

Taken for granite

Turlock Marble and Granite Works carving out Viking monument stone to mark family's past

By Kimberly Horg
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A 9-foot piece of granite was shipped half-way across the world to be carved by Turlock sculptor Ira Kessey.

A Viking monument stone, called "bautastein" in Norwegian, was shipped from Norway to the United States four months ago to be carved by Turlock Marble and Granite Works.

When Kessey is finished with it, the stone will be displayed at the annual Norway Day Festival, May 8-9 at San Francisco's Crissy Field.

It will then be placed at the Na-

pa Cemetery the following Saturday with a dedication ceremony. A San Francisco Norwegian folk dance group will perform near the cemetery during the day followed by a procession to the dedication site. During the unveiling of the stone, speeches and proclamations will be made by U.S. or Norway dignitaries.

An evening banquet will be held featuring a concert by the popular Norwegian singing star Hanne Krogh, which will be reservations only but the event is free and is open to the public.

Kessey, along with Granite Works owner Stewart Saugstad, are both of Scandinavian her-

itage, so the project takes on an extra significance.

"Both of us follow our heritage and have been involved in many Scandinavian celebrations," Saugstad said. "They were looking for someone to do it, heard that we have a good sculptor and we are Norwegian. They picked the best sculptor on the West Coast to do it."

Kessey said he started working on the project about three weeks ago.

"It was a raw stone when I got it," he said. "I carved the ship by my own design resembling the

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way the ship would have looked back then. By the end of the week I will have carved the letters and it should be finished within a couple of weeks."

An image of the ship is on one side and a bronze plaque that is being shipped from Norway will be on the other side. The bottom of the boulder was removed for testing.

"Carvings on Viking stones usually have a story to tell in the Rune alphabet accompanied by an intertwining design," Kessey said.

Saugstad said the project started off small.

"When it began I didn't realize the significance," he said.

The project was commissioned by Keith and Peggy Wheeler of Napa. Keith Wheeler's great-great grandparents, Jakob Anderson Slogvig and Serena Tormodsdatter Madland, moved to California — after living in several other states — from Norway in 1854. They worked a farm in Soscol, a town just south of Napa.

Their move to the U.S., like a number of other Norwegians, was inspired by the "Sloopers," a group of Norwegian pioneers seeking religious freedom in the New World. Jakob died in 1864, while Serena lived with her son, Andrew, and his family until she passed away in 1898. She was buried next to her husband and youngest

son in the Napa Tulocay Cemetery. Presently these three family members have only one small grave stone between them. Their great-great grandson, Keith Wheeler, is making sure that changes soon.

Wheeler said he was shocked that more recognition wasn't given his family members and their journey west.

The stone will be used as a grave marker after its display in San Francisco.

The idea came from the traditional Viking rune stone. The Wheelers came up with the idea to dedicate the stone to their ancestors' voyage. The chunk of granite was found on a farm in Norway, close to where their ancestors were from. It was shipped to the U.S. by a vessel across the ocean, taken off the boat in Oakland and the East Bay Monument Shop delivered it Turlock by truck.

Small pieces of the stone will be sold during the Norway Day festival to help pay for the project.

For more information on this project visit www.wheelerfolk.org.

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