

HISTORY

# New Chapters in American History

## Studies Indicate that the Kensington Stone of Minnesota Is a Record Left by Goths and Norsemen in 1362

By EMILY DAVIS

SCHOOL CHILDREN may soon find that they have a brand new chapter of American history to learn. It will be a chapter of fourteenth century history, sandwiched in between the story of Leif Ericsson sailing to Vinland in 1000 A.D., and Columbus' celebrated voyage across the Ocean Sea in 1492. Into that fourteenth century, now a blank sheet in America's past, is being written a tale of exploration in America so unbelievable that scientists have scarcely dared to think it could be proved true.

It is a story of a band of Goths and Norsemen who sailed to America and pushed their way deep into the wilderness, as far as Minnesota. There, ten of the party were attacked by Indians. The others, returning from fishing, found the camp raided and their comrades lying "red with blood and dead." Fearing for their own lives, the survivors moved on, and when they found a shelter they stopped and set up a rune stone to commemorate the disaster. And then these survivors themselves disappeared from the historic record.

The rune stone telling about this fourteenth century murder mystery was unearthed at Kensington, Minnesota, 35 years ago. Then began a long siege of argument. Was the Kensington rune stone a hoax made by some modern Scandinavian settler? Or if the stone was authentic, what did it really mean to American history?

One man in particular, a student of Minnesota history named Hjalmar R. Holand, has had faith in the Kensington stone. For 20 years he has bent every effort to get to the bottom of the mystery the stone represented. One by one, he reports, the obscure points have become clear. After all this time, he has published the result of his research, presenting a book full of evidence so that Americanists can weigh the case.

As for himself, Mr. Holand writes, "Only one conclusion seems possible; That the Kensington rune stone is a genuine record left by Norse explorers in Minnesota about 1362."

And he adds, still more impressively: "This runic inscription is perhaps the most important that has ever come to the attention of man. It is the only legible runic inscription found in America.

"Finally, it has a priceless significance in that it is the oldest native document of American history written by white men."

The stone which Mr. Holand gives so important a place in American history is a slab of dark colored rock 31 inches long, with an inscription in runic alphabet characters on one flat side and along one edge.

The stone came to light in 1898 when a farmer happened to clear a rough piece of timber land. The farmer, Olof Ohman, was grubbing stumps when he attacked a particularly troublesome tree. Swing as hard as he could, his axe made little headway. And the reason, he discovered, was that a flat stone was fixed under two of the biggest roots.

Mr. Ohman got the exasperating stone out and forgot it. But his little son dusted off the slab and pointed out curious marks cut into it. The neighbors came to see and the rumors spread. The stone gained such fame that it was displayed in the Kensington bank window. Thousands came to look at it.

### Became a Doorstep

Then, a professor of Scandinavian languages was consulted. He read off part of the writing, and, thinking in terms of eleventh century Viking expeditions, he pointed out that something was wrong. Such writing was not the correct form used at the time of the Viking voyages. European scholars were consulted, too. They promptly called the stone a clumsy fraud, perpetrated by some immigrant.

So the Kensington stone came back to its discoverer, and in disgust at the whole business Mr. Ohman threw it down for a doorstep in front of his granary. There it lay, face down, for nine years.

Then, Hjalmar Holand came that way seeking data for a history of Norwegian



### BEFORE COLUMBUS

*More than 350 years after Leif Ericsson and over 100 years before Columbus a band of men sent out by the King of Norway and Sweden covered this route, new studies of the Kensington stone and Scandinavian literature indicate.*

immigration, and he heard so many stories about the Kensington rune stone that he asked Mr. Ohman to give him the granary doorstep.

When Holand had lugged the prize home and studied it, he discovered something that put an entirely new light on the situation. He found on the edge of the stone the date 1362. No wonder the runic alphabet characters were not in proper eleventh century style, thought Mr. Holand to himself. But—would they prove authentic fourteenth century letters? He decided that the stone was worth a complete investigation.

Mr. Holand's translation, which is regularly accepted, is as follows:

"(We are) 8 Goths (Swedes) and 22 Norwegians on (an) exploration-journey from Vinland over the West (i.e., through the western regions) We had camp by 2 skerries (i.e., by a lake wherein are two place-rocks) one day-journey from this stone We were (out) and fished one day After we came home (we) found 10 (of our) men red with blood and dead Ave Maria Save (us) from evil"

On the edge of the stone, Mr. Holand read these words:

"(We) have 10 of our party by the

sea to look after our ships (or ship) 14 days-journey from this island Year 1362"

Eagerly, Mr. Holand searched Scandinavian literature for a Norse adventure to fit this story. He found one.

"A Norse expedition was actually sent to American waters by the King of Norway and Sweden in 1355," he writes. "This expedition appears to have returned in 1364."

And Mr. Holand adds that if the inscription is genuine it must refer to this expedition.

### Missionary Expedition

To many critics, one of the stumbling blocks in accepting the Kensington rune stone as authentic has been the mixed personnel of the group described in the inscription. Goths and Norsemen in one party would be an absurdity, critics declared. Only a stupid person planning a hoax would fall into such a blunder.

But an "absurd" crew of Goths and Norwegians sailed together on that unique expedition of 1355, Mr. Holand found. The political situation in Scandinavia brought this about.

A king named Magnus ruled Norway and Sweden jointly at that time. He learned that the Christian colony of Norsemen in Western Greenland had abandoned their faith. In horror and distress, the king planned a missionary expedition to set out to re-convert the colony. Selecting Paul Knutson as leader, the king ordered him to take men from the royal retinue and from retinues of other men and to set out.

Now, King Magnus was noted for favoring his home province of West Gothland in Sweden, and his own retinue would naturally have furnished Goths. Knutson, a Norwegian, would just as naturally have picked Norsemen for the rest of his crew.

The language on the Kensington stone, a mixture of Swedish, Norwegian, English, and a Latin phrase, is about what would be expected of such a group, Mr. Holand argues. Soldiers and sailors, perhaps a priest or two, some Swedes, some Norwegians, would come to talk an idiom of their own.

But to return to the expedition's career. It seems queer that a religious crusade to Greenland should be massacred in Minnesota.

Not so hard to believe, says Mr. Holand.

The Greenland colonists who abandoned their faith also abandoned Greenland. Where they went has never been

known. Ahead of them lay that famous land of Vinland where timber and grapes grew in profusion.

Not finding the colony in Greenland, Knutson trailed them—somewhere—for about nine years. Mr. Holand theorizes that the trail led Knutson to Vinland, somewhere on the northeast coast of America. Then the expedition trailed north around the coast into Hudson Bay to the Nelson River.

There the expedition left its ships "by the sea" and ventured into the wilderness in canoes and on foot. And 1,000 miles from the ships came the massacre. Perhaps redskins had been tracking the strangers for days, waiting the chances when the camp was divided, some men fishing, some resting at the camp. The attack was ferocious and the Indians went off with scalps.

Among the "discrepancies" pointed out in the Kensington stone inscription, one big one was the statement about the camp being 14 days-journey from the ships. It was pointed out that in no direction could 14 days travel bring medieval explorers to the sea.

As usual, Mr. Holand found an answer. A days-journey was a phrase used by Scandinavian sailors in the Middle Ages as a definite unit of distance, equal to about 75 miles. This was a standard distance for a day's sailing. The distance from Iceland to Greenland was "four days-journey" to a Norseman, though it usually took several weeks to weather the ice and fog between the two lands. The Kensington stone lay just about 14 days-journey from Hudson Bay, in sailors' terms.

### Negative Possibility Tested

The rune-master who carved the stone used this term twice. He said that the tragedy occurred a days-journey away from the place where the stone was being set up. This camp was by a lake with two skerries, that is, boulders of place-rock projecting out of the water. Mr. Holand sought such a site a real day's walk from Kensington and could not find it. Now, he searched 75 miles north of Kensington, and among hundreds of lakes there he found just one that fitted the description.

From only one high point is it possible to see the two skerries at once, and from this Mr. Holand judges that the high point was the camp-site where the Indian massacre took place.

The champion of the Kensington stone has not been content with piling up evidence that the stone is an authentic record of history. He has also

tested the negative possibility, that the stone was faked.

Holand checked up on the growth of aspen trees in that part of Minnesota. The age of the aspen that held the Kensington stone was fixed at not less than 70 years. This date would apparently rule out the possibility that a modern settler faked the inscription. The first pioneers came to settle Minnesota about 1850.

As if to bear out the truth of the fantastic tale of medieval adventure in America, no less than four old axes have been unearthed in western Minnesota. Like everything else associated with the Kensington stone story, these axes have been branded "impossible."

Mr. Holand toured museums in six European countries several years ago, and came home convinced that the Minnesota axes are authentic weapons lost by Knutson's crew. All are of types used during the same medieval period and all are Scandinavian.

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KENSINGTON STONE

"Oldest native document of American history written by white man."