

LILLESAND'S TOWN HISTORY

The settlement of Lillesand, originally called Sanden, is mentioned as a port for timber shipment in the early 17th century. It consisted solely of an inn which was owned by Jacob Justøn Wulff (d.1640). He is the first person officially named in connection to Lillesand. Møglestu (Vestre Moland), just a few kilometers away, was the centre of the rural district at this time. In fact, Møglestu was an old chief seat of the Viking Age.

Lillesand was granted trading rights in 1688 and therefore was permitted to import grain and export timber. By this time the vertical framed saw had been introduced and farmers in the area began to profit from the timber trade. In the 18th century many enterprising Danish traders and artisans immigrated to the town. Lillesand flourished, and large fashionable houses were built near the shore. However, from 1760 onwards the district was afflicted by a period of crop failure and local unrest, and in 1786–87 a local farmer and ship owner, Kristian Lofthus (1750-1797), gathered the farmers in protest against injustice by government officials and townspeople. Lofthus was subsequently imprisoned, and died in Akershus Fortress in 1796. Lofthus is the most famous man of Lillesand. The town has a memorial stone dedicated to him, as well as a monument and a sculpture of him, and he is said to have had great influence on the men who later participated in the forming of the Norwegian Constitution. He has a valuable place in the Norwegian history-books.

From 1800 onwards it is a man called Steener Steenersen who stands out as the most important player in both timber trade and shipping. He was granted a license to engage in overseas trading during the Napoleonic wars, and as a result of this, in addition to other privateering activities, he became an extremely wealthy man. In 1830 Lillesand was granted import and export privileges by the king, as well as having fixed boundaries established. In the middle of the 19th century the shipping trade was increasing. Since the 18th century ships had been built here but from the 1860's the ship building industry really gathered momentum, and between 1875 and 1895 Lillesand experienced its greatest affluence. There were 8 or 9 shipyards along the shores of the inner harbor and over 50 wooden ships were built. During these times of prosperity people were attracted to Lillesand from all over. There was an expansion in commerce and trading which brought greater possibilities, and the population more than doubled. The same thing happened on most of the southern Norwegian coastline at the time.

In 1896 the Lillesand – Flaksvand railway was built to transport timber to the harbor, where there stood a number of factories and a saw-mill, but as it was completed, the sailing ships ceased to be profitable and steam ships came into their own. Lillesand underwent a period of depression and unemployment. Some people survived by means of small handicraft businesses, shops, or by operating small coastal cargo boats. Many people emigrated to America. It took a long time for the economy of the town to recover and it was not until after the Second World War that the situation began to improve and new businesses began to be established. In 1965 Norton A/S began production at its new silicon carbide factory to the north of the town, and became one of the most valuable industries in the area.

Following the fusion into one municipality in 1962, Lillesand, Vestre Moland, and Høvåg became one large municipality with a total population of 4,850 inhabitants. Since the early 1970's there has been an enormous development of housing areas to the west of the town. Large numbers of people have moved to Lillesand and there has followed a need for increased infrastructure, such as primary schools and a large secondary school. At Øvre Tingsaker there is a large shopping centre, and on the borders to Lillesand Municipality IKEA have built a superstore. At the present time, 2014, the municipality of Lillesand has a population of over 10,000, of which around 700 people live in the old town centre. Lillesand is a popular summer destination, and the inner seaway, Blindleia, is often called the Riviera of Norway. In the municipality there are more than 1700 holiday cabins, and those in the best locations are some of the most expensive cabins of the country.