

Skarland Hall Dedication on May 7, 1966 by William Cashen

Mrs. Egan, President Wood, Mr. Flavin, Pioneers, Alumni, Students, Ladies and Gentlemen:

To select from among my dozens of memories of Ivar Skarland, a few to share with you this afternoon, is a rather difficult task and one fraught with some inherent dangers.

In the first place, there are many present who knew him quite well who would easily detect fable from fact. Secondly, I would not like students, new to the University, to gain a false or misleading impression of the man we are honoring today. Finally, my favorite memories of Ivar are largely of a humorous vein; and there is the danger that some present may consider humor in poor taste on an occasion such as this.

Within these limitations and boundaries; but assuming that today is a happy occasion (which I am sure would be Ivar's wish) rather than a solemn memorial service, I am most happy to relate some of the anecdotes I have been telling about Ivar Skarland since I first met him over 30 years ago.

As most of you know Ivar was born in Norway in the last year of the 19th century; grew up under the care and stern tutelage of an older sister who had him reading newspapers at the age of five; served his "hitch" in the Norwegian Army and completed a course in Forestry at a school roughly comparable to an American 2 year technical college.

Stories of America from his grandfather, who had sailed "Windjammers" as far as California and back, inspired a desire to see this new world, and he came to Canada in 1928. First in the forests of British Columbia and later in the Juneau area he worked as a logger, and in the spring of 1930 came north to Healy to work at the Healy River Coal mine.

Here he met Captain Austin E. Lathrop, Alaska's first industrialist, among whose many enterprises, was ownership of the Healy Mines. As Ivar told it, he had not been on the job long when, during a wait between coal cars, he sat down on a bench and began reading a magazine. Up the stairs and into the tipple, on an impromptu inspection, strode "Cap" Lathrop. Ivar, caught loafing, remained seated.

"And what in blazes do you think you're doing?" demanded Lathrop.

Ivar hadn't the slightest idea who the fellow was but he replied, truthfully, "Not a single thing." I might add, parenthetically that both Lathrop's questions and Ivar's reply lose something in this polite translation, but at any rate "Cap" Lathrop was stopped dead in his tracks. He started at the resting miner for a second or two, then burst out laughing.

Down at the office he inquired who the new tippie-man was and from that day on, Ivar had a job at Healy any time he wanted to work. "Cap" Lathrop, a self-made man himself, admired the courage and honesty he saw in this young man from Norway.

In September of 1930 Ivar came up to the College, seeking admission as a student, which meant an interview with Dr. Charles E. Bunnell, the president of the College. The interview was a complete failure. Ivar, very conscious of his accent, spoke as little as possible and what he did mutter was almost totally unintelligible to the President. Finally Dr. Bunnell told him he had better to go back to Healy for another year or two until he had a better grasp of the language. "You see, Ivar," he said, "you talk kind of twisted!"

I don't know what they teach in Freshmen English these days, but when I was a Freshmen we submitted a "theme" every Monday morning and Professor Southwick spent the period reading them aloud and holding them up for public ridicule. The papers came back on Wednesday covered with red pencil notations in great profusion citing page and paragraph of the *Handbook of Compostions* which showed the rule broken or the blunder committed. The source of these outrageous notations and the fellow who dotted every "i" and crossed every "t" we neglected was none other than that insufferable perfectionist Ivar Skarland!

I would be so provoked with the mass of red markings on my papers that I actually resorted to looking up the reference cited, hoping of course, to find the paper grader in error. I never did; but as the year progressed I was pleased to note that he became less meticulous and toward the end he didn't make many marks at all.

Ivar also taught me French. He had learned French as well as German and English in Norway. We lived across the hall from each other in my sophomore year and Ivar, by this time a good and close friend, would correct my attempts at writing French sentences. He should have confined his help to the written work. One day Professor Marchand remarked that I was the first American he ever knew who pronounced French with a Norwegian accent!

Although he was from ten to fifteen years older than most of us, Ivar was very much a part of Student life. His skill as a skier was well respected and he spent many hours teaching any and all who wished to learn the best cross-country techniques. He carried the University colors in the early Ice Carnival ski races, and always placed among the winners. He served on the Collegian staff on the Denali, of which he was the Editor of Volume II in 1935. HE was on the Executive Council of the ASUA and on the Rifle Team. Most of us had part-time jobs to pay our college expenses, but other than correcting English papers, which no one else could do, Ivar would not take such jobs. HE could support himself, and he would not take a job which a younger student needed, he felt, more than he did.

Ivar was graduated in May 1935 with a B.A. in Liberal Arts, English major. His GPA was 3.48 – just under honors. His name was placed on the Ira J. Brumback plaque as

the outstanding senior man of 1935. He had completed his work in three and one half years – one semester off to refinance himself at Healy. The summers of 1934 and 1935 he spent with Otto Geist and others on the St. Laurence Island Archaeological expeditions. This work appealed to him and seeing the opportunities and need for anthropological studies throughout the Territory, he decided to make this his life work.

But graduate study meant money, and money meant Healy and so it was another call on “Cap” Lathrop and another return to the coal mine, which by this time had become his second home, and where he had many friends.

The years 1935 to 1945 were busy ones for Ivar: from Healy to Harvard to College—and his first faculty appointment – to Fort Richardson and two years of U.S. Army services; back to College, back to Harvard until his goal was achieved: Ivar Skarland, Ph.D., Professor of Anthropology.

For the next twenty years Ivar devoted himself to his University classes which were always filled capacity.; to making summer field studies throughout Alaska; and to lecturing on his specialties, “Alaska Natives” and “People of the Arctic.” He grew in professional stature and was recognized as an authority in these fields. The hospitality of his log cabin home on Rainey Ridge, his personal charm and unaffected friendliness became legend on campus and off.

His death on January 1, 1965 was a severe blow to all of us who knew him. As a close friend, a fellow student and for 23 years a colleague, I am particularly delighted that this fine structure, located only a stones – throw from Ivar’s log cabin home of many years, has been named Skarland Hall. It is a fitting tribute and remembrance to a loyal son of his Alma Mater and of his adopted land, Alaska, USA.

Students, present and future, may well reflect on the accomplishments of this man; a young immigrant, who, by sheer hard work and perseverance, by being helpful to others, by being a good student, a good citizen and a good teacher, by sharing whatever he had with whomever desired a share, attained the high goals he set for himself and left a warm and lasting memory in the hearts of those who knew him. He was a pioneer in the truest sense of the word, and a professor of highest merit.