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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION | FALL 2019 VOLUME 173
OUR MINNESOTA SCHOOL ROOTS

There is already a buzz among Norwegian-American organizations about 2025, the bicentennial year of organized emigration from Norway to America. The same year, NAHA will observe its centennial.

NAHA was founded in 1925 and has evidenced a heightened awareness among Norwegian Americans of the importance of preserving and interpreting the immigration story. It was part of a national trend. Several other immigrant and ethnic groups formed similar organizations in the early 20th century, including the Swedish Historical Society in America in 1905.

The beginnings of NAHA were also tied to an emerging thread in the field of American immigration history. Called the "Minnesota School" by immigration scholar Donna Gabaccia, this approach was developed at several Midwestern land-grant universities, most notably by historians Theodore Blegen and George Stephenson at the University of Minnesota. The methods were centered on the immigrants themselves, with an emphasis on their experiences and voices and ethnic culture.

Historians Arthur Schlesinger, Sr., Oscar Handlin, and Marcus Hansen at Harvard, and other scholars at primarily East Coast universities, interpreted immigration quite differently. Their work focused more generally on the assimilation of immigrants into the American workforce and culture, and the resulting effects on American society.

Blegen had a long association with NAHA, serving as its editor from 1925 until 1960. The establishment of the NAHA archives in the late 1920s, under Ole Rølvaag’s direction, was squarely in line with the Minnesota School approach of creating archives in collaboration with both academic researchers and immigrant groups. The letters, diaries, and photographs in these collections were essential sources for a research focus on immigrant viewpoints and communities. Certainly, the archives are an important aspect of the association’s own history.

Our work in collecting, cataloging, preserving, and digitizing continues. Look for more initiatives regarding the archives in coming months.

Meanwhile, for those curious about the Minnesota School of immigration history, there is more to read on the topic from Donna Gabaccia. Now a professor of history at the University of Toronto–Scarborough, she is a former director of the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota. Her article "The Minnesota School and Immigration History at Midwestern Land Grant Universities, 1890–2005" appeared in the Journal of Migration History in 2015. It can be accessed online at https://cla.umn.edu/sites/cla.umn.edu/files/minnesotaschool.pdf.

Dennis Gimmestad, President

JOIN NAHA IN NORWAY NEXT JUNE

Two memorable travel opportunities are coming up in June 2020. Both are open to members and friends of NAHA.

The Norwegian-American Historical Association in Norway (NAHA-Norge), will host its triennial seminar at the Norwegian Emigration Museum near Hamar, June 18–21. See more information and the call for papers below.

Following the seminar, NAHA will offer a week-long tour, "Artistry and Industry of Norway." The group will meet in Norway’s capital, Oslo, before traveling west through the stunning Telemark and Hardanger regions, and finally arriving in Bergen. Highlights of the tentative itinerary include the Rjukan-Notodden Industrial Heritage Site, designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the Telemark Canal, built in the 19th century.

Other tour sites also offer a blend of history, industry, and artistry, including Hadeland Glassworks, built in 1762; the Hardanger Bestick cutlery factory on the Hardangerfjord; and the Oleana knitwear factory, which continues the rich history of Norwegian textile design and production. Along the way, there will be spectacular landscapes, locally sourced cuisine, and opportunities to learn how industrialization and migration affected these regions from the 18th century to the present. The tour will be guided by NAHA Editor Anna Peterson, associate professor of history at Luther College, and led by Amy Boxrud, executive director of NAHA, together with local experts. Arrangements for both events will be made by Borton Travel, which also can assist with pre- and post-tour travel for those interested. The finalized tour itinerary, cost, and registration instructions will be posted on the NAHA website in coming weeks. Space is limited. To receive details as they become available, contact us at naha@stolaf.edu or 507-786-3221.

NAHA-Norge Call for Papers

The Norwegian-American Historical Association in Norway announces its next seminar, "Nordic Identity Formation in a Transnational Context," to be held June 18–21, 2020 (dates are still tentative), at the Norwegian Emigrant Museum in Ottestad, near Hamar.

The seminar will focus on ties between emigrants from the Nordic countries and their countries of origin, and how this contact shaped the identity of Nordic Americans. Presentations may be delivered in English or Norwegian. Prospective speakers are invited to submit a proposal and a one-page curriculum vitae to NAHA-Norge Chair Nils Olav Østrem by January 1, 2020 (nils.o.ostrem@uis.no). More information is available at nahanorge.wordpress.com.

June 18–21

Tentative dates for the NAHA-Norge seminar at the Norwegian Emigration Museum in Ottestad, near Hamar

June 21–28

Tour: "Artistry and Industry of Norway"
RECENT HAPPENINGS

FALL MEMBER EVENT: EXPLORE ST. PAUL’S EAST SIDE

Save the date, Saturday, October 19, 2019, for a NAHA event focused on ethnic settlement on St. Paul’s East Side. We will gather at 10 a.m. at the East Side Freedom Library, and from there will take a walking tour of the city’s Payne-Plaun neighborhood with Macalester College emeritus professor of history Peter Rachleff as our guide.

Rachleff is co-executive director of the Freedom Library, an institution dedicated to telling the stories of residents on the East Side, including the Dakota who first lived there, European immigrants who came in the 19th and early 20th centuries, African Americans and Mexicans who came between the world wars, and more recent immigrants from Southeast Asia, Central America, and East Africa, who are revitalizing the neighborhood. Following the tour, we’ll reconvene at the library for refreshments and a discussion to further explore the history of the neighborhood.

Plan to attend and invite a friend—the public is always welcome. More information and online registration will be available at naha.stolaf.edu by September 1.

RELaunch of norwegian-american studies coming soon

NAHA is pleased to announce the redesign and relaunch of its academic journal, Norwegian-American Studies. Since 1926, the association has published 36 volumes of the journal, detailing and interpreting the Norwegian-American experience. While the look and feel of the journal have changed, its primary mission has not. “Studies remains focused on showcasing new scholarship in the field of Norwegian-American studies, including the related fields of history, literature, religion, art, and cultural studies,” says NAHA Editor Anna Peterson.

Now published annually, the journal also aims to facilitate intellectual exchange. “Perhaps one of the biggest changes is the variety of content readers can now expect,” Peterson says. The journal will feature original, peer-reviewed research alongside discussions of scholarly works in progress, an ongoing dialog about the teaching and learning of Norwegian-American studies, reviews of books recently published, and more.

While NAHA retains editorial control and copyright for the journal, it will be published as part of the University of Minnesota’s journal program “We are thrilled to be partnering with the University of Minnesota Press,” says Peterson. “They have an impressive record of publishing scholarship in the field of Scandinavian studies and a longstanding relationship with NAHA, co-publishing several manuscripts with us. We are building on this historic relationship to offer Studies in both print and electronic forms. All of these factors made the collaboration a natural fit.”

NAHA members in good standing can expect an issue of Studies to arrive by the end of the year. A digital version, along with back issues of the journal, will be available free to members via JSTOR, a digital library of more than 12 million academic journal articles, books, and primary sources in 75 disciplines.

Submission guidelines for Norwegian-American Studies can be found at naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/guidelines.htm. For more information, contact Anna Peterson at naha-editor@stolaf.edu.

Kari Garnett is 2019 Summer Intern

This year for the second time, NAHA has created a summer internship for a St. Olaf student. Kari Garnett (’21) began a 10-week internship on July 1, working closely with NAHA staff to gain exposure to many facets of archives and nonprofit management.

Garnett spent June in Norway on St. Olaf’s Snåsa Youth Exchange program. “I learned so much about the people who decided to leave Norway and come to the U.S.,” Garnett says. A Norwegian and psychology major with a Nordic studies concentration, she looks forward to applying her summer learning to her future coursework. “It will be very helpful to be working with NAHA since I’m taking a class on Scandinavian emigration this fall.”

The internship is supported by the Sigvald Qvale Fund, which encourages undergraduate student activity in NAHA. “NAHA is fortunate to have these funds to involve students in our mission. Our student employees are an important part of our operations,” says NAHA Executive Director Amy Boxrud.

A Gathering of Presidents

Current and past NAHA presidents enjoyed a meal together in Northfield in May. They met to hear an update on the association and discuss plans for its future. Front row: Brian Rude, Lois Rand. Back row: Dennis Grimestad, Karen Humphrey, and John Tunheim.

Spring Member Meetup

About 50 members and friends of NAHA gathered on April 30 to hear Sigrid Lien (left) present research from her book Pictures of Longing: Photography and the Norwegian-American Migration (University of Minnesota Press, 2018). NAHA hosted the event at Norway House in Minneapolis. Pictured with Lien is the book’s editor, Kristian Tvedtian.

Looking Ahead

NAHA board member Kyle Janssen (standing) and strategic planning consultant Beth Kallestad (standing, left) facilitated a visioning discussion during a retreat held May 10–11 at the Minnesota Center for the Humanities in St. Paul. Seated (from left) are board members Scott Knudson, Debbie Miller, Kristin Anderson, and NAHA Archivist Kristina Warner.

NAHA is fortunate to have these funds to involve students in our mission. Our student employees are an important part of our operations,” says NAHA Executive Director Amy Boxrud.
WALDEMAR AGER, 150 YEARS LATER
HE RAISED QUESTIONS ABOUT NORWEGIAN AND AMERICAN IDENTITY THAT STILL ECHO TODAY.

BY DENISE LOGELAND

What would Waldemar Ager say about Norwegian America in the year 2019? It’s impossible to know with certainty. Ager was born in 1869 in Fredrikstad, Norway, and died in 1941 in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, where he spent most of his life. But during his long career as editor, author, temperance activist, and Norwegian America’s leading author, he left a paper trail of his views on issues that still resonate today.

The Ager Collection at NAHA holds some of those documents. There are handwritten speeches from Syttende Mai celebrations and other events around the country. Ager’s penciled lines of text fill the backs of scrap paper from the print shop where his Reform newspaper was published. One archive box contains the newspaper’s mailing list from September 1941. The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is among the subscribers, in exile from occupied Norway at a London address.

Words were Ager’s stock in trade and there are manuscripts for editorials and short stories, along with the ephemera of close family ties and friendships. The letters and telegrams that Ager wrote and kept show his wide correspondence with friends and family. In his time, Ager was one of the best known Norwegian immigrants in the United States. His work was widely read. He was listed in Who’s Who in America in 1916. Norway’s King Haakon VII named him a knight of the Order of St. Olav in 1923. Ager was born in 1869 in Fredrikstad, Norway, and died in 1941 in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, where he spent most of his life.

The Young Prohibitionist

Ager became a United States citizen in October 1891. The next year, he left Chicago and moved to Eau Claire to work as a printer for Reform. He was quick to organize a chapter of the Templar Order of St. Olav. Ager rose from printer to regular contributing writer to manager by 1896. When Ager published his first book, Fremad in 1899, a collection of verse and short stories that he titled Paa drikkevendes kontor (Charged to the Account of the Evils of Drink), Fremad Publishing Company, which published Reform, printed and distributed the book. Encouraged by positive reviews and good sales, Ager wrote a novel a few years later, I strommen (In the Stream), published by Fremad in 1899.

For more than a decade, he had been developing his skills as a writer for the temperance cause, publishing not just news items and opinion pieces but poems and short fiction. In 1894, he put out his first book, a collection of verse and short stories that he titled Paa drikkevendes kontor (Charged to the Account of the Evils of Drink). Fremad Publishing Company, which published Reform, printed and distributed the book. Encouraged by positive reviews and good sales, Ager wrote a novel a few years later, I strommen (In the Stream), published by Fremad in 1899.

His fiction was about the perils of drink, but reviewers found in Ager’s books much more than morality narratives. At temple meetings, they sang and enjoyed musical performances, folk dancing, and recitations of poetry and literature. Through the Excelsior Temple that Ager founded, he met Gurolle Blestren from Tromsø, Norway, who he married in 1899.

At Reform, Ager rose from printer to regular contributing writer to manager by 1896. When Editor Ole Olson died in 1903, Ager took his place.

RENEW, DIGITIZED

Issues of the Reform newspaper from 1896 through 1941 are available online on the website of the Waldemar Ager Association (agerhouse.org/reform-online.htm). The text is searchable, but with some limitations due to Reform’s Fraktur typeface.

For those who can’t read Norwegian, the association has published A Reform Sampler: Selections from a Norwegian Language Newspaper, 1898–1941. Find details on ordering the book at agerhouse.org/reform.htm.
The Mother Tongue

Ager had found his voice as a writer, and it had the breadth and depth to carry his cultural ambitions. In a February 1900 letter to friend and fellow author Ole Amundsen Buslett, Ager talked about the need for Norwegian Americans “to create a literature of our own” that can gain respect.

In his books and in his writing for Reform, temperament remained a thread, but other issues gained space as years passed. Among them were women’s suffrage (which Ager favored), the possible involvement of America in the First World War (which he did not), and especially his campaign to promote Norwegian language and culture.

“Reform reflects Ager and his interests more through time,” says Greg Kocken, president of the Waldermar Ager Association in Eau Claire. The newspaper “expresses the idea of Norwegian-American identity as observed through Ager’s lens.” With the arrival of prohibition, Ager promoted the fact that Reform had “added other causes to its program” besides temperance, and he encouraged readers to support the Norwegian-language press for their own ultimate benefit.

But Norwegian Americans’ feelings of identity were changing. Through the 1910s and 1920s, Ager watched as church and other organizations abandoned Norwegian in favor of English. He was rankled by the decision of the brand new Norwegian-American Historical Association in 1925 to publish its works in English. He railed against anti-foreign propaganda and the “100 percent Americanism” promoted by U.S.-born citizens in the years surrounding World War I. But he also blamed Norwegian Americans themselves for “quietly choking,” the language, as he wrote to his friend Buslett in 1921.

Kocken says it’s worth noting that Ager was not parochial about the importance of preserving language and a distinct cultural identity. When anti-German feelings were strong in the 1910s, “German language classes were being dropped in high schools and universities, and [Ager] was opposed to that,” Kocken says. To Ager, “German American didn’t necessarily mean anti-American.”

Questions That Still Matter

Earlier this year, when the Ager Association held events to commemorate the anniversary of Ager’s birth, it invited local Hmong educators to the Ager House museum in Eau Claire. They spoke about their efforts to preserve their language among the second and third generations of their immigrant community.

“Outside Ager’s lifetime and promotion of the Norwegian language during his lifetime and what we see with newer immigrant groups was striking,” Kocken says.

How will the Hmong efforts fare?

Today, despite Ager’s decades of agitation, only a tiny percentage of Norwegian Americans can speak Norwegian.

Kocken concedes there is irony in the fact that the Ager Association has digitized 43 years of Reform to make it accessible online, but for most people it remains inaccessible. Ager, who championed the Norwegian language and Norwegianism, has mostly disappeared behind a language barrier and can no longer reach his audience.

“By all of the measures that Ager would have applied, he probably would have seen himself as a failure” in 2019, Kocken says. For Ager, language was the defining feature of Norwegian ethnic identity. What Ager couldn’t foresee, Kocken adds, is that there would still be millions of Americans who identify themselves, in part, through their Norwegian heritage, and that “other aspects of their lives would tie into that heritage and define that ethnicity.” For some, the tie is music, for others it’s food, for others, sports.

A durable sense of Norwegian-American identity is one of Ager’s contributions to this country, but his greatest contribution may be something else, Kocken says. Ager still matters today because he asked questions about American identity for which we still seek answers. “That conversation of ‘What does it mean to be an American?’ ‘What does it mean to be an immigrant?’ is one of his most lasting legacies.”

| I Sit Alone, 1931 / Hundøerne (Dog Eyes), 1929 |
| On the Way to the Melting Pot, 1995 / Paa veien til smeltepotten, 1917 |
| When You Are Tired of Playing (Stories for Eyvind), 1907 / Fortelinger for Eyvind, 1906 (Available in English at hathitrust.org) |
| Christ Before Pilate: an American Story, 1924 / Kristus for Pilatus: et norsk amerikansk fortelling, 1910 |
| Sons of the Old Country, 1983 / Gamlelandets barnver, 1926 |
| Colonel Heg and His Boys: a Norwegian Regiment in the American Civil War, 2000 / Oberst Heg og hans gutter, 1916 |
help us digitize: adopt a cassette

former NAHA editor Odd S. Lovoll has made a donation of 44 cassette tapes containing interviews that he conducted during research for his book The Promise Fulfilled: A Portrait of Norwegian Americans Today. This is an exciting addition to the NAHA archives, and it presents a challenge to us in preserving the material and providing access to it. Cassette tapes have a short lifespan and need to be digitized quickly. Digitization in a preservation format is expensive.

If you want to help us preserve this important record of Norwegian-American history, please consider making a donation (suggested amount $20 to $30 per cassette) earmarked for digitizing these tapes. The donation form on the “Giving” page at naha.stolaf.edu allows you to specify the purpose of your gift. Whether you donate online or via check, we are grateful for your support of this project.

addition: NAHA 2019/008 Odd Lovoll oral interviews. Donated by Odd Lovoll
The Norwegian Glee Club “Sympathy” Orchestra, Minneapolis, Minnesota. This image is part of a recent donation from the Norwegian Glee Club of Minneapolis, which was formed on August 7, 1912, by two members of other choruses: the Norwegian Good Templar Singing Society and the Hugnad Male Chorus. The glee club joined the Norwegian Singers Society and attended the society’s Sangerfest for the first time in 1914. Carl G. O. Hansen, the club’s first director, was an influential Norwegian-born journalist, musician, lecturer, and author. He also served as educational director of Sons of Norway, president of the Norwegian-Danish Press Association, and a founder of Det Norske Selskap and of NAHA.