CARL LUDWIG BOECKMANN, with his fiery red beard and moustache, flowing tie, and clothes in keeping, was a picturesque member of the early Minneapolis art colony. In recent years, however, he has been overlooked, and so I, his granddaughter, have set for myself the task of reacquainting the public with him. It is no easy matter to paint a portrait without a model — he died before I was born — but it has been possible partially to reconstruct his life and work from information gleaned from his paintings and newspaper clippings, from publications, including catalogues, and from interviews.

Although my grandfather was the foremost restoration artist in Minneapolis and a well-known painter, he did not receive national recognition. He did, however, gain a full measure of success in his chosen field. He became known in the Twin Cities of Minnesota and throughout the entire Northwest for his "Norse Pilot Head" portraits, landscapes, and religious works.¹ These accomplishments were considerable when one remembers that he was a Norwegian immigrant living in the Middle
West and that painting in America by the 1890s had become a pursuit leading to a poverty-stricken existence for most aspirants. This situation had come about because the art-buying public was primarily interested in purchasing works from European artists of established reputation.2

Carl L. Boeckmann was born in Christiania, Norway, on January 29, 1867. He was the youngest in a family of five children that included a brother, Adolph, and three older sisters, Hanna, Thora, and Bridget. Nothing is known of the background of his family except that it sprang from town-dwelling people.

In 1883, at the age of sixteen, Carl began to study at Knut Bergslien's school of painting. A year later Christian Krogh, Erik Werenskiold, Eilif Peterssen, and Hans Heyerdahl started another art school, where my grandfather was a student until 1885.3 An undated red book entitled Kunstnere af Chr. Krogh was found later among his possessions. It contained the names of many who later became Norway's leading painters, among them Edvard Munch, Hans Gude, Theodor Kittelsen, and Harriet Backer; it is likely that some of them were schoolmates of Carl Boeckmann.4 He also studied in Copenhagen and Munich.

My grandfather migrated to America in 1886. Here he started out by wandering about and visiting most of the larger cities in the central and northwestern parts of the country. He experienced both good and bad. "[I] lived in both rabbit cages and palaces," he said later. He was in Milwaukee for three years and did some painting there and in Chicago.5 In his favor was the fact that he transplanted easily. He spoke several languages, an ability probably acquired in his student days in Denmark and Germany. He also had a flamboyant personality and a charming gregariousness that won him friends wherever he went.
CARL L. BOECKMANN

At the age of thirty-eight, in 1905, Boeckmann settled permanently in Minneapolis, but he continued to take painting trips around the country. One wonders why this professionally trained artist had left Norway — at a time when that country was enjoying a “golden age of art” — to pursue an uncertain course in the New World. For one thing, he was barely nineteen when he reached America, and it is clear that at that time he was afflicted with wanderlust and probably with “America fever.” He had all the qualities thought important for emigrating: youth, health, and a profession guaranteeing him a means of earning a living. In addition — perhaps wanting to better himself economically — he apparently thought of himself as a reporter for the group of immigrants leaving Norway almost continually during the 1880s, a kind of chronicler in paint of historic events, and a custodian of Old-World traditions. 6

Boeckmann was always ready to record the contributions of his fellow countrymen in their new land. Take, for example, the fine character study that he did of the Reverend Elling Eielsen (1804-1883), the pioneer lay preacher who founded the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. 7 The face in this painting reminds one of the minister portrayed in Ole E. Rølvaag’s Giants in the Earth as he preached the “glory of the Lord” to the early settlers in Fillmore County, Minnesota. Another realistic picture depicts the ill-fated Colonel Hans C. Heg and the Fifteenth Wisconsin Regiment in the Civil War battle of Chickamauga, fought in 1863 in Tennessee. The faces of the men in the painting were actual portraits done after careful study of war chronicles and photographs. 8

In keeping with his position as custodian of the traditions of the Old World, Boeckmann painted an amazing number of Norwegian seamen, probably from the Lofoten Islands; many of these portraits were of the famous
pilot Ulabrand. They were called Norse Pilot Heads. The seamen whom he painted were individuals whose daring exploits were well known among the early immigrants. Their pictures provided a link with the past, and they were proudly displayed by their possessors in their American homes. I never met an owner of a Norse Pilot Head who did not prize it highly.

Boeckmann was a member of Kristianialaget, one of the societies formed by Norwegian immigrants from a particular bygd (or community) in their native land. The purpose of these groups was to conserve Old-World social ties and customs in the New World. In 1917 he bestowed upon Kristianialaget a canvas called "The Painting" or "Boeckmann's Painting." The income from its sale by the society was to be used as a memorial gift to the needy in Norway. The scene in the painting is of a fjord at sunset with Gronlien as its background. This well-known work was painted in 1884, when Boeckmann was on Fritz Thaulow's yacht with a group of other young artists, who were on the fjord sketching fishermen and various shoreline sites.

My grandfather's paintings varied from miniature to wall-size, and most of them were completed before 1920. Portraiture appeared to be his forte; he did sensitive portraits (from sketches while in Norway) of such cultural giants as Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Henrik Ibsen, Edvard Grieg, and Kaiser Wilhelm II. He also did two self-portraits, one showing him at the age of twenty-seven, with a cigarette in his mouth, looking very much like the dashing bohemian about town. Another, done later, shows him wearing a cowboy hat, probably acquired during his travels in western Montana. I also found an undated St. Paul newspaper clipping stating that he painted miniatures on ivory, including portraits of Mr. and Mrs. A. E. Johnson.

Boeckmann left a splendid pictorial record of both
prominent Norwegians and native Americans of his day — portraits of such men as Governor Knute Nelson, State Senator Henry Gjertsen and his daughter Beatrice, the opera singer, and Olaf O. Searle, wealthy owner of the A. E. Johnson steamship line that brought Norwegian immigrants to these shores. His paintings also included Colonel F. C. Listoe, editor of *Nordvesten* (St. Paul), who later became American consul at Rotterdam, family groupings of Consul E. H. Hobe, including his wife Johanna and his father and mother, and of Kristofer Janson, the controversial Unitarian minister whom Boeckmann called “one of the nicest men I ever met.”\(^{12}\) The portrait of Janson — considered by Boeckmann to be one of his most valuable works — was probably done as a result of their both being members of the Norwegian Art Association organized in Minneapolis in 1887.\(^{13}\)

Well-known Americans who posed for Boeckmann included President William McKinley, then governor of the state of Ohio, who was painted in 1896 at the Windsor Hotel in St. Paul.\(^{14}\) Others were Governor William Merriam, Governor John Sargent Pillsbury, Cyrus Northrop, John Burroughs, the famous naturalist and essayist, Callaway, the Soo Line’s general passenger agent, Mr. and Mrs. T. B. Walker, and Colonel Charles H. Wood.\(^{15}\) An article in the *Minneapolis Journal* of June 5, 1905, entitled “Portrait of Colonel Wood” describes this picture in detail; it hung for a time in the old West Hotel in Minneapolis.

In 1890, Boeckmann painted a pastel portrait of a lovely young bride, Mrs. George M. (Kristine) Jensen. It was to be a gift from her husband for their first Christmas together. The artist received only $50 for this work, which at the time was quite an extravagance for the young husband, who was employed as a printer in St. Paul. Today it is highly treasured by the family; Mrs. Jensen’s eldest daughter has it displayed proudly in her
home in Duluth. Like Harriet Backer, then Norway’s greatest woman artist, he had a talent for painting interiors, as is shown by a portrait of his wife and two sons reading the *Minneapolis Journal* in the sun room of the family home at 3500 Third Avenue South.

Boeckmann’s Norwegianness was evident in his love of the water, and he painted it on many occasions, both in Norway and in the New World. He completed many powerful seascapes, fjord scenes, and an especially beautiful painting entitled “Land of the Midnight Sun.” I know that this picture was sold to a Mr. Williamson at the Chicago Norske Klub in 1924, but its whereabouts is not known today.\(^\text{16}\) He also did landscapes of many lakes and farms in the Twin-City area — of White Bear and Minnetonka lakes, and many views of Minnehaha Creek. The lake scenes were done in a neo-romantic style, showing the effects of light, particularly moonlight, on the water. An undated newspaper article tells of a painting he did of Olaf O. Searle’s beautiful villa on Big Island in Lake Minnetonka. It was commissioned by Mr. Searle to be sent to Norway, and was to arrive at the same time as Mrs. Searle who was then beginning a journey to that country. I do not know whether it ever reached its destination.\(^\text{17}\)

There is also evidence that Boeckmann completed a number of altar paintings — how many I do not know, but I do have information regarding at least two: one a painting of “Christ on the Cross” done for the United Church parish in Rothsay, Minnesota, which I am unable to locate today, and another of “Christ and St. Peter” that hangs today in Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church in Norway, Kansas.\(^\text{18}\) His versatility is also reflected in a lovely floral bouquet of pink, white, and red peonies against an ultramarine blue background, and, interestingly enough, in a painting of a regal lion’s head done in
the style of Rosa Bonheur, the famous French animal portraitist.\textsuperscript{19} 

My grandfather was short — five feet, six inches in height — but with a red beard and a thick crop of red hair that I understand at times concealed quite a temper. Unlike Munch and Ibsen, he did not look “on the dark side of life,” but, rather, had a jolly disposition and an optimistic outlook. He loved good food, fine cigars and beer, and would amuse himself by sketching portraits of patrons on the white tablecloth in the old Shiek’s Cafe on Fourth Street in downtown Minneapolis. He could play the piano as easily as he could work on a canvas. He spent many hours relaxing as he painted on Lake Minnetonka. He and his family frequented a summer cottage on Stubbs Bay owned by their friend and neighbor, Anchor Thoresen.

In 1905, Boeckmann married Marie Finstad, who had been born on a farm in Søndre Strand, Eidsvold, Norway. The wedding was a civil ceremony in Milwaukee, attended by J. M. Heffelfinger and George Kirchner.\textsuperscript{20} The Boeckmanns had two sons, Ralph Sigurd and Carl Falk. Carl, a United States Army Air Corps flyer, was killed in 1943, at the age of thirty-one, in a plane crash. The plane was carrying troops and equipment and evacuating wounded from the fighting front in the South Pacific. He was posthumously awarded the Air Medal with two oak-leaf clusters. The eldest son, Ralph, a professional golfer in his earlier years, is now in his seventies and is retired.

Settled in Minneapolis, Boeckmann and his family lived at two addresses: 2614 Fremont Avenue North from 1905 to 1915, and later at 3500 Third Avenue South. Because my grandfather painted and was a friend of many prominent statesmen, he became somewhat involved in politics. I understand that he was an ardent
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admirer of William Jennings Bryan and Governor John Lind. Like all patriotic Norwegian Americans of his day, he contributed to the country’s war effort, becoming a member of the first National Guard unit organized in Minnesota during World War I.

One of Boeckmann’s successes came in 1914: an honorarium of $3,500 and an award of $300 for painting the historic Indian fight that took place at Killdeer Mountain in North Dakota on July 28, 1864. Called the “Eighth Minnesota Infantry ( Mounted) in the Battle of Ta-hakouty,” the picture shows the troops of General Alfred Sully’s expedition against the Sioux. A nine-by-twelve-foot wall-size painting, it hangs today in the senate conference room of the state capitol, St. Paul. Another large historical work, showing Admiral George C. Dewey at the “Battle of Manila” during the Spanish-American War of 1898, hung for a time in the old Plankinton Hotel in Milwaukee. It was recently located in a private collection in Wisconsin.

On one occasion, a wealthy steel executive from Jamestown, New York, paid Boeckmann $10,000 for several portraits of his family. His son Ralph once said of his father’s returns for his work: “His usual fee for commissioned portraits of notable people was $1,500.” He added that Boeckmann received $150 for each of many Norse Pilot Head paintings. It thus appears that he had a highly successful career. However, during his early years, he was often beset by financial difficulties and would sometimes be forced to sell a painting for whatever it would bring. A letter from an artist friend, Lars Haukaness, dated November 14, 1914, says: “Here in Chicago we’re having a terrible time, all art dealers are selling almost nothing, and say they never had such bad business.” This was probably also the case in Minneapolis, and perhaps one of the reasons why
Boeckmann turned to the restoration of old works of art in his later years. This type of work represented the epitome of artistic skill.

From 1908 until his death in 1923, he managed the gallery of the lumber magnate, T. B. Walker, earning a regular salary as he worked on the paintings of the masters purchased by Walker, who was then assembling one of the region’s great art collections. While in this position, Boeckmann was also credited with discovering the painting of a famous master concealed under a portrait; for safety in transportation, the original had been painted over as a means of avoiding recognition.24

Boeckmann also did for Walker a series of five Indian chiefs and their wives from the Piegan branch of the Blackfoot Confederation; this was done in the style of H. C. Cross, master Indian portraitist. The five Indian leaders were Little Chief, Curly Bear, Lazy Boy, Big Spring, and Bill Shoots. He also completed a group of three women: Mrs. Curly Bear, Mrs. Little Chief and her daughter, Little White. These Indians came from their reservation in Glacier National Park, Montana, to pose for Boeckmann in Walker’s old gallery at Eighth and Hennepin. The oil portraits are now hanging at the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art in Tulsa, Oklahoma. They depict the native Americans with charm, grace, and dignity.25

Boeckmann won a gold medal at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, 1893, for a painting of a Norse Pilot Head, his trademark. He also received a silver medal for a portrait of Congressman Edmund Rice of St. Paul. After his death in 1923, his wife Marie sent some of his paintings to the Norse-American Centennial Art Exhibit at the state fair grounds, 1925. She also had delivered some to the Fourth Annual Norwegian-American Art Exhibit held at the Chicago Norwegian Club in November,
Norse Pilot Head

Minnehaha Creek, Minneapolis
Family Reading the Minneapolis Journal

Battle of Killdeer Mountain
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1923. She hoped to sell them to help meet living expenses. The pictures did not all sell; as a result, we still have a number of them in the family today.

In 1968 I assembled twenty-five of Boeckmann’s paintings from private collections in the Twin Cities and in the Duluth area, and showed them at the Sons of Norway headquarters on Lake Street, Minneapolis. I continued to search for my grandfather’s works, found thirteen more, and showed a total of thirty-eight at the Hennepin County Government Center, in downtown Minneapolis, during the American Bicentennial Celebration of 1976. My most recent exhibit of Boeckmann’s work was held in September, 1977, in the Skyway Arcade of the Northwestern National Bank, Minneapolis. I have located seventy-nine of his paintings; however, these have not all been exhibited. I now know that they are only a sampling of the large body of work that he completed during his lifetime. I would like to find the others to copy them for our family album.

The two great art themes of the nineteenth century were Nature and the Individual Man — and Boeckmann painted them both. His cheerful outlook on life and his varied interests are reflected in his choice of subject matter — the lakes, his family, flowers, fellow countrymen, and public men. His style was naturalism, or realism (with overtones of romanticism). Naturalism was, as Christian Krogh said, “simply setting up your easel in front of your motif, and reproducing it precisely without embellishment.” Romanticism was the emotional expression of the simple, the fanciful, the familiar. Boeckmann borrowed the dark gallery tones from the old masters, and made liberal use of photographs; to an artist whose main ability lies in painting, any black and white model will do.

Boeckmann’s approach was unlike that of Herbjørn Gausta (1854–1924), another Norwegian immigrant
painter, whose artistic contribution to a subject came in his first sketch or in his rapid recording of it. His style also differed from that of Edvard Munch (1863–1944), to whom the matter of supreme importance was the subject or the pictorial expression of the human mind. Boeckmann's expertise seems to have been in his mastery of the medium, the pure pleasure of painting for painting's sake. His unerring line and poise were evident whether he was interpreting nature or man. He never broke out of his traditional, academic style, even though impressionism was the goal of many painters after the 1870s. His technique, coupled with the fact that he was isolated in the Middle West—away from the artistic centers of New York and Paris—helps explain why he failed to receive national recognition. With the exception of a few short-lived exhibits at the Odin Club and at the Norwegian Art Club, there were no regular showings of the works of Scandinavian artists in Minneapolis.

Because Boeckmann's work held such great charm for many, I should like to see a return to his style of painting. Richard Lack, founder of the Atelier Lack School of Studio Arts on Lake and Hennepin in Minneapolis, says: "There seems to be a revival of romantic realism, the true representation of form and color, the traditional school. And there are allied revivals, too... Look at the great wave of nostalgia sweeping the country and the world... the restoration of old houses and neighborhoods, the re-awakening of pleasure in what is past and traditional and where avant-garde is not all."

My grandmother Marie was often quoted as saying: "Carl isn't popular now, but perhaps, like so many painters, he will be after his death." So, I think it is appropriate that we rediscover the idyllic charm of the paintings of Carl Ludwig Boeckmann. In addition to being an out-

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Standing artist, he was also a fine example of the best in Norwegian Americanism. He assimilated the highest values of two cultures and gave generously of his talents to the New World.

NOTES

1 Obituaries of Carl L. Boeckmann appeared in the Minneapolis Sunday Tribune and Daglig Tidende of Minneapolis, on September 23, 1923.
5 G. N. E., “The Man and the Painting.”
6 In the 1880s eleven out of every thousand Norwegians were leaving their homeland annually. See Odd S. Lovoll’s A Folk Epic: The Bygdelag in America (Boston, 1975).
7 From “Historical Portraits,” published by Luther Seminary, St. Paul, as a special project for the American Centennial Celebration in 1976.
9 Ulabrand (1815–1881) was the famous sea pilot stationed at Ula in Tjølling, a province of Vestfold, Norway. Born in Tjølling, his real name was Anders Jacob Johansen. He saved many lives during his career until he lost his own at sea. The Sons of Norway Viking, No. 9, 73 (Minneapolis, September, 1976).
10 G. N. E., “The Man and the Painting.”
11 A list of Boeckmann’s paintings was written on his personal stationery by his wife Marie. She states that the portraits of Bjørnson, Ibsen, and Grieg were done from sketches made in Norway. I do not know what happened to the portrait of Kaiser Wilhelm II.
12 G. N. E., “The Man and the Painting.”
13 Carl G. O. Hansen states that a “Norwegian Art Society” was organized in Minneapolis in 1887; My Minneapolis, 92 (Minneapolis, 1956). Nina Draxten mentions a “Norwegian Art Association” as being formed in 1887; Kristofer Janson in America, 180 (Boston, 1976).
14 From an undated newspaper article entitled “Local Artist Finds Painting He Made of McKinley While Governor.”
15 G. N. E., “The Man and the Painting.”
16 A letter addressed to Marie Boeckmann from a Mr. Langfeldt, dated January 14, 1924, says that “Land of the Midnight Sun” was sold and that shortly she would receive a check for $50 for it.
17 From an undated article entitled “From the World of Art,” written in Norwegian.
18 Mrs. M. J. Melhus, Concordia, Kansas, to Marion J. Nelson of the University of Minnesota.
CARL L. BOECKMANN

19 Rosa Bonheur was a French painter of animals whose work Boeckmann obviously admired.
20 From an undated clipping, probably from a Milwaukee newspaper.
21 Interview with Mrs. Norton Johnson, Boeckmann’s close neighbor and friend.
22 Interview with Mrs. George Mowry Fish, whose mother was acquainted with Boeckmann when she worked at the old Guaranty State Bank in downtown Minneapolis.
23 The letter also states: “[Herbjørn] Gausta promised to clean the picture I have at the Odin Club. It was damaged by fire last spring, but I haven’t heard from him since.”
24 From obituaries in the Minneapolis Sunday Tribune and Daglig Tidende, September 23, 1923.
25 Paul A. Rossi to the author, June 12, 1970. Rossi, director of the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma, says that there are six oil portraits by Boeckmann in their collection.
26 Information from directories of artists, from catalogues of the Norse-American Art Exhibition and the Fourth Annual Norwegian-American Art Exhibit, and from G. N. E., “The Man and the Painting.”
27 Catalogue, “The Sons of Norway Presents an Art Exhibit by Carl Ludwig Boeckmann” (Minneapolis, 1968).
28 Catalogue, “The Richfield Bicentennial Commission Presents an Art Exhibition by the Late Norwegian-American Artist Carl L. Boeckmann (1867 to 1923).” The exhibit was held October 14-15, 1976, in the Hennepin County Government Center, Minneapolis.
29 Jan Askeland, Survey of Norwegian Painting, 36 (Oslo, 1963).
31 Carl G. O. Hansen, My Minneapolis, 92.
32 Pioneer Press Lively Arts Tabloid (St. Paul), September 12, 1976.