historic review of the Earldom and its owners was given. The Residence was described as a building which had the honour of giving shelter to royal and princely persons, however in 1821 the citizens of Laurvig bought it for the purpose of town hall, and flats for the vicar and the parish clerk.<sup>25</sup>

The shift from being a feudal to a democratic town had an aspect of national rapture to it represented by the editor of the first local news paper in 1834 and his rage towards any remnant of former Danish dominion. Hans Christian Hansen was an outspoken representative of the so called 'wergelandske strømninger' and exploited every opportunity to mock the town's aristocratic past, and those who showed any affection towards it.<sup>26</sup>

What about local people's memories and opinions about the building; stories told by those who worked in the garden, kitchen and the princely chambers? It seems like those who actually lived and worked in the building were the ones influenced and reminded of the building's past. Among these were students, teachers and the vicar telling ghost stories about 'the Earl' and one of his mourning and abandoned women.<sup>27</sup> Local 'memory work' did not constitute enough power to turn commemoration into a monument, or say a museum. So where did that power come from?

J. R. Gillis says that 'nineteenth-century commemorations were largely for, but not of, the people. Fallen kings and martyred revolutionary leaders were remembered, generals had their memorials, but ordinary participants in war and revolution were consigned to oblivion'.<sup>28</sup> The Norwegian kings and heroes brought back from the long gone past were not Danish kings and noble men from the fifteenth century, and definitively not those who had represented the 'dual monarchy' in a very tangible way in Larvik. On a national level the consciousness of cultural heritage was in its early awakening Norway the 1840's, first and foremost among prominent persons and the upper class and under strong influence of the humanistic science eager to study Norwegian history as a key to national identity. It was an urgent political issue to proclaim Norwegians with an independent history dating as far back as possible.<sup>29</sup> From a national cultural heritage point of view, the old earldoms of Vestfold were of particular interest, namely because of the number of medieval churches and not at least its archaeological sites. From 1860 and onwards many hundreds of mounds, the majority dating from Iron Age were excavated, crowned by the Oseberg find in 1904. The objects were brought to the capital Christiania for further conservation and for the creation of one of the great narratives about the Norwegian Viking. At the end of the century five archaeological museums were established, followed by the 1905 Act for the Preservation of Antiquities. Responsibility for ancient cultural monuments was clearly assigned to the museums. In 1844

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24 Fagerli 1998.

25 *Norsk Penning-Magazin*. 1836.

26 *Langeland* 1953:227-236.

27 *Knudtzon* 1945:94.

28 Gillis 1994:9.

29 Ågotnes 2000.

‘Fortidsminnforeningen’ (The Society for the Preservation of Ancient Monuments) was founded. Its purpose of was to

..discover, examine and maintain Norwegian cultural heritage monuments, in particular those which could enlighten the Cultural Awareness of the People and their Appreciation of Art from the Past, as well as to make these Objects known to the General Public through Illustration and Description.<sup>30</sup>

From 1905 and onwards the conservation of architectural heritage became the primary task of ‘Fortidsminneforeningen’, accompanied by a new interest in the rich architectural culture from the centuries after the medieval era.<sup>31</sup> In Larvik the magic sleep was soon over, but to what kind of reality was the Princely Residence about to wake up to?

### 1900–1940: The Re-Construction of a Monument

In this particular case work has been more complicated than usual because the building’s interiors dates from two or rather three different styles, one hidden behind the other, all of them equal of importance, layers upon layers of paint, distorted and often damaged. (...) The premise was to restore the building, not ‘repair’ or ‘clean’, as this would have made a chaotic ruin. But to reconstruct with consistent palette of colours.<sup>32</sup>

In July 1929 the decorative painter and conservator Domenico Erdmann<sup>33</sup> left Larvik for good. His merit had been to restore the Residence, at this point of time the name had shifted to the more common: *the Manor House*. He visited the building for the first time in 1919, and in his journals he refers to the project as one of his most prominent and difficult.<sup>34</sup> In the years gone as well in those to come debate flourished on a national level as well as in the local society. Erdmann disagreed with Riksantikvaren (the Directorate for Cultural Heritage) on restoration principles and with the director of the Norwegian Cultural History Museum on extradition of cultural heritage material. The latter fought to acquire examples from the Manor House, but the temperamental Erdman never gave in.<sup>35</sup>

On a local level strong hatred towards Denmark and everything that tasted ‘Danish’ in general can be registered in Larvik, but despite all the different ambitions pushing and pulling in various directions the Manor House’s transformation into a museum was forwarded. I have found it helpful to apply some of the perspectives from Arne Bugge Amundsens article *Museum som fortelling: Sted, rom og fortellerunivers* when looking closer into this process. Particularly the presented alternative:

to see how museums are arenas for more or less official narratives about themselves, their activities, and their characteristics. What ‘is history about’ - seen through the ‘eyes’ of the cultural history museum. This approach does not only imply how museums tell about themselves, but as well one should look at how they legitimize or authorize their own lines and their own identity.<sup>36</sup>

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30 The Society for the Preservation of Ancient Monuments: Available at: <http://www.fortidsminneforeningen.no/English>.

31 Fett 1912.

32 Erdmann D.J. 1926. 1921-28. Journal for restaureringsarbeidene. Nasjonalbiblioteket.

33 Erdman was the first conservator employed by Riksantikvaren (The Directorate for Cultural Heritage). The bureau, was founded in 1913.

34 Erdmann D.J. 1921-28. Journal for restaureringsarbeidene. Nasjonalbiblioteket.

35 Letter from Hansteen to Bødtker 18/2. 1925. Håndskriftsamlingen, Nasjonalbiblioteket.

36 Bugge Amundsen 2003:72.

In 1901 a new epoch started for the Manor House. At last, after having outlived several fire onsets, hundreds of pupils slamming doors and drawing graffiti on the walls, and freezing residents always in process of rebuilding and adding more and more layers to cover up insufficiencies, something happened which focused the building and its history. This year the Manor House was mentioned when the city council discussed whether to participate in the National Cultural History Exhibition in Christiania (Oslo). Those who forwarded the case in Larvik were good citizens, and with an outspoken historical interest. They urged the exhibition was of particular interest to Larvik and proposed that the following should be put on display:

Characteristic lists of inhabitants with name and position, dwelling etc from before or after the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Descriptions of houses, valuations, maps, curious conveyances, old costumes and uniforms for the police and firearms, costumes from night watchman, objects like drums, bells, and 'Morgenstjerner'. Treasures from the churches and old chasubles. Copies of rooms perhaps with a kitchen, and with motives taken from the manor house, the old hospital or other houses. The rooms should have moulding boards, doors and windows and iron stoves from Fritzøe iron mill. Useful and decorative objects, porcelain, paintings of ships and portraits. Furniture made by the local craftsmen and silver from local goldsmith.<sup>37</sup>

In 1904 the vicar Torbjørn Frølich in Christiania wrote to architect Schirmer in Fortidsminneforeningen and told him about "the so called Manor House of Larvik, a building supposed to be erected by Gyldenløve".<sup>38</sup> Another 12 year after this incident the Magistrat and Chief Constable in Larvik, appealed to his good citizens for the founding of a town museum. One of the buildings suitable to house a museum was the former Residence, now the 'Manor House'. A committee was appointed and besides the protection of cultural heritage in the town and surrounding rural districts, their ambition was to take Larvik to the same cultural level as its neighbour town.<sup>39</sup> The first paragraph in the museums statutes was:

To build a museum for Larvik and its surroundings. Its purpose is to collect and protect everything which might shed light on the town's and the rural district's culture in times past and particularly to protect and if possible bring 'The Manor House' back to its original being.<sup>40</sup>

The initiative had already gained support from Riksantikvaren. He suggested that the museum should be built on local traditions, the obvious site was the Manor House and it would also be worthwhile to try to reconstruct the surrounding garden. The following times to come were busy as the plan was to open the museum for the town's 250 years anniversary. An important element in the preparations for the celebration was the historic work on the town's history. The task was assigned to the historian Oscar Albert Johnson. In the instructions for the chapter on 'The Manor House' the editor instructed:

I kindly as you to collect all your sketches notes and articles about the manor house, at least the knowledge important to the town at its citizens. I suppose that manorial life has been followed with anxious attention form the townspeople in olden times, therefore

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37 Hesselberg 1920:66.

38 Riksantikvarens arkiv.

39 Østlands-Posten, 8. mars 1916.

40 Ketilsson 1966: 4.

culture history is relevant, and however you should make a point of the side of manorial life facing the town.<sup>41</sup>

The work was published in 20 booklets in 1921 and completed in 1923. The genealogy, the county and the dual monarchy had been subject to topographic and historic works already, however for the first time the Residence/the Manor House was focused as an important element. With no ambition of analysing the text in depth, much weight was put on the Earl Gyldenløve, as individual and his importance to the town. One chapter was: 'Gyldenløve's town' and another: 'Social and cultural conditions during the Gyldenløve Era'. Ulrik Frederik Gyldenløve already had a special status both in public commemoration and history works in Norway. Even though he was Danish; he was referred to as friend of the peasants and for his reform of Norwegian legislation. Legends were told about him, and to a certain degree he might be accepted as a hero to be commemorated – on a national level.<sup>42</sup>

The 17. December 1920 the city council in Larvik met to discuss the future of a building they had discussed so many times, only this time they discussed it as a monument and cultural heritage and a museum. The situation turned into a confused and aggressive argument. The issue was whether the Manor House could still be used for public functions, or should it be turned into – something else. Was it possible to use it for various purposes – and still protect it as cultural heritage? One said it ought to be converted into a barracks, since they had neither money nor the skills to protect it. Another claimed it was possible to do both, use it for public purpose and protect it as a distinguished and venerable monument.<sup>43</sup>

The restoration process was started and went on and interacted with to the writing of the history all along. In its initial phase the project was presented in national newspapers and magazines<sup>44</sup>. The headlines and articles depicted the manor House as if this was another Oseberg find. An archaeological excavation, although more colourful, vivid and resurrecting the forgotten lives of the earls. The architecture and decorations dating from the Baroque Period which had been encapsulated gradually came forth. Art historians, architects and historians were enthusiastic as this happened exactly at the same time as attention was directed toward conservation of architectural heritage, accompanied by a new interest in the rich architectural culture from the centuries after the medieval era. The Residence was protected by the Cultural Heritage Act in 1923, and even though local politicians in Larvik feared the expenses of a restoration, they actually had no choice but to bring it back to pomp and ceremony – and 'hereby the town might obtain a cultural monument of importance and of eminent art historic and historic value' as declared the Riksantikvaren. The national attention was towards the buildings cultural heritage values and categorization as a 'live monument' opposing 'dead monuments'<sup>45</sup>

The museum society managed to establish a deal with the municipality, that nothing should be done to the building that might diminish its value, and they were given premises for the museum. The restoration was governed from a national level by Erdmann and Riksantikvaren, 'history' was edited by a historian. The museum process however, was attended to by local people. What ideals and principles for guidance and formation were available?

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41 Letter from O.A. Johnson to K.E. Bødtker 18/4 1918. Håndskriftsamlingen, Nasjonalbiblioteket.

42 Rian 1976, Øverland 1891-95 and other.

43 Østlandsposten . 18. December 1920.

44 Aftenposten and Tidens Tegn 1920 and 1921.

45 Aftenposten 9. April 1921.

### *Ideal Form and Authorized Content*<sup>46</sup>

The birth of the museum in Norway in the late nineteenth century was strongly related to a complex set of factors in society; the modernisation of industry, transports, science and urbanisation. In Norway like in other European countries the national aspect was important, combined with ideals from the Enlightenment. The old society was about to be abandoned, and the overall mentality was progressive and future-oriented. Museums are described as important elements in the national scheme established to support nation-building, national values and identity.

“Det Kongelige Norske Videnskabers Selskab” (The Royal Norwegian Society of Sciences and Letters) founded in 1760 inspired the formation of encyclopaedic museums in the major cities with natural history objects, antiquities, ethnographic material and medieval collections. The Norwegian University was founded in the capital Christiania (Oslo) in 1817 and laid ground for museums like Etnografisk Museum (the Ethnographic Museum) and Oldsaksamlingen (the Antiquity Collection). The function of these early museums was scientific and inspired by similar museums and milieus in England and Denmark. Displays were governed by the principles of classicistic scientific taxonomy. From about 1860 and until 1940 evolutionism dominated museums scientific analysis and the way collections and displays were organized.

The idea of heritage as important for nation building had its roots in the national Romantic Movement. The philosophy of the German philosopher Johan Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) was an important impulse to the history subject, as well as for the focus on national heritage. From his point of view the common people represented the national, the authentic and something that was genuine, original and untouched by foreign influence. The genuine Norwegian was associated with rural culture and the peasant. Folk art was particularly suited to demonstrate the character of people and places. The remains of history could shed light on and concretize the native people’s character and unique history. In Norway it was an urgent task to demonstrate that the country was a native people and a nation through history. History was given the role of shaping identity, besides its traditional scientific function. Parallel to nation-building cultural regionalisation and consciousness was a parallel movement. There was no contradiction between nation-building and weight put on the regional/local; remote areas were understood as just another approach to the national. For the birth of the museum in Norway the connection between cultural heritage and nation-building became increasingly more important towards the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

About 1900 the various museums had developed their institutional form and their hallmarks. A main structure based on ideas and concepts rather than a hierarchic model based on geography or governmental funding model, is proposed by Ragnar Pedersen which includes encyclopaedic museums, university museums, enlightening museums, cultural history museums/open air museums, commemorative museums and theme museums. Their responsibility could be nationwide, or of national importance as symbolising the cultural and scientific level of the Norwegian nation.

The Norwegian Museum of Cultural history was the prototype of an open-air museum in Norway, but it also had important impact on regional museums and cultural history museums in general from the beginning of the century until after World War 2. An interesting aspect of this museum was its overall or holistic view on the native country. Both the rural districts and cities were represented, mainly as “high” or “low” culture or bourgeoisie culture and folk culture.<sup>47</sup> A division was made between “the national section” and the section for “the towns

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46 The paragraph is mainly based on Pedersens 2003: Noen trekk av museenes historie i Norge fram til tidlig 1900-tall in *Museer i fortid og nåtid: Essays i museumskunnskap*.

47 Lie Christensen 2003:100.

and the upper class”<sup>48</sup>. The scheme was carried through both in the open air section and inside the exhibition halls with displays based on typology and style. The museum proved to be a success, and copies were initiated on a regional level. Dag Vestheim<sup>49</sup> writes that the regional museums were within a national culture tradition. Their superior cultural historic and cultural policy context was national, and sometimes international. The government supported their foundation financially, first and foremost the establishments in the middle of Norway, where folk culture would be particularly strong.<sup>50</sup>

The responsibility of the regional museums was to collect and exhibit regional and local cultural tradition. Examples on institutions near and relevant to Larvik was e.g. the Drammens museum in Buskerud County founded 1908. It reflected the same program as Norsk Folkemusum, and collected both rural culture regarded as ‘folk culture’ with little attention towards individuals, as well as ‘town culture’ understood as the culture of important families and individuals. Other relevant museums are Skien Museum in Telemark County, established in 1909 and Tønsberg museum (later Vestfold County Museum) in Vestfold County in 1894. The ‘town section’ exhibition in the latter was re-organised as late as in the 1950’s, still following the scheme handed down from the prototype. Displays are based on style: Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo, Louis XVI and narratives reflecting the important families and their continental inspired style of life<sup>51</sup>.

The larger museum context was probably well known to those who initiated formation of a museum in Larvik. Was it their ambition to introduce the typological and stylistic approach into the seventeenth century princely residence? The chosen name, ‘The Manor House’ indicates this modest alternative and so does collecting and displays: Larvik like other places experienced old patrician buildings and their beautiful gardens disappeared, as well as traditional institutions and traditions, arts and craft – probably associated with the middle class values, and as well the minimal representation of high class culture. It also had an educational aspect, to teach about good taste and high standards. The exhibition of 1901 evoked local feelings and pride. ‘We cover for almost every style, from Renaissance to Louis XVI.’<sup>52</sup> Even rural objects were on display, perfectly arranged in the kitchen section. What seems to have become more and more a challenge was history and the restoration, in which direction the contour of a cultural monument and commemorative museum grew.

To sum up: It seems like it was actually events like the publishing of ‘history’ and the restoration process that legitimized the museum. The supposed ambitions to become like other town museums or regional museums turned out rather half-hearted and actually failed, as the museum did not expand its ambitions and territory until the 1970’s. What came into existence was, in Ragnar Pedersen’s terms, a ‘minnemuseum’<sup>53</sup> – commemorative museum, relating to the importance of ancient monuments and the content of meaning as symbols and metaphors for important historical events, and as well important individuals. This group of museums concretize central values for the society, and their symbolic content have storytelling power. One Norwegian example is ‘Eidsvoldsminnet’ founded in commemoration of the historical events leading up to the signing and sealing of the constitution in 1814.<sup>54</sup>

The commemoration of Gyldenløve, his and his successors’ activities in the Earldom could not happen without history and not without the Manor House itself. It is tempting to imply

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48 The division is kept until today, however in more neutral terms as “town section” and “rural districts”.

49 Vestheim 1994:48.

50 According to Lise Emilie Fossmo Talleraas and her coming thesis on Norwegian museums.

51 Thoresen 1996: 4–13.

52 Letter from Hansteen to Bødtker 22/2 1922. Håndskriftsamlingen, Nasjonalbiblioteket.

53 Pedersen 2003:41.

54 The building was purchased in 1837 as a national heritage and opened for the public.

that commemoration was planned and arranged for, echoing seventeenth and eighteenth century. 'Every thing was arranged for the transition from history to memory, and for it to happen in a correct manner. The place would carry the right message. It was coded with meaning which could be read and experienced, valued and re-created by those who visited the place.'<sup>55</sup>

In 1925 a small part of the old garden was opened to the public. In the east corner a column was raised, the antiquarians and historians thought it to be from Gyldenløves residence. In an ironic and mocking comment in the local news paper says that first and foremost it is ugly and stupid, and then:

At this place, one has decided to raise a 'monument'. This man, like everyone else, had good qualities. However, qualities are not the most characteristic about this person. It is a fact that he ruled during the darkest period in Norwegian history. Remembering this, it gives good reason to be surprised about the exaggerated constraint made to protect the memory of this man. As far as I know, no one has raised a monument for those who represent progress.<sup>56</sup>

The commemoration of 'the 400-year night' turned its page again.

### From the Backyard of National Museums

My initial standpoint was from the backyard of national museums and the national narrative, asking if the process of restoring an old manor house, or rather a princely residence, might shed some light on museums, monuments and nation-building in Norway. I also hoped for an opening towards new approaches to the group of manor houses and mansions which exist as monuments and museums today.

**Fig. 2** Colum in the Manor House garden.



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55 Eriksen 1999:95.

56 Nybrott 29/9 1929.

So where did this journey take us, and how to proceed?

The story of the Residence of Larvik its days of glory, oblivion and resurrection has strong connections to the Absolute Monarchy from 1660-1814. First and foremost it must be related to other quasi-princely earldoms and baronies erected in Denmark-Norway during the same period of time. One way of approaching its extended meaning and broad cultural content is as shown, to look for practice, events, traditions which can be analysed in depth and compared with similar situations elsewhere. The king's entry-example implies new modes of understanding the historicity of the building and elements relevant to the terms 'nation' and nation-building'. In its turn this may revise interpretation and displays for the future museum.

The transition from former glory to a more modest, common and social acceptable role and use is something the Residence share with many of the scattered and dissimilar group of manors and mansions in Norway. What happened to the various buildings and their interiors during the nineteenth century? What was written about them? How were they memorized? How did they fall into oblivion?<sup>57</sup>

And finally: How did manor houses and mansions find their way into museums? This is a story yet to be told, and it deserves to be looked into. The national attention given to the Manor House in Larvik in the 1920'es was towards its cultural heritage values and categorization as a 'live monument' opposing 'dead monuments'. The building was an example of continental architecture and decorative art, and the restoration brought back what was once lost. As cultural heritage monument the Residence was seemingly successful, and because of its status as 'living heritage' it could serve public entertainment like concerts, representative dinners and so on, which it actually still does. The perspective on 'dead' and 'live' monuments and further consequences for the museum function during the first decades of the twentieth century is an interesting question, and so it might be for other mansions and manor houses as well.

It seems like the Residence/the Manor House in Larvik was less suited for the big picture as a legitimate part of the national narrative, communicated by national and regional institutions. It could not easily be modified to the bourgeoisie way of narrating important families, individuals and their activities to the prosperity and progress of the Norwegian nation. The alternative; commemoration of a Danish aristocrat was controversial. The town was reluctant to embrace its *museum*. Was it because its content of meaning could not be accepted as collective commemoration? Will there be a second chance?

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