In September, a group of 22 Norwegians from the Tysvaer History Club near Stavanger, Norway arrived in the U.S. on a journey with the purpose of retracing the route of the first Norwegian immigration to America in 1825. The history club’s leader was Knut Djupedal, who is the director of the Norwegian Emigrant Museum in Hamar, Norway. They arrived in New York City and visited the Norwegian settlement in Brooklyn before traveling along the Hudson River to Albany, where the first Norwegian immigrants spent several days before boarding an Erie Canal packet boat traveling west.

The modern-day travelers moved by motor coach rather than canal boat and visited Rome, New York, and its historic Fort Stanwix National Monument, built in 1758. Among the many stops along the canal route was Syracuse and its significant Erie Canal Museum. The group arrived in Rochester on the evening of Monday, September 14.

The inscription on the Larson family monument reads: “Lars Larson and wife Martha first Norwegian leader of emigration to America on Sloop Restorationen — 1825.” On that historic voyage, 52 Norwegians emigrated to America. They were followed by a million more in the following years. There are now more Norwegians in America than in Norway.

Photo by Frank A. Gillespie.

This sign at the canal park in Holley commemorates the arrival of the first Norwegian immigration in America. In 1825, they landed in Holley to settle on farms in Kendall, New York.
At 9:00 a.m. the next day (Tuesday, September 15), I gave the group a tour of Mount Hope Cemetery with the principal focus being the grave of Lars Larson, the leader of the 1825 immigrants. Lars Larson was a native of Stavanger who led the 52 Norwegians emigrating from Norway in 1825. So it was a particularly poignant moment for the newcomers to see Larson's gravesite and those of his family, altogether comprising ten graves in the Larson plot.

From Mount Hope, the group traveled to Holley, New York, (named for Myron Holley, original canal commissioner and another permanent Mount Hope resident) where the first group of 52 Norwegians disembarked. The canal park in Holley commemorates the Sloopers; they were called that because they sailed the Atlantic Ocean in a sloop. In the idyllic Holley park setting beside the Erie Canal, Bill Andrews, professor emeritus of political science at SUNY Brockport and longtime leader of this area's Sons of Norway lodge, talked about the historic Sloopers event and the significant impact that Norwegian immigration made in American history.

Most of the Sloopers had been farmers in Norway and therefore settled on farmland in America. After landing in Holley, therefore, the Sloopers walked to Kendall where they bought land where another Norwegian, Cleng Peerson had already settled. Peerson was the advance man who immigrated before the Sloopers with the purpose of finding a suitable site for Sloopers settlement. He was from Tysvaer, Norway, where many of the 22 recent visitors live.

So, the next stop for the present-day Norwegian visitors was Cleng Peerson's farmland and original basement and foundation on which a new house has been built. The land is along the shore of Lake Ontario, and after visiting the early 1800s basement, the group gathered lakeside for a talk on the Sloopers settlement by Kendall town historian, Joette Knapp.

After lunch at the historic Village Inn in Childs, the luxury motor coach headed west to Lockport, Niagara Falls, Old Fort Niagara, the petroleum museum in Oil City, PA (Norway is a major oil exporter), Chicago, and the Fox River Valley in Illinois where the Sloopers finally landed, having given up their underproductive farms in Kendall.

Lars Larson's Sloopers story is so significant and eventful that it is worth retelling:

Born in 1786 on a farm near Stavanger, Lars Larson as a young man learned the life of a sailor and the boat-building trade. In 1807, at age 21 years, he captained a Norwegian boat carrying a load of lumber to France when Europe was engulfed in the Napoleonic wars. Larson's boat was seized by an English warship. He and his crew were captured and held prisoners in England for seven years.

During imprisonment, the captured Norwegians were visited by English Quakers who brought the men religious strength and encouragement. Lars Larson became a devout convert to the Society of Friends, and after he was released from prison in 1814, he worked for one of the Quakers, Mrs. Margaret Allen, for a year to raise money to return to Norway. And when he did...
get back, he organized the first Society of Friends in Norway.

Quakers didn’t believe in baptism and confirmation of children, which the national church of Norway, being Lutheran, required. The United States, however, was broadly accepting of varied religious beliefs, according to news reaching Lars Larson. He was now married to Martha Georgiana Jorgensdattir Eide, who was pregnant and would soon be facing the baptism issue. So he organized the first group emigration from Norway to America. The group bought a used sloop that was named Restaurationen (Restoration). It was clearly too small for 52 people, but they managed and sailed on July 4, 1825.

By the time they reached New York City 98 days later, on October 9, they were 53 passengers, because Martha, gave birth to Margaret Allen Larson (named in honor of Mrs. Margaret Allen, the English Quaker leader) on September 2, 1825. But New York was not welcoming. Their sloop was seized because it violated a port ruling that a ship of the size of the Restoration should have carried no more than 16 passengers.

It was Lars Larson’s intention to sell the sloop on arrival in order to provide needed funds to continue the journey and buy land in Kendall. Lars Larson sent his family and the other passengers on ahead while he prepared appeals to have the impounded boat released. The Norwegians sailed by steamboat up the Hudson River to Albany where they contracted passage on a packet boat traveling west on the just-opened Erie Canal.

Meanwhile, in Buffalo at 10 a.m., October 26, 1825, four white horses, whose tow lines were attached to the handsomely decorated packet boat Smea Chief, stepped forward on the towpath to carry Governor DeWitt Clinton, the canal commissioners, politicians, and military notables on the historic inaugural journey down the completed Erie Canal.

Within a few days, Governor Clinton’s flotilla met the Quakers. Canal courtesy dictated that when two boats meet, the boat traveling east must stop, drop its tow rope to the bottom of the canal, and permit the west-moving boat to proceed over it. Clinton had a chance, therefore, to greet the new Americans, and they cheerfully responded, in Norwegian, of course. Clinton then realized the impact his new canal was already making on the settlement of the great wilderness that was New York State.

Back in New York City, Lars Larson managed to obtain a pardon from U.S. President John Quincy Adams, and the sloop was released. But after great effort to sell it, he was able to get only $400 for the boat that had cost $1,350. It was now November and the canal had been drained of most of its water. Larson noticed, however, that the shallow amount still left had frozen, so he bought a pair of ice skates in Albany and skated 290 miles to Rochester. No one since has beat that feat.

While most of the Norwegians bought land and settled on farms in Kendall, Lars Larson started a boat-building business in Rochester in an area that is now called the South Wedge. His canal-boat business was enormously successful and he built a handsome house on Atkinson Street in Rochester’s affluent Third Ward (now Corn Hill) and raised a family of four daughters and a son.

For years, his large house and four others that he also owned were the most important stopover for Norwegian immigrants traveling to permanent settlement in the Midwest. He was known to feed, entertain, and advise on American ways, as many as 100 Norwegians for days at a time.

On November 12, 1845, Lars Larson delivered a boatload of furs to a
The drawing is of the Federal-style house that Lars Larson built on Atkinson Street for his family. He operated a successful canal-boat construction enterprise on the south side of the Erie Canal in an area now called the South Wedge.

Lars Larson, the leader of the first Norwegian immigration to America is buried in Mount Hope Cemetery, Section R, Lot 23.

Martha Larson, wife of Lars Larson, is buried beside her husband. Also buried in the plot is Lars Larson's brother Elias Larson (1831-1907), deaf-mute sister Sarah Larson (1774-1854), three daughters, and a son.

purchaser who met him in Rexford Flats, which is on the Erie Canal a few miles south of Schenectady. His buyer turned out to be an unsavory character named Hotaling. Rather than pay for the furs, Hotaling purportedly shoved Larson off a narrow walkway into the deep water of a lock in which he drowned. He was 59 years old.
The principals in this article are:

Father: Peter Palmer (1799-1895)
Only son: James Palmer, Sr. (1821-1908)
Grandson: James Palmer, Jr. (1844-1935)
Grandson: John P. Palmer (1847-1909)
Grandson: Joseph W. Palmer (1849-1911)
Grandson: Jerome B. Palmer (1854-1941)
Grandson: George W. Palmer (1857-1900)
Grandson: Charles H. Palmer
(no record at Mt. Hope Cemetery)

Tucked away between bending roads and lofty trees, the Palmer family plot manages to stand out among the nearby gravestones. Located in Range 3, Lot 61, in Mount Hope Cemetery, the Palmer plot invites visitors to stop for a moment and admire its large family monument comprised of natural stones. There are eleven headstones spread throughout the plot commemorating the Palmers, who were remarkably active in Rochester business, especially in pyrotechnics.

The patriarch of this large family was Peter Palmer. He was born in Whittlesome, Suffolk, England, in 1799. In 1830, he moved with his wife Mary and son James, to Utica, New York. In 1841, Peter Palmer, along with his family, moved to Rochester, where he remained for the rest of his life. The year they arrived, Peter and son James Palmer presented a Fourth of July fireworks display on Allen Street. Soon after, Peter Palmer opened a public fireworks garden on Main Street, opposite North Street, of the same character as the one in Utica. The promenade concerts and displays of fireworks that were given there attracted huge crowds and made Mr. Palmer famous as a pyrotechnist.

Peter Palmer continued his business pursuits until a year or two before his death in 1895. He was listed in the 1875 Rochester Directory as a produce dealer before returning to pyrotechnics in 1880. At the time of his death, he was one of the oldest residents of Rochester and had been an original pew-holder at St. Paul's
Episcopal Church. His wife, Mary, died in 1873 at the age of 86 years.

When Peter Palmer died in 1895, he was 95 years old, and his cause of death was debility due to old age. He was survived by his second wife, Elizabeth Palmer, and his only son, James Palmer, Sr. Peter Palmer was also survived by nine grandchildren. His will read that his estate was valued at $2,100 and was left to his surviving wife, Elizabeth. At the time of her death, her estate was equally divided among Peter Palmer’s grandchildren.

Peter and Mary Palmer’s only son, James Palmer, Sr., had been the proprietor of Rochester Pyrotechnic Garden since 1849, soon after its establishment. In 1854, James Palmer, Sr. expanded the business by adding a luxurious concert hall to the Rochester Garden fireworks business. A Rochester newspaper at that time stated that attendees at the first concert were “agreeably surprised to find the place so eloquent and commodious, and so well adapted to the purpose for which it is primarily designed”. The article continued to explain that the hall “extends 66 feet on the street and is 42 feet high, divided into but two stories”.

Soon after, in 1858, newspapers were encouraging community members to support the business and enjoy its offerings. The Union and Advertiser stated that “all this beautiful and rational entertainment will be afforded at one dime only per ticket” and continued on to suggest that “married men should take their wives and children; young men should take the girls, and all will have a pleasant evening at the Garden”.

James Palmer, Sr. married Eliza Palmer in 1843. She died in 1873 at the age of 52. James Palmer, Sr. then married Abagail Baldwin. She also passed away before James Palmer, Sr. in 1902 when she was 64 years old. According to the records, her cause of death was suicide by drowning. James Palmer, Sr. died at 87 years, in 1908, from pleurisy.

James Palmer, Jr., son of James and Eliza Palmer, Sr., began his work as a pyrotechnist in 1870. The company was turned over to James Palmer, Jr. and his brother Joseph W. Palmer in 1876. Shortly thereafter, multiple explosions occurred at the pyrotechnic company. In 1877, James Palmer, Jr. and Joseph W. Palmer changed the name of the pyrotechnic company to James Palmer’s Sons. The company expanded and by 1890, there were over forty buildings on the factory grounds.

At this time, the pyrotechnic company had a large export trade with South America and Australia and had agencies in New York, Boston, Cincinnati, Chicago, Minneapolis, Denver, Salt Lake City, and San Francisco. In 1891, the pyrotechnic company changed its name again to the Consolidated Fire Works Company. Three years later, in 1894, it would be known as the Rochester Fire Works Company.

In 1895, the Union and Advertiser covered a story of another explosion in the pyrotechnic company. The article stated that an employee “was engaged in filling Roman candle cylinders with prepared powder and other combustible material, when suddenly the friction of the substances caused a blaze”. The building was demolished but no one was injured. James Palmer, Jr. described the company’s safety precautions by
explaining, "Our manufactory is divided into a number of small buildings, so that in case of accidental explosion not many employees will be liable to injury nor chances taken on having a big blaze."

In 1869, James Palmer, Jr. married Frances Haver, who died at the age of 87 in 1933. James Palmer, Jr. died soon after his wife, at the age of 91 in 1935.

Joseph W. Palmer was another son of James and Eliza Palmer, Sr. In the 1871 Rochester Directory, he was listed as a pyrotechnist, alongside his brother, James Palmer, Jr. In 1881, he was listed as the foreman of the pyrotechnic company; he died at the age of 62 years in 1911. Mount Hope Cemetery interment records state that he was indeed buried in the Palmer family plot but was removed to Holy Sepulchre Cemetery on July 2, 1917.

John P. Palmer was yet another son of James and Eliza Palmer, Sr. He was born in 1847 and graduated from the University of Rochester in 1868. During his time at the University of Rochester, he served as president of his class, a member of the baseball team, as well as a member of the Delta Psi social fraternity. After graduation, John P. Palmer began his studies in law, was admitted to the bar, and practiced law for five years. In 1879 he was an assistant teller and, by 1901 he had moved past fireworks into banking.

In the 1901 Rochester Directory, he was listed as the assistant cashier at Alliance Bank at 183 Main Street. This position was usually one of the highest positions, just below president and cashier. Margaret E. Syme Palmer predeceased her husband in 1905 at the age of 57. John P. Palmer died soon after, in 1909, at the age of 62.

Jerome B. Palmer was a fourth son of James and Eliza Palmer, Sr. Jerome held a number of different jobs, beginning in 1872 as a pyrotechnist. By 1890, he was involved with the Englehardt and Palmer Company, which sold stoves and gas fixtures. The same year, he was involved in the Palmer Real Estate Investment Company Incorporated. The company had a capital of $7,000 and the trustees included James Palmer, Jr., Joseph W., Jerome B., Charles H., George W., and Fred D. Palmer. Jerome B. Palmer died in 1941 at the age of 87, predeceasing his wife by a few years. Cora Louise Palmer died of arteriosclerosis in 1945.

A fifth son of James and Eliza Palmer, Sr. was George W. Palmer. He first appeared in the Rochester directories in 1875 as a clerk working at 10 Exchange Street. Within the next ten years he was listed as a clerk in multiple other businesses, such as those at 76 Front Street and 14 Elm Street, before being listed as a broker in 1887 at 278 East Main Street, which was probably his family’s pyrotechnic business. An article in the Rochester Daily Chronicle cited George W. Palmer's death in 1900 and stated that "for some years he was engaged in the real estate business, but for the past year he had been an invalid and could go about only in a wheelchair". George W. Palmer was 43 years old when he died in 1900.

Charles H. Palmer was the sixth son of James and Eliza Palmer, Sr. Charles H. Palmer was an accomplished banker and one of the few Palmers not involved in the pyrotechnic industry. In the 1875 Rochester Directory, Charles H. Palmer was listed as a clerk at the Traders’ National Bank. By 1879 he was an assistant teller and, by 1883, he was a paying teller at the same bank. In 1904, he was listed as the vice-president and also a director of the Traders’ National Bank. The last information found on Charles H. Palmer was in the 1923 Rochester Directory, which listed him as an attendant of Rochester State Hospital at 31 Exchange Street in Room 300. There is also no mention of Charles H. Palmer in the Mt. Hope Cemetery interment records.

(Editors Note: Author Molly Korotkin is a University of Rochester student and prepared a more extensive essay from which the above article has been extracted. The essay was part of the coursework for Religion 167, Speaking Stones, taught by Prof. Emil Homerin, who is also a trustee of the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery.)
Jean Sleight DuBois grew up on Canterbury Road in Rochester. He was a student at Colgate University, a men's school in Hamilton, New York, south of Utica. He "put up the fight of (his) life" as a result of an automobile accident that fractured his spine. Unfortunately, he lost the fight soon after reaching the age of 21 years. Jean S. DuBois is buried in Section AA, along Evergreen Avenue near the intersection with Forest Avenue.