



## Historical Timeline for Norway

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This class is designed to teach family history researchers about the and historical timeline in Norway, and how it affected record keeping.

### Objectives:

Patrons will be able understand the different time periods and how it affected record keeping.

- - 872 BC (Small warring kingdoms)
- 872-1000 CE (One kingdom, Christianity)
- 1319 CE (Royal line died out on male side)
- 1349 CE (Black Plague)
- 1397-1523 (Union of Kalmar)
- 1523-1814 (Union with Denmark, Reformation)
- 1814-1905 (Union with Sweden)
- 1905-1991 (Constitutional Monarchy)

### Background:

Norway, officially the Kingdom of Norway comprises the western and northernmost position of the Scandinavian Peninsula. The remote Arctic islands of Jan Mayen and the archipelago of Svalbard also form part of Norway. Bouvet Island, located in the Subantarctic, is a dependency of Norway, it also lays claims to the Antarctic territories of Peter I Island and Queen Maud Land. The capital and largest city in Norway is Oslo.

Norway has a total area of 148,729 sq miles and in November of 2020 had a population of 5,385,300. Norway shares borders with Finland and Russia to the north-east and the Skagerrak strait to the south, with Denmark on the other side. Norway has an extensive coastline, facing the North Atlantic Ocean and the Barents Sea. The maritime influence dominates Norway's climate with mild lowland temperatures on the seacoasts, whereas the interior, while colder, is also a lot milder than areas elsewhere in the world on such northerly latitudes. Even during polar night in the north, temperatures above freezing are commonplace.

The kingdom was established in 872 as a merger of many petty kingdoms. From 1523 to 1814, Norway was a part of the Kingdom of Denmark-Norway, and from 1814-1905, it was in a personal union with the Kingdom of Sweden. Norway was neutral during world War I and remained so until April 1940 when the country was invaded and occupied by Germany until the end of World War II.

Norway maintains the Nordic welfare model with universal health care and a comprehensive social security system, and its values are rooted in egalitarian ideals. Norwegian state has large ownership positions in key industrial sectors having extensive reserve of petroleum, natural gas, minerals, lumber seafood and fresh water. The petroleum industry accounts for around a quarter of the country's gross domestic product. On a per-capita basis, Norway is the world's largest producer of oil and natural gas outside of the Middle East.

## **Prehistory:**

About 10,000 BC, following the retreat of the great inland ice sheets, the earliest inhabitants migrated north into the territory which is now Norway. They traveled steadily northwards along the coastal areas, warmed by the Gulf Stream, where life was more bearable. To survive they fished and hunted reindeer (and other prey). Between 5,000 BC and 4,000 BC the earliest agricultural settlements appeared around the Oslo fjord. Between 1500 BC and 500 BC these agricultural settlements spread into the southern areas of Norway – whilst the inhabitants of the northern regions continued to hunt and fish.

## **-872 BC (Small warring kingdoms)**

New settlers arrived in eastern Norway around 2000 BC. They were Indo-European farmers who grew grain and kept cows and sheep.

From about 1500 BC, bronze was gradually introduced, but the use of stone implements continued. Norway had few riches to barter for bronze goods and the few finds consist mostly of elaborate weapons and brooches that only chieftains could afford. Huge burial cairns built close to the sea as far north as Harstad as well as inland in the south are characteristic of this period.

*The Iron Age* allowed for easier cultivation and thus new areas were cleared as the population grew with the increased harvests. A new social structure evolved when sons married as they would remain in the same house. This extended family was a clan. They would offer protection from other clans if conflicts arose. The issue would be decided at a *ting* (court) a sacred place where all freemen from the surrounding area would assemble and determine punishments for crimes, such as paying fines in food.

From the last century, a widespread cultural influence took place. The Vikings adapted letters and created their own alphabet. Trading with Romans also took place, largely

furs and skins in exchange for luxury goods. Some Scandinavians also served as Roman mercenaries. Some of the most powerful farmers became chieftains.

## **872-1000 CE (One kingdom, Christianity)**

From the 8th to the 10th century, the wider Scandinavian region was the source of Vikings. The looting of the monastery at Lindisfarne in Northeast England in 793 by Norse people has long been regarded as the event which marked the beginning of the Viking Age. This age was characterized by expansion and emigration by Viking seafarers. They colonized, raided and traded in all parts of Europe.

In the mid-9th century, the largest chieftains of the petty kingdoms started a major power struggle. Harald Fairhair started the process of unifying Norway when he entered an alliance with the Earls of Lade and was able to unify the country after the decisive Battle of Hafrsfjord (circa 870–900). He set up the very basics of a state administration with stewards in the most important former chieftain estates.

Norwegian Viking explorers discovered Iceland by accident in the 9th century when heading for the Faroe Islands and eventually came across Vinland, known today as Newfoundland in Canada. The Vikings from Norway were most active in the northern and western British Isles and eastern North America isles. During the late 9th century, Iceland had been divided among 400 Norse chieftains.

From the 1040s to 1130 the country was at peace. In 1130, a civil war era broke out over succession to the throne, which allowed all the king's sons to rule jointly. At times there were periods of peace, before a lesser son allied himself with a chieftain and started a new conflict. The Archdiocese of Nidaros was created in 1152 to control the appointment of kings. The church inevitably had to take sides in these conflicts, with the church's influence on the king also becoming an issue in the civil wars. The wars ended in 1217 with the appointment of Håkon Håkonsson, who introduced clear succession laws. He also managed to subject Greenland and Iceland to Norwegian rule. The Icelandic Commonwealth thus came to an end after a civil war resulted in a pro-Norwegian victory.

## **1319 CE (Royal line died out on male side)**

The 14th century is described as Norway's Golden Age with peace and increase in trade, especially with the British islands, although Germany became increasingly important towards the end of the century. Throughout the High Middle Age, the king established Norway as a sovereign state with a central administration and local representatives.

King Haakon V Magnusson served as king of Norway from 1299 until his death in 1319. Born 10 April 1270 in Tønsberg, Norway and died 8 May 1319 at the Tønsberg Fortress. He and his wife Euphemia married in 1299 and they resided at the Akershus

Castle in Oslo. Queen Euphemia loved to read and is said to have owned one of the largest book collections in Europe at that time. They had only two children. Ingeborg of Norway (their only surviving child) and Agnes Haakonsdatter. They did not have a son to take over the kingdom after his father. Therefore, the King of Denmark was asked to represent Norway, but not as a ruler.

### **1349 CE (Black Plague)**

In 1349, the **Black Death** spread to Norway and within a year killed more than a third of the population. Later plagues reduced the population to half by 1400. Many communities were entirely wiped out resulting in an abundance of land allowing farmers to switch to more animal husbandry. The reduction in taxes weakened the king's position and many aristocrats lost the basis for their surplus reducing some to mere farmers. High tithes to the church made it increasingly powerful and the archbishop became a member of the Council of State. The loss of lives during the Black Plague made Norway weak and Denmark became the stronger of the two countries.

The Hanseatic League took control of Norwegian trade in the 14th century and established a trading center in Bergen. In 1380, Olaf Haakonsson inherited both the Norwegian and Danish thrones, creating a union between the two countries.

### **1397-1523 (Union of Kalmar)**

In 1397, under Margaret I, the Union of Kalmar was created between the three Scandinavian countries. She waged war against the Germans resulting in a trade blockade and higher taxation on Norwegians which resulted in a rebellion. However, the Norwegian Council of State was too weak to pull out of the union.

Margaret pursued a centralizing policy which inevitably favored Denmark, because it had a greater population than Norway and Sweden combined. Margaret also granted trade privileges to the Hanseatic merchants of Lubeck in Bergen in return for recognition of her right to rule and this hurt the Norwegian economy. The Hanseatic merchants formed a state within a state in Bergen for generations. Even worse were the pirates, the "Victual Brothers", who launched three devastating raids on the port.

King Christian II, (1 July 1481-25 January 1559) was the last king in the union. He executed 80 people in what is known as the Stockholm bloodbath and tried to blame it on the military. Sweden left the union shortly thereafter. Christian II died as a prisoner on 25 January 1559 at the Kalundborg Castle, Sweden.

## **1523-1814 (Union with Denmark, Reformation)**

Denmark and Norway 1523-1814 stayed together under the rule of Frederick I who favored Martin Luther's Reformation. At first it was not popular in Norway as the Church was a national institution and the country was too poor for the clergy to be very corrupt. At first King Frederick agreed not to introduce Protestantism to Norway, but in 1529 he changed his mind. Norwegian resistance was led by Olav Engelbrektsson, Archbishop of Trondheim who invited the old king Christian II back from his exile in the Netherlands. Christian returned but his army was defeated, and Christian spent the rest of his life in prison. When King Frederick I died and a three-way war of succession broke out between the supporters of his eldest son Christian III, his younger Catholic brother Hans and the followers of Christian II, Olav Engelbrektsson again tried to lead a Catholic Norwegian resistance movement. Christian III triumphed and Engelbrektsson went into exile and in 1536/1537 and Christian demoted Norway from an independent kingdom to a puppet state. The Reformation was imposed in 1537, strengthening the king's power. All church valuables were sent to Copenhagen and the forty percent of the land which was owned by the church came under the control of the king. Danish was introduced as a written language, although Norwegian remained in distinct dialects. Professional administration was now needed, and power shifted from the provincial nobility to the royal administration. District stipendiary magistrates were appointed as judges and the sheriffs became employees of the crown rather than of the local nobility. In 1572, a governor-general was appointed for Norway with a seat at Akershus Fortress in Oslo. From the 1620s professional military officers were employed.

The 17<sup>th</sup> century saw a series of wars between Denmark-Norway and Sweden. In one of these wars Denmark-Norway lost Jämtland and Härjedalen now in Sweden.

Throughout this period, Bergen was the largest town in Norway. Its population of 14,000 in the mid-18th century was twice the size of Christiania (later Oslo) and Trondheim combined. Eight townships with privileges existed in 1660 and by 1800 this had increased to 23,000. During this period up to two-thirds of the country's audited national income was transferred to Copenhagen. In the last decades of the century Hans Nielsen Hauge started the Haugean movement, which demanded the right to preach the word of God freely. The University of Oslo was established in 1811.

## **1814-1905 (Union with Sweden)**

Denmark-Norway entered the Napoleonic Wars on France's side in 1807. This had a devastating effect on the Norwegian economy as the royal Navy hindered export by ship and import of food. Sweden invaded Norway the following year, but after several Norwegian victories a cease-fire was signed in 1809. After pressure from Norwegian merchants' license trade was permitted with corn from Denmark to Eastern Norway in exchange for Norwegian timber export to Great Britain. The Treaty of Kiel was signed 14 January 1814 and Denmark ceded Norway to the king of Sweden. This put an end to 100s of years of border war between Norway and Sweden.

The Napoleonic Wars sent Norway into an economic crisis as nearly all the merchants had gone bankrupt during the blockade. Recovery was difficult because of export tariffs and the country experienced high inflation. The Norwegian *speciedaler* was established as a currency by the Bank of Norway when it was established in 1816, financed through a silver tax which lasted until 1842. Under threat of a coup d'état by Carl Johan, Norway reluctantly paid the debt stated in the Treaty of Kiel despite never having ratified it. Constitution Day on 17 May became an important political rally that year.

The constitution of Norway was adopted on 16 May 1814 and signed on 17 May 1814 by the Norwegian Constituent Assembly at Eidsvoll, Akershus, Norway under protest from the Swedish King. 17 May is celebrated in Norway every year.

Norwegian support of the union decreased towards the end of the 1890s, especially following the 1897 Swedish abolition of the free trade agreement and the lack of a Norwegian foreign minister. Christian Michelsen, a shipping magnate, statesman and Prime Minister of Norway from 1905-1907, played a central role in the peaceful separation of Norway from Sweden. A national referendum confirmed the people's preference for a monarchy over a republic. However, no Norwegian could legitimately claim the throne since none of Norway's noble families could claim descent from medieval royalty. In European tradition, royal of "blue" blood is a precondition for laying claim to the throne.

## **1905-1991 (Constitutional Monarchy)**

The Parliament voted to establish a Norwegian consular service in 1905, which was rejected by the Swedish king and on 7 June the Parliament unanimously approved the dissolution of the union. In the following dissolution referendum, only 184 people voted in favor of the union. Only men were allowed to vote, but it was the women who made their men go out and vote. The government offered the Norwegian crown to Denmark's Prince Carl, who became King Haakon VII of Norway. His two-year-old son Alexander became Prince Olav of Norway. His wife Princess Maud of Wales became queen Maud of Norway. She was born 26 November 1869 at Marlborough House, London, England.

Crown Prince Olav born 2 July 1903 in Denmark became King Olav of Norway in 1957 following the death of his father. He married Princess Märtha of Sweden in 1929. They had two daughters and one son who became King Harald V of Norway. King Harald V of Norway married Sonja Haraldsen in 1968 and they have two children. Princess Märtha Louise and Crown Prince Haakon (married to Mette-Marit Tjessem Høiby). They have two children. Princess Ingrid Alexandra and Prince Sverre Magnus. Princess Ingrid Alexandra is next in line to the kingdom after her father Crown Prince Haakon.