

ANDY ANDERSON - VIKING WARRIOR

Written and photographed by June Grayson

If all of the world's history books, almanacs, and reference tomes have to be rewritten soon, blame it on Wilfred Raymond Anderson, a prolific Chicago writer and retired businessman.

Anderson has trained his sights on what he calls the Columbus Fraud. Anderson has proof, he believes, the Christopher Columbus we know as the discoverer of America was an ignorant Genoan weaver who died in 1480. The real Columbus was a Spaniard of Norwegian and Jewish blood.

"I know the idea sounds weird if you haven't heard it before," admits Anderson, "but anyone can examine the evidence." To make the facts more accessible, Anderson published a book in 1981 at his own expense called the "Viking Explorers and the Columbus Fraud." He publishes a quarterly newsletter for the Leif Ericson Society of which he is founder, president, public relations director, and newsletter writer. He writes letters to the editors of newspapers throughout the world. He appears on television and radio talkshows. He sends news releases to college history departments so historians can keep abreast of his discoveries (although none of them so far have deigned to respond).

A Chicago literary agent will market his latest book, "Panning For Truth," subtitled "Columbus and Other American Myths," which he is writing with four co-authors. The over-riding theme of the book is that the people of ancient civilizations were much more mobile than previously thought and there were hundreds and maybe thousands of transatlantic and transpacific ocean crossings before Columbus.

Small wonder that one of his favorite prints adorning his living room wall is Salvador Dali's Don Quixote, the sometime patron saint of lost causes.

Andy Anderson thinks big as befits a six-foot, four-inch descendant of the Vikings. His father, Ole Martin Anderson Djerke (the Djerke was dropped when the Andersons became Americanized) was born in Ullensaker, Norway, in 1881. His mother, Matilda Frederickson, was born in Kongsvinger, Norway, in 1886. Their families joined the thousands of other Norwegian families who came to America around the turn of the century seeking economic opportunity.

Born in Janesville, Wisconsin, Anderson lived there until attending the University of Wisconsin at Madison. He majored in chemistry "until I got tired of acid burns on my pants." The highlight of his college experience, he recalls, was the chance to study Norwegian with Einar Haugen. In 1939 he graduated with an accounting degree and became a CPA.

After working in Atlanta and Detroit, he ended up in Milwaukee in 1950 where he met his future wife, Gerd Tennebekk, from Bergen, Norway. They have been married for thirty-seven years and have two daughters and three grandchildren. Trained in fashion and design, Gerd is now a supervisor at Marshall Field's in Chicago.

Anderson has always been a writer. He wrote his first

column for the school newspaper when he was twelve and had a regular column in *The Cardinal*, the University of Wisconsin newspaper. He has written over two hundred business articles published in various trade journals.

In October, 1961, a chance remark by Finn Sandberg, then Norwegian vice-consul in Chicago, started him on the path of an amateur historian and fervent apologist for the Vikings. "I visited the consulate to secure a writing assignment to finance a trip to Norway," remembers Anderson. "Sandberg offered no encouragement. As a joke, I said - I guess I will have to get Congress to change Columbus Day to Leif Ericson Day."

"If you can do that, you'll have a million Norwegian-Americans on your side," Sandberg said. Recognizing a gauntlet when he heard one, this latter-day Viking thought - why not?

Anderson had despised the study of history in college, but he became a frequent visitor to the Chicago Public Library and the Newberry Library. He discovered that there already was a Leif Ericson Day, first proclaimed for October 9th, 1935, by Congress and signed into law by President Roosevelt.

To learn more about his Norwegian heritage, Anderson called a Chicago Norwegian newspaper and asked for a sample copy. "Send me seven dollars and I'll send you a subscription," said the

editor (who shall remain nameless) as he slammed down the receiver.

"That really annoyed me," says Anderson. "I decided to write my own newspaper." He ordered letterhead stationery and started the Leif Ericson Society in 1962. His avowed purpose was to discover and publish the truth about the Vikings. "Even today many Norwegians are ashamed of their Viking ancestry," Anderson says. "Most Americans think any talk about the Vikings in America is only hearsay."

Chicagoans don't quite know what to make of Andy Anderson. Is he only an intellectual gadfly and the biggest story-teller in Chicago - or something more? One thing sure, he has provided many interesting tales for Chicago newspaper columnists.

Perhaps it does not help his credentials that he has won three honorable mentions in the Burlington, Wisconsin, Liars Club annual contest with entries such as this:

"In slum clearance for a Chicago expressway, they encountered a house so dilapidated that \$8,000 had to be spent on remodeling before it was fit to be condemned."

Consider the "ridiculous" plan that he and five other investors had in 1966 to build the Leif Ericson Center east of

Michigan Avenue on the south bank of the Chicago River - a 132 story, 1,452 foot tall building of glass and aluminum. The plan failed. However, only a few years later the new Sears Tower reached a height of 1,454 feet with 110 stories. His vision was not preposterous, only premature.

Or consider his proposal to observe the millennium of Leif Ericson's discovery of America (wait till 2,003 A.D.) by building a 1,000 foot statue of Leif, complete with sword and shield, astride the Chicago River in downtown Chicago.

Anderson has an even more obliging reason to step up the pace of his assault on historical errors. He wants to convince the world of his thesis before 1992, when he expects Italians to go all out to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America by the "wrong" Christopher Columbus.

You can read Anderson's summary of the Columbus controversy elsewhere in this magazine. If you assume that Anderson's sources are accurate and if you examine his evidence with an open mind, you may have to admit that his version of history could be true. Remember the historical context of these events:

Columbus sailed on the eve of the final banishment of the Jews from Spain on the pain of death. If Columbus was indeed Jewish,

he would have had to lie to get the support of the Spanish royalty and he could not have returned to Spain safely unless he continued to hide his Jewishness.

Particularly compelling is the evidence marshaled by Saul Wieselthaler, the famous Nazi hunter, in his book, *The Sails of Hope*, where he asserts that Christopher Columbus was really an educated Jew rather than an unschooled Genoan Catholic. The esteemed *Encyclopedia Judaica* summarizes similar information but reaches no conclusion under its heading of Christopher Columbus.

Anderson is not alone in seeking to set the record straight. At the very least, his plot is as good as that of any current spy best-seller.

If the controversy exists, why do we never read about it in our children's history books? Why don't university history departments research the subject? Can the scientific method be applied to the study of history as well as medicine?

According to Lew Erenberg, Ph.D., professor of American history at Loyola University, Chicago, "Historians use scientific methods in that we make hypotheses and assess the evidence. We need first hand accounts of historical records - birth records, church records, death records. If the evidence is still inconclusive, we have to search for more evidence. All of the

pieces must fit together pleasingly."

"If Mr. Anderson feels rebuffed by historians," Erenberg continues, "I suspect that it is because lay writers are out of the mainstream of historical research and not taken seriously as historians. This is not an burning subject for present day research," Erenberg thinks.

"If there were only some larger issue riding on the subject, then it could again become an important matter to historians. I am not averse to mentioning such controversies to my students but this may be a subject, like the Kennedy assassination, which will never be resolved to everyone's satisfaction."

Anderson has one unfulfilled desire. He would like to visit Spain and examine the evidence he cites firsthand. However, he is 73 years old (although he could pass for 60), he takes daily blood pressure medication, and his wife wants to go to Hawaii.

He hopes that one of his grandsons will pick up his standard if he does not finish his work. "When my grandson was a baby, I held him in my arms and rubbed his little face with the fur on one of my Viking statues," Anderson beams.

In the meantime, Anderson lives by his credo: it is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness. Anderson is too

modest. He lights fire-bombs, not candles.

Will he ever retire?

"Hell, no, I'm having too much fun. I'll die with my boots on and kicking all the way to my word processor."

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