Most cultural values—fortunately, we might say—cannot enter museums. They must be kept in their place while one endeavors to fit them in. This is where cultural heritage organizations enter the fray: their aims are the same as those of museums, but their means are different. Constant interaction takes place through collaboration and by learning from and influencing one another. Today, The Society for the Preservation of Norwegian Ancient Monuments (*Foreningen til norske Fortidsminnes merkers Bevaring*), The Directorate of Cultural Heritage (*Riksantikvaren*), and The Council of Historic Buildings (*Den Antikvariske Bynismsennd*) form the backbone of preserving our country’s cultural heritage. In both name and aim, the main Norwegian association is the sister of the French Archeological Society for the Conservation of Historic Monuments (*Société française d’archéologie pour la conservation des monuments historiques*), which is a decade older (we would not say daughter, as the age gap is too small), and this by and large helps explain the intimate programmatic link between the Norwegian and French organizations. […]

This [French] movement runs parallel to the Nordic one that, in essence, maintains a tradition of cultural continuity in rural areas. Our day and age has learned to reckon with large units, with the safeguarding of cultural heritage based on consistent principles. Initially, the museums idolized individual objects, and the individual parts—the cornices, the panels, the furniture—were elevated at the expense of the whole. The old buildings were regarded as places from which museums could gather their material. Gradually, however, the importance of the environment and the surroundings increased. One started thinking in bigger terms, feeling the deep affinity between the different elements: the decorative, the interior, the style. An old building with its interiors, gardens, outbuildings, and outhouses is no longer something coincidental but a living organism that belongs together and in which one was not afraid, if necessary, to complete the rooms with furnishings, whether original, in keeping with the [period] style, or carefully worked, detailed copies. One has sought consciously for the rules governing this art, the broader, overarching lines behind the details. The buildings and the natural surroundings themselves, the plot, the landscape—all this became a part of cultural heritage protection. […]

In Stockholm, Sweden, preserving the Old town (*Gamla Stan*)—“the town between the bridges” (*staden mellan broarna*)—is doubtless one of the most interesting conundrums for cultural heritage organizations in modern times. In Stockholm, a complete medieval layout has been preserved in the midst of a modern town. Public
opinion demanded that due consideration be paid, and the fanatics in modern traffic and town planning were eventually put in their places. Tricky social problems often arise in connection with old, unhealthy, decrepit parts of town.

A peculiar element of the population was living in completely medieval surroundings, with the hotels for bachelors and the dodgy dens for liquor smugglers and drifters. A proper review of the whole problem linked with “social clearance” was demanded—the same problems we have everywhere, in Frankfurt as in Marseilles, in Hamburg as in London—the problem of slum clearance. Creating a modern city without diminishing its historical values was at stake. The question was approached on a broad basis. Director General of Cultural Heritage Curman and the secretary of the committee responsible for beautifying the town, Professor Martin Olsson, threw their weight behind the matter. Entire blocks were purchased. Cultural corporations were set up, and the city of Stockholm invested large amounts of money. One by one, the old parts of town were done up and cultural values were preserved. No longer does anyone imagine knocking down the Old Town and replacing it with profitable functionalist blocks and modern town planning.

These attempts to preserve continuity in Stockholm have surely been important for the pleasant social conditions of the town. Preserving continuity is like preserving family memories.

By way of their listed buildings acts, Norway and Denmark have worked on these problems. Representatives of cultural heritage organizations are consulted when old and valuable secular buildings are under discussion. Collaboration between the owners of the buildings and the public authorities takes place, and this work involves trying to balance the persistent contradictions between private and public interests. Admittedly, this is not always easy; often, linking the memories of the past to everyday life is hard enough. To what degree and in what way should we seek to protect it? […]

In reality the past is a part of our present, part of the face of contemporary Norway, whose fate has been entrusted to us and which is our responsibility. Our work is based on creating a continuity in the experiences of the soul of our nation, a spiritual link to the historical forces at work—in the towns as well as in the villages. […]

Doubtless, protecting cultural heritage in the Nordic countries has also been influenced by the movement that arose around Hazelius’s museum work.1 Old houses from town and country alike were purchased, the rules for listed buildings enforced, the old farms of government officials cared for. Old rural gardens were restored, churches were preserved, cotters’ farms, old workshops, watermills, and a farm were run in the traditional fashion. Outbuildings for storing corn, tar burners, village bell foundries, an old rural open-air rope maker’s, fishing huts, technical moments, mills—all of these were preserved. Ecclesiastical and family celebrations were reintroduced, some families worked their old farms, the day of the old members of the family was celebrated, the day of the ones who had moved from the farm and so forth. Clear signs of this movement can be discerned in Norway. In a number of places in our country, remarkable farms have been preserved at their original locations. […]

The Swedish director general of cultural heritage, Sigurd Curman, writes that June 12, 1941, was a watershed in the history of Swedish heritage: a law was introduced to protect prehistoric monuments. Old directives, regulations, and bans were incorporated into one piece of legislation. But what was new was that the reach of cultural heritage
associations was widened. Old cult and sacrificial sites were included, as were the assembly sites of the Thing. Old cult and sacrificial sites were included, as were the assembly sites of the Thing. Squares and outdoor area linked to historical myths and memories, roads, way markers, and bridges were all protected. And the land around ancient monuments could also be preserved. This inclusion of natural surroundings is characteristic of the new way of protecting cultural heritage.

In our country, we have also preserved a great deal of the ancient historical landscape—the landscape of the sagas and the past—perhaps more than in any other country. I am thinking of the Borre burial mounds, Hafrs Fjord, and Stiklestad. By Hafrs Fjord on a sunny day one can hear Hornklove’s famous poem: the ships approaching from the East, itching to fight, with fierce, gaping dragonheads. And at Stiklestad one can easily hear Tormod Kolbrunarskald’s reveille, which neither roused the men to wine nor the sweet murmurings of women but to battle. And we can see Olaf order his army into one long, thin line to avoid being encircled. His clear and simple instructions can still be heard. Fairhair and St. Olaf left their mark on Hafrs Fjord and Stiklestad, as Petter Dass has left his at Alstadhaug, Bjørnson, and at the fields of Aulestad.

And finally the landscape itself. When people move in, what becomes of it? Building, whether in the countryside—in short, in natural surroundings—or in the best parts of town, has not on the whole been discussed by us from an aesthetic, financial, or theoretical perspective. But this is another chapter.

In the meantime, we can work with our friends, the nature conservationists. They too protect and create natural parks.

For the need of humans to destroy is great. Valuable flora is flattened. Species of animals become extinct; it is only a matter of time before the bear vanishes from our country.

The world will become poorer not just culturally but also naturally unless continuity is maintained.

As late as 1840, the English traveller William Bilton wrote:

If they were swept away from the face of the earth, the Norwegians would leave behind them no monument of human skill, or labor, or intellect to tell another generation that a great people had so long been tenants of the wide extent of Scandinavia. Nature’s monuments would indeed still remain: Norway’s Fjelder and Fjords would still claim the homage of admirers of the sublime and beautiful. But no work of public utility or ornament (its two or three cathedrals can scarcely be reckoned an exception), no achievement in science or literature, with which the human mind of one period converses with the mind of all times, would exist to excite the regrets and admiration of the future wanderer on these shores.

Thus spoke civilized Europe about us, well-meaning, not unsympathetic, but endlessly condescendingly. Throughout the nineteenth century, our work has been to account for and show our face to ourselves and others and to demonstrate the continuity in our cultural life. In other words: link the spirit of the people of one period to another; it is here that cultural monuments have their place in the midst of modern life. They learn to be faithful to their local area and to the nation. An affinity for one’s local area is not just a matter of habit, it is the life force of humanity. Norwegian society is built on continuity, on the farmer’s respect for fairness and his livelihood, freedom, and respect for the rights
of others. In concentrated form, it is a solution to the greatest problem of humanity: the problem of the organization of society. From this affinity for one’s native district, patriotism has grown. And from this patriotism, if people live up to their potential, a feeling for humanity itself may evolve.[…]

In their own way, all these monuments will teach us to understand ourselves, our innate traits, what fate has made of us, our independent and acquired creativity, our successes and failures, and everything that is unbreakably bound to our people’s historical living process that provides continuity. Here is the source of a patriotism of a rather different ilk than that associated with chauvinism, imperialism, and xenophobia. It is the responsibility involved in living in this country that increases our awe, deepening our sense of what is ours.

1 Arthur Hazelius (1833–1901), pioneering Swedish folklorist and founder of the open-air museum of Skansen in Stockholm.
2 The Thing was an ancient Norse political assembly.
3 In the last part of the ninth century, King Harald I (Harald Fairhair) aimed to become the sole ruler of a united Norway. Hafrs Fjord in southwestern Norway is the site of a decisive battle in this process, described by the king’s scald, Thorbjorn Hornklove (Þórbjörn hornklofi).
4 Stiklestad by Trondheim is the site where King Olaf Haraldson, Norway’s patron saint, fell in battle on July 29, 1030. This date is regarded as the definitive arrival of Christianity in Norway. The Icelandic scald, Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld, fell by the king’s side.
5 Petter Dass (1646–1707), priest and poet in seventeenth-century northern Norway; Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832–1910), poet and key figure in Norwegian nation-building in the nineteenth century.