

## CONFERENCE, 2009 Stavanger/Sand, Norway

### Historic Houses as Documents of Social Life and Traditional Skills

Synopses of papers by Hetty Berens / María de Jesus Monge  
(NOTE: Papers are arranged by date)

Sunday, June 21st

NORWAY - "Wall decorations and how to preserve them"  
Anne Yterdal

The Old Church of Ardal is a 17th Century timber building which documents construction craftsmanship and is also fully decorated with religious mural paintings. The tempera paintings present various conservation challenges which conservators are trying to face through a thorough study of previous interventions, as those done in the 1960s that were particularly damaging, due to the chemicals used at the time. The aim is to find conservation practices that respect construction and painting techniques. The installation of new drainage tubes in the vicinity also proved to be very damaging to the building, provoking rotting at its base. Those examples called attention for the need of integrated conservation as the entire environment of such fragile constructions, that survived for centuries, is now in peril due to sometimes well intended but misinformed interventions or poorly tested materials. The option not to install electricity or other modern facilities is part of this integrated and highly responsible attitude.

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NORWAY - "Social diversity in rural living"  
Ernst Berge Drange

Within the panoramic view of social diversity of historic Norway, nobility was almost unknown. In rural living there were 'bondes' or farmers who had a free and independent position. They had their own land and families stayed on farms for a long time. Viga is a representative site of that farmers group. Besides freeholder 'bondes' there was the tenant 'bonde', who settled on rented land with a life-time contract, with no obligation to work for the landowner and had limited access to cut wood in the forest.

The Norwegian farm is a very old and permanent unit and can, up to today, have the same boundaries as in the Middle Ages. Farms were clusters or 'klyngetun'. The reason for clustering was the lack of field, so houses were not to occupy farmland. The third social group in the rural community was the 'husmenn' or crofters. They could be poor people but played a very important economic role as labour-reserves in farming and wood cutting, in sawmills, as fishermen and also as craftsmen and small traders. Crofters lived on very small farms of about one or two acres of land. They paid rent to the farmer, in the form of money or work and had life-time contracts. Western Norway rural society has always been a more democratic and homogenous society than the eastern rural universe. Farmers and crofters were often closely related. Roynevarde is an authentic croft. Haland farm represents the universe of the wealthy farmers in the Ryfylke region of the 17th Century, a period in Norway with huge economic growth brought about by the selling of wood to Europe's booming building industry, plus the new technology of sawmills. There was immigration and emigration at the time. However, Haland is an exception in the social reality in the west Norwegian society, which represents part of the diversity of rural living. The Haland family belonged to what has been called sawmill or lumber trade aristocracy. Their farm consisted of as many as 10 crofters and numerous servants. This social status is the closest to nobility in Rogaland. The main groups in pre-industrial Norway society were the farmers and the crofters.

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Monday, June 22nd

DEMHIST - Opening Speech  
Daniela Ball, Chair

House Museums as documents of social life and traditional skills is the theme of this conference. It is about craftsmen skills and the importance to document these skills and manage the knowledge transfer of them. Knowledge transfer has to be promoted in order to find persons eager to learn and practice them. Houses tell manifold stories. On the one hand there is the story of the construction of the house and the skills involved in the building and decoration of it. On the other hand, a house is a small universe and includes all aspects of human life. A house can be more than a place to live. It represents a more complex world.

The need to document traditional skills and to practice them dates from the late 19th Century with the movement of the *Volkskunst*, in order to find a national style and create a new vocabulary of ornaments. The Scandinavian countries were amongst the first to preserve their traditional skills. This was also the context in which the open air museums were founded at the end of the 19th Century. *Ryfylkemuseet* has evolved out of this tradition and has chosen the French approach of the *eco-museum*, which preserves the houses *in situ*.

Today's motivation to preserve intangible heritage has changed and we shall be discussing during this conference the methods and ways to preserve and document traditional skills as part of the world's intangible heritage.

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NORWAY - "The Norwegian county Rogaland"

Egil Harald Grude, Director of Culture and Heritage, Rogaland County Council

Rogaland is a many-faceted county, with nature and agriculture, as dairy farming and fishing. Rogaland's largest communities became centers of industry at the end of the 19th Century, producing brickwork, porcelain and canning. During the last decades, sand, gravel and stone have become important export products for making concrete.

Rogaland has also a rich cultural life. From the County Councils point of view the museums landscape is built around the five regional museums: *Jaeren* in the south, *Dalm* in Stavanger, *Haugalandsmuseene* in the north western part and the *Ryfylkemuseet* for the *Ryfylke* area. State, regional and local authorities take a very central part in the task of preserving houses, as the regional museums do. They both have an important role in the preservation of buildings, where many houses are being preserved *in situ*, and where different houses represent different farming districts, for example the *Jaeren* coastal plain, or the fiords and the eys.

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NORWAY - "Intangible heritage and traditional craftsmanship, knowledge as part of a holistic heritage policy"

Magne Velure, Director of Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs

Storytelling makes history come alive. Historical sources are diverse; images as portraits and pictures; papers, contemporary graphic images. Some are formal, some are informal. Some silent witnesses are evidence of everyday life in the past. They can be found in the buildings themselves, like deeply worn patches just outside the doors. The lecturer worked in *Frogner manor*. It was not until 1747 that a farmstead was built in a typical Norwegian context, where there were no landlords. It was originally inhabited by a tenant. Afterwards, wealthy people lived in it and they enlarged it and made it more representative of their status, adding a masonry building with a ballroom and a baroque garden. It was taken over by the City, who opened it as a City Museum in 1909. The house has different exhibition concepts to tell its history.

What story is there to tell about the history of the house? Should it tell the story of "Everyday life in the upstairs-downstairs manor"? It also raises the question about the concept of building preservation: to conserve it as it is at present so the building shows a longitudinal section in the flux of time, or restore it as it was in the past, or as it was never before? In the case of choosing preservation, what period should it represent? The city decided for a conservation concept, as to conserve evidence of all historical periods, side by side if necessary, in order to tell different stories at the same time.

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NORWAY - "A National icon – storyteller and restoration object"

Erik Jondell, Director of *Eidsvoll 1814*, Norwegian Centre for Constitutional History

*Eidsvoll Manor* is a historic event house, and birthplace of the Norwegian Constitution. Its history marks the change of Norway as part of a *Dano-Norwegian* kingdom, governed by an autocratic king in Copenhagen. At the end of the Napoleonic wars the Danish king was forced to give up Norway to the Swedish crown. The Danish prince, the king's representative, summoned Norwegian leaders for consultation on this. In his friend's house, *Eidsvoll*, Norway was declared as an independent state. Within six weeks a constitution was produced! During the autumn of 1814, Norway was forced a union with Sweden that remained until 1905.

*Eidvoll House*, with its 1800 square meters, was erected from 1800 to 1802 as a modern private residence, modelled on French and Danish ideals. It is the most significant house of its period in Norway. The owner, *Carsten Anker*, was the director of the *Iron Works Company*. When lumber trade collapsed in the early 1820s the house had to be sold and English creditors took over all of the estate. However, since 1814 the house has been looked upon as a national symbol and is the location of famous and important visits. In 1815 it became national property, and soon was opened as a museum. As an important anniversary is coming up, a complete restoration is taking place. It will be restored back to the state it was in 1814, and will become a storyteller about the time, the era and the society that created Norway.

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NORWAY - "Historic houses as documents"  
Roy Hoibo, Director of Ryfylkemuseet

The so typical concept of the Ryfylke Museum, with museum houses in situ, lays in the political history of the country. Norway was a union with Denmark for almost 400 years, until 1814 and with Sweden from 1814 to 1905. Towards the dissolution of the union with Sweden a strong national romantic movement was growing. The basis for a national self-consciousness was to find in the Middle Ages, the history of Norway. Originally, the idea behind this museum was to establish a traditional open-air museum in Stavanger. The first house brought in dates from the Middle Ages, from the 13th Century. It opened as a museum in 1936. After WW II this centralized museum idea was left behind, for the idea of preserving houses in their original places. The houses have greater authenticity and they can be experienced in their original environment. Small farms as croft houses and large farms were turned into museum houses. In 2009 the Ryfylke Museum has a total of 55 houses. The professionalism of the staff of a small museum as the Ryfylkemuseet was established by a National Museum Reform that was implemented after the millennium. Tools for professionalism were established with national networks of museums that have common interests, for example, traditional crafts and building preservation. Our network dealt with the important issue of developing tools for a more satisfactory documentation of buildings.

Documentation is to be done in different phases, from basic to the most ambitious:

1. Create source data
2. Collect existing source data
3. Organize the source data
4. Make data available through comparison of data
5. Learn.

The goal of the documentation work is furthermore to create research data and to create a foundation for knowledge-based learning, to establish data as security documentation and as a basis for further maintenance. A handbook is being made and adopted by a number of museums, and a joint system for electronic registration has been made.

Keep in mind that:

- Not only conservators have a role in documentation, also craftsmen, who come in close contact with the building materials, construction and tracks of those who have been there before. Training and time to do so is required, as a good collaboration between both of these professionals.
- Terms need to be standardized
- Also take care of local terms

Through a good documentation work the buildings become important and meaningful and enhance the scientific basis for their protection. It will raise awareness about the value of the buildings as unique historical venues, and increase respect for authenticity.

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Tuesday, June 23rd

BRAZIL - "Networks as a tool for preserving historic houses"  
Ana Cristina Araújo de Carvalho

Networking amongst museum professionals and institutions enables interaction, exchange of knowledge and recognition of patrimonial assets. It stimulates conservation and promotes museum related actions, fundamental to colleagues and museums that are often geographically isolated.

This interconnection is very important not only on a 'horizontal' basis, but on a 'vertical' direction, particularly in big countries like Brazil, where you have various levels of administrative and political powers that are reflected on a variety of governing bodies.

In the public arena, the connection is important between national and local sectors, because the regional governments make community actions that stimulate citizens to respect and understand the value of heritage that has been preserved. Thus, the network system is not a short-term project, although there are effective actions that can immediately modify the local dynamic of the neighbourhood.

Considering the conservation of heritage as something fundamental to the economic and social development, the flow of interaction between the museum and the community creates a virtuous circuit of value and service which is able to modify and develop the communities where these institutions are located.

The diversity of heritage that resulted from Brazil's historic, economic and social evolution, as well as the variety of building construction techniques and materials, provides a challenge that may be faced with the proposed network for the conservation management of architectural heritage in the following actions:

- identification and inventory (including identification, dimensional recognition and documentation) by heritage institutions;
- responsibility of historic house museums for the material safeguarding of their own and similar heritage, as well as the stimulation of the relationship between and awareness of local communities;

- Safeguarding and teaching of traditional knowledge by a network of technical schools in close contact with the above mentioned historic house museums.

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NETHERLANDS - "The 'Upstairs' and 'Downstairs' of Museum Van Loon. The shift from traditional to social focus in conservation put into practice"

Charlotte van Emstede and Diederik von Bönninghausen

The analysis of the transition from a 'traditional, tangible' to a 'social, intangible' attitude in conservation of built heritage in the Netherlands implied a change in attitude for experts working in this field.

Three aspects may be distinguished when accessing social value of built heritage:

The first refers to the way of living and building in the past, to the past community and its customs, skills and traditions. It is evaluated from scientific, cultural and historical points of view.

A second aspect is the value that heritage represents in general for present day citizens, which is important for the sense of identity and belonging of the members of the community at large.

The third is about the value that a specific community may attach to historic objects and places, which is more about emotions and memory of that particular group of people, but may also have significance for the community as a whole.

Recently, the two last aspects of social value have come to the foreground, since expert and laymen find each other in their shared amazement for heritage. Conservationists need to focus on communicative skills and vocabulary to effectively use their scientific based knowledge in order to give content to social and intangible values. In that way, they can effectively make all aspects of heritage values understandable, thus securing public support for its preservation.

After this theoretical context, the stage was set for an illustrative case: Museum Van Loon in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. The museum is a listed and highly valued canal house, and former residence of the Amsterdam regent family Van Loon. It was opened to the public in 1973 and up to now the museum's main focus has been the social life and wealth of the 'Upstairs'. Recently the museum was given the opportunity to acquire the accompanying coach house. Now the museum wants to broaden the Van Loon story, telling also about ordinary life and traditional skills that belonged to the 'Downstairs' of a city manor. Von Bönninghausen showed that archive research and interviews with members of the Van Loon family, former personnel and their descendants gave the necessary insight in intangible and largely forgotten aspects of a large household in a time when coaches were the main means of transportation. These aspects will be shown in the restored coach house. After raising over two million euros for the acquisition and restoration of the coach house, plans are now made to preserve the coach house and display the original coaches. In 2010, Museum Van Loon will be the only complete ensemble of canal house, ornamental garden and functioning coach house in the Netherlands.

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## TOURS

- Stavanger: Ledaal and Breidablikk House Museums.
  - Årdal: Old Church.
  - Viga: House museum site.
  - Håland: House museum site.
  - Røynevarden and Kolbeinstveit: House museum sites
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