

Prime Minister
Gro Harlem Brundtland

VINLAND REVISITED. KEY-NOTE SPEECH AT THE SOUTH STREET SEAPORT MUSEUM GALA DINNER, SEPTEMBER 25.

It is a great honour for me to be here tonight and to address this festive gathering here at the South Street Seaport. I cannot imagine a more appropriate setting for celebrating the seamanship of the past and present. We from Norway and Iceland are proud to share our maritime heritage with this great nation, a heritage which this museum can pass on to new generations.

Here at South Manhattan we can look across to Brooklyn where so many Norwegians have come to live and which I feel particularly close to myself since I spent a year of my childhood right there on the other side of East River. That is one more reason why it is really good to be back in New York.

I was ten years at the time and I remember how sorry I was to leave all my American friends when my father finished his medical research fellowship here. This was at the time of the Korean war, and I remember that my best friend in Brooklyn was not allowed to come and visit me in Norway because of world tension and because Norway was too dangerously close to the Soviet Union. This shows us how much the world has changed.

This dinner has a dual purpose: - the one is to celebrate the arrival in New York of the Vinland Revisited Viking fleet captained by Ragnar Thorseth. Let us give him and his courageous crew a big hand.

The other purpose is to support the South Street Seaport Museum where so much of America's great maritime tradition comes together.

We have now entered the last decade of a millennium of human discovery. It was around the dawn of this millennium that Norse Vikings set out in their graceful, superbly seaworthy vessels and became the first Europeans to set foot and settle on American soil.

A new millennium is approaching, challenging our resourcefulness and commitment. In a world that we spent a thousand years discovering, we now recognize the urgency of charting the right course for the future.

The Governments of Iceland and Norway together with the Norwegian shipowner Knut Kloster, were inspired by this millennium of discovery to embark upon the Vinland Revisited project. It commemorates the one-thousandth anniversary of

Leif Eiriksson's historic voyage to North America and focuses on our responsibility to protect and develop the resources of planet Earth for the benefit of generations to come.

Another useful side effect can be to enlighten those who might believe that the Vikings came from Minnesota.

An English historian has concluded that "in the tenth century the Viking peoples were still the great settlers of the Western World", thanks to their advanced maritime capabilities. It must be added though that their ventures often were of painful concern to their European neighbors since the Vikings could be ruthless and had a relaxed attitude towards the principle of private ownership to movable property.

Yet, the Vikings crossed the Atlantic not to conquer. They came in search for resources and they found plenty of it: timber in dense forests, fine grazing grounds, fresh water in fast-running brooks and salmon in the sea offshore.

Through their Vinland Revisited Voyage Ragnar Thorseth and his crew have re-enacted Leif Eiriksson's historic trans-Atlantic voyage and demonstrated the courage of our Viking ancestors and the skills they must have possessed to build and sail such graceful, seaworthy ships. The museum has exact replicas of three different Viking ships. The GAIA, originally known as the Gokstad ship, is indeed fit to undertake intercontinental voyages. This voyage is also a demonstration of how the people of North America, Iceland and Norway are not separated by the Atlantic ocean. We are, and we will remain united by it.

Leif Eiriksson's settlement in North America was short-lived one. Subsequent generations of Norwegians and Icelanders did, however, follow his route across the Atlantic in search of richer lands and kinder climates. One third of Norway's total population, i.e. more than eight hundred thousand people actually sailed the North Atlantic as Leif once did to find new opportunities and help build this great nation.

Thousands of Norwegian ships must have docked in this seaport since the middle of the 19th century, when the British Navigation Act was abolished and the principle of freedom of the sea established. The British shipowners of the time were nearer the truth than they perhaps anticipated, when they complained to Parliament and predicted that "... even the cherished song Rule Britannia would vanish, and ... only the boisterous songs of the Yankees and the Norwegians would remain to be heard in ports".

Almost one hundred years ago, in 1893, another replica of a Viking ship crossed the Atlantic and visited New York. The celebrations then apparently became so "boisterous" that the whole Norwegian crew was put in jail by the Brooklyn police, causing the mayor of New York to publish acrimonious accusations against his Brooklyn colleague for not having shown

decent hospitality towards the latter-day Vikings from Norway.

I hope this year's festivities will not result in similar incidents, so that the Viking fleet can finish the voyage to Washington D.C., where the ships are scheduled to arrive on 9 October. In 1964 the United States Congress established 9 October as Leif Ericson Day to commemorate the great son of Iceland and the grandson of Norway.

We have among us here tonight representatives of the Norwegian-American organizations which were instrumental in establishing the official Leif Eiriksson Day. I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to you and to your organizations for your untiring efforts help keep alive the bonds between our nations.

I would like to close by paying a special tribute to our host tonight, the South Street Seaport Museum, and in particular to its direct