FALL BRINGS ENDINGS, NEW BEGINNINGS

In an academic setting, autumn signifies a new year and a time of growth. It’s an exciting time, full of new hopes for a new school year. This is counterintuitive if you look at the changes the season brings in nature, but I’m guessing anyone who has ever been a student remembers the feeling.

This feeling of new growth is certainly present at the Norwegian-American Historical Association. October 6 marked the 90th anniversary of our founding in 1925. And now that the celebration is behind us, we look ahead to a new year and a new decade.

What a celebration it was! Thanks to all who were able to join us. Thanks, too, to members who wished us well from afar and to those who offered a special gift of $90 for the 90th, which has been added to the capital campaign for climate controlled archives.

The goodwill of support and enthusiasm has left me feeling excited for our future, and I believe the same is true for many members who attended. If you weren’t able to join us, you can read a recap of the event on page 8.

While autumn feels like a time of new beginnings, it is also the end of our fiscal year. Since stepping into this position in February, I’ve been astounded by the goodwill and generosity of members who have supported our capital campaign. And now — in a year of so much generosity — I’m asking you to consider another very important gift to the Association, this time in support of our annual fund drive.

While preserving our archival holdings through our capital campaign is critically important, the annual fund is equally important to our day-to-day mission to locate, collect, preserve, and interpret the Norwegian-American experience. It enables us to welcome patrons and respond to their research requests. It supports the editing and production of this and other publications. It allows us to stay connected with our members and other organizations and institutions. And it helps the Association continue to grow.

You will soon receive a letter from NAHA asking for your support. I plan to remember the work of the Association in my year-end giving, and I hope you will, too.

Here’s to NAHA, 90 years strong. On to 100!

Amy Boxrud, Director

LETTERS

Thank you for the recent issue of Currents. I was disappointed that the only person identified in the cover photo of the Board of Publications of Augsburg Publishing House was O. M. Norlie.

I strongly believe that the person to his right is Rev. Lars P. Thorkven, of St. James, Minnesota, who also was president of the Gudbrandsdalslaget and secretary of the Rygdelegenenes Fellesråd in addition to his pastoral work.

Who are the others?

Jim Olson
Sioux Falls, S.Dak.

EDITOR’S NOTE: The men in the photo are, from left to right: E. Kr. Johnsen, Olaf Lysnes, Peder Tangjerd, and O. M. Norlie. The person on the far right is unidentified in our photo. After a quick image search online, I agree that it appears to be Thorkven.

HOLIDAY GIFTS FOR HISTORY LOVERS

Check out these gift ideas for the history buffs on your holiday list.

Keeping Christmas: Yuletide Traditions in Norway and the New Land
Kathleen Stokker explores and traces the development of Christmas traditions on both sides of the ocean, from their centuries-old origins to today. 382 pages, MNHS Press (2001) $22.95. shop.mnhs.org/products/keeping-christmas

NAHA Gift Membership
A 2015 gift membership includes the second volume ofOrm Øverland’s From America to Norway: Norwegian-American Immigrant Letters 1838–1914 (563 pages, hardcover — a $60 value), a subscription to Currents, the quarterly NAHA newsletter; free use of the archives, and more. Memberships start at just $55. naha.stolaf.edu

Encounter on the Great Plains: Scandinavian Settlers and the Dispossession of Dakota Indians, 1890–1930
Karen V. Hansen examines the interactions between the Scandinavians who migrated to the Spirit Lake Dakota Indian Reservation in North Dakota and the indigenous people they encountered there. 360 pages, Oxford University Press (2013) $16.95. Available from your local bookseller, or on amazon.com.

CLUB 2014 CAMPAIGN UPDATE

The Norwegian-American Historical Association is the permanent home for North America’s largest archive related to Norwegian-American life. The ability of NAHA to safeguard its collection of letters, papers, books, photographs, and periodicals depends on a climate-controlled archive to ensure that its materials will be available for generations to come.

Early in 2014, NAHA set the goal of securing $160,000 to fund the installation of a climate control system that meets industry standards. To date, we’ve raised more than $144,500 — that’s 90 percent of our goal! Our project is part of a larger climate control initiative for St. Olaf College’s Rolvaag Memorial Library, where NAHA is housed. In the summer of 2017, the future home of the NAHA archives will be vacant and ready for remodeling. In the meantime, we’ve invested our campaign funds in a CD, so they can continue to grow until construction begins.

To support Club 2014, visit naha.stolaf.edu/campaign/index.htm or contact Amy Boxrud at 507-786-3221 or email boxrud@stolaf.edu.
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Digitized Parish Registers are images of pages from the record books of most churches in Norway. These books can be invaluable resources in genealogical research.

The types of church records that have data most useful for genealogical research are:

• Birth/baptism records — often include the residence of the parents at the time
• Confirmation records — can include parents and residences
• Marriage records — may have father’s names and residences
• Death records — may have a spouse’s name
• Migration records — for people moving in or out of the parish. Destination may be as general as “Amerika.”

Sometimes two record books were generated by a church: The pastor wrote the official one, the ministerialbok, and the klokker (sexton) wrote a copy, called the klokkerbok. In some cases one of the books may be easier to read, so it can be worthwhile to look at both copies. Access the books online at arkiververket.no/URN:kb_read.

For a given church, many books may be needed for the full range of years. All types of records may be in one book, or a large church may have only record type in a book.

To read more about church record books, visit these sites:

• Familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Norway_Church_Records
• Homepages.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~norway/na20.html

Watch for more information on accessing and understanding church records in the next issue of Currents.

Dale Hovland teaches classes on Norwegian genealogy and has volunteered for NAHA since 2004.

The oldest church records in Norway date from 1623 in Andebu, Vestfold fylke (county).

STUDENT STAFFERS

The new academic year brings a new group of St. Olaf students to work in the NAHA archives. NAHA welcomes its assistants for the 2015-16 academic year. From left: Justice Galvan, ’17, a Norwegian/political science major from Santa Cruz, Calif.; Cassidy Neuner ’18, a political science major from Carmel, Calif., and Anna Quanbeck ’19, an environmental studies/economics major from St. Paul, Minn.

in brief

UNDERSTANDING NORWEGIAN CHURCH RECORDS

BY AMY BOXRUD

Cleng, Cleng, name like a song,
Lonely and lean, drifting along,
Crossing the prairies and wading
the streams.

His purse full of nothing, his hat
full of dreams.

Tora Aasland, Norway’s former Minister of Research and the former governor of Rogaland County, shared these lyrics to “Cleng’s Song” by Erik Bye at the opening of the Legacy of Cleng Peerson Conference, held in October 13–16 in Clifton, Texas. Aasland was a key planner of the event, along with Professor of History Gunnar Nerheim from the University of Stavanger, who oversaw its academic content. The gathering was officially opened by Kåre Aas, Norwegian ambassador to the United States, along with local and state officials.

Commemorating 150 years since the death of the legendary pathfinder for early Norwegian immigrants, the conference explored the legacy of Peerson and other Norwegian and European immigrants in Texas. At a time when massive migration is making news daily, the conference highlighted themes of relocation and assimilation and explored the degree to which Cleng Peerson can still be seen as a symbol of freedom and migration today.

The meeting was hosted by the Bosque Museum in Clifton (bosquemuseum.org), home to the largest collection of Norwegian artifacts in the South and Southwest, and also home of the Cleng Peerson Research Library. The first Norwegian settlers in Bosque County arrived in 1854, the year Bosque County was founded, with the 71-year-old Cleng Peerson among them. Following his death, waves of Norwegian immigrants, most from Hedmark in Eastern Norway, as well as Southern and Western Norway, continued to arrive in the area until about 1900. Today, Clifton is known as “the Norwegian capital of Texas,” with many people of Norwegian heritage still living in the area.

The conference offered its 55 registrants nearly 20 presentations.

THE LEGACY OF CLENG PEERSON

A GATHERING IN TEXAS CELEBRATES THE “FATHER OF NORWEGIAN IMMIGRATION”
NEW CLUES ON CLENG

Nils Olav Østrem, professor of history at the University of Stavanger, Norway, was one of nearly 20 presenters at the Cleng Peerson Legacy Conference. As the current president of NAHA-Norge, he is also the organization’s representative on the NAHA board of directors. His paper, “The Early Life of Cleng Peerson: The Stories People Like to Tell Compared With Hard Data From the Archives,” was part of the conference’s session on new research on Peerson’s life.

NAHA: Can you share one or two of the most common misconceptions or myths about Cleng Peerson’s early life?

NOØ: One thing to correct is the farm he was born on in the municipality of Tysvær. Many people think he was born on the Hesthammar farm, where he was raised from the time he was a few years old. But he was actually born on the Lervik farm. Many people also don’t know that in 1807, when Cleng Peerson was in his early 20s, he left the parish and moved to the island Finney.

NAHA: In your research, did you come across anything that surprised you?

NOØ: Both in my research on Cleng Peerson and on Norwegian emigration in general, I’m surprised by the many misunderstandings or misconceptions that prevail about emigration from Norway. For example, the Norwegian emigrants were not particularly poor, they didn’t leave a particularly poor country, and they were not uninformed about America. Through the great emigration in the 1600s and 1700s to Holland, emigrants from the south and southwest of Norway were well informed about what to expect in the United States. Through word of mouth, there was a living tradition for emigration, first to Amsterdam, and later to America. Norwegian farmers were also literate to a much greater extent than previously envisioned. Emigrants from Norway were rather enlightened people!

NAHA: Were there any resources that you found particularly helpful while researching your project?

NOØ: The National Archives of Norway (arkivverket.no) contain rich material about individuals. So it’s possible to follow the details of Cleng Peerson’s life until his journey in 1821 and his permanent emigration in 1824. There is also a lot of legal material about a companion, Knut Olsen Eide, who traveled with Cleng from 1821 to 1824, since Eide’s wife filed for divorce after he left for America.

NAHA: Have we learned everything there is to learn about Cleng Peerson?

NOØ: There is still reason to research Cleng’s efforts and his importance to Norwegian emigration. More research is also needed to understand Cleng’s views on life: In 1821 he traveled to the United States as an agent for the “sloopers.” That same year he argued for the importance of an “inner migration” and a religious life based on individualization and personal conviction.

READ MORE ABOUT NORWEGIANS IN TEXAS

The Lady with the Pen: Elise Warenskjold
Edited by Clarence A. Clausen (NAHA, 1961).

Pathfinder for Norwegian Emigrants

Norwegian-American Studies
See Vols. 1, 8, 12, 14, 20, 21, and 25 for articles on early Norwegians in Texas by visiting naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nastudies.htm.

The future of our past
NAHA members celebrate 90 years by looking ahead

What lies ahead for the Norwegian-American Historical Association? How are the needs that ethnic archives and historical societies meet in our society changing? These and other questions were the topic of conversation as NAHA celebrated its 90th anniversary on Saturday, October 10, at the Minnesota Historical Society’s History Center in St. Paul, when 75 members and friends of the Association gathered to enjoy a meal, honor the Association’s past, and consider its future.

Guests gathered in the History Center’s Heffelfinger room, where they were welcomed by NAHA President Karen A. Humphrey and Director Amy Boxrud. Vice President Dennis Gimmestad read a greeting from Nils Olav Østrem, president of NAHA-Norge, the Association’s sister organization in Norway.

Following the luncheon, NAHA editor Todd Nichol, King Olav V professor of Scandinavian-American studies, spoke about the Association’s publishing program, which boasts more than 100 titles in its 90-year history.

The keynote event was a panel discussion with the theme “The Future of Our Past,” led by Annette Atkins, professor emerita of history at St. John’s University and the College of St. Benedict. Rather than focusing solely on the future of NAHA, the panel addressed the role of ethnic identity in general, and the value archives and other cultural organizations can provide in supporting it.

“Anniversaries are occasions to celebrate,” says Humphrey, “and they are opportunities to look forward with questions like, ‘How is our organization still relevant in our world today?’ How can the organization meet expectations for future researchers? Who are the future members, and why is a long-established ethnic archive still worthy of new support?’”

Three speakers representing Swedish-, Hmong-, and Norwegian-American organizations addressed the topic: Philip J. Anderson, professor emeritus of history and president of the Swedish-American Historical Society; Lee Pao Xiong, professor of American government/political science and director of the Center for Hmong Studies and at Concordia University; and Gary De Krey, professor of history and archivist for NAHA and St. Olaf College.

By including speakers from multiple ethnic communities, the panel highlighted the common mission, goals, and challenges shared by the organizations.

“Ethnic identity is significant to one’s identity,” says Atkins. “Ethnic organizations can help us explore and question what that means. They can also help us deepen our understanding and build bridges across and among ethnic identities.”

After the presentations, Atkins opened the discussion to the whole group. “As a general rule I invite my audiences to participate,” she said. “And in this case it seemed especially important to ask the members in attendance what they see as the future and the value of their organization.”

Many members responded, with several comments reinforcing the idea that understanding one’s own history and ethnicity plays a key role in understanding and appreciating other cultures.

“NAHA provides a community and a context for examining our Norwegian and Norwegian-American past,” says Atkins. “By focusing on our own ethnicity, we establish a foundation from which to connect to people of other ethnicities to find common ground and to relish and celebrate differences.”

Karen Humphrey concurs. “There seemed to be a palpable energy in the room about the future for ethnic archives like NAHA — and the importance of understanding our place in the American story, so that we can also understand and help new immigrants with their own remarkable stories,” she says.

By focusing on our own ethnicity, we establish a foundation from which to connect to people of other ethnicities to find common ground and to relish and celebrate differences.”

— Annette Atkins

Left: The celebration followed NAHA’s quarterly board meeting, and many board and staff members were in attendance. Row 1, from left: Sarah Halvorson Brunke, Karen A. Humphrey, president, Cynthia Elyce Rubin, Betty Bergland. Row 2: Bruce Willis, Karen Davidson, Marci Sortor, Laslee Lane Hoyum, Katherine Hanson, Anna Peterson. Row 3: Ronald Johnson, Dave Holt, John Nilson, Dan Dressen, Dennis Gimmestad, vice-president. Row 4: Gary De Krey, archivist, Jeff Sauve, associate archivist, Todd Nichol, editor, Amy Boxrud, director. Not pictured: Blaine Hedberg, treasurer, Liv Hustvedt, Kim Kittilsby, Margaret Hayford O’Leary, Dearon Olson, Brian Rude, John Tunheim, Nils Olav Østrem.
DONATED JULY 1 – SEPTEMBER 30, 2015

FAMILY HISTORIES, MEMOIRS, AND ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORIES


- Sigdalslagent Papers. Secretarial minutes and notebooks (1911–1985), and 28 microfilm reels, including census and church records. Added to P0645 Bygdelagene Papers. Donated by Sigdalslag.


- Trinity Lutheran Church Records (1908–2008), Letcher, Sanborn County, S.Dak. Includes secretarial, business, Sunday school, ladies’ society, and church histories. Added to P0537 Congregation Papers. Donated by Richard Christopher with the assistance and encouragement of NAHA board member Cynthia Rubin.

ADDITIONS TO THE ST. OLAF COLLEGE LIBRARY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, INCLUDING BOOKS, PERIODICALS, AND NEWSPAPERS

- Five Norwegian books (1747–1947), two of which belonged to Reinert Tofteland; Nisse folklore collection of four children’s booklets authored and illustrated by Lily Tofteland Hartmann; and assorted issues of the following newspapers: Nordisk Tidende, Western Viking, Norway Times, and Den Danske Pioneer. Donated by Lily Tofteland Hartmann, NAHA Associate Member.

ARTIFACTS


From left: Great northern Machinists, 1920s correspondence donated by Marie Berggren Martin includes an envelope with a Nazi “opened” stamp and a 1941 letter written at Ullevål hospital in Oslo.
In *Keeping Christmas: Yuletide Traditions in Norway and the New Land*, Kathleen Stokker writes that Christmas card production began in Norway in 1883 with the *nisse*, or gnome, as a standard motif. During WWII, the Nazi regime banned many nisse cards when Norwegians ridiculed the occupying force by adding flags and other national symbols to the popular nisse theme, along with wishes for a Happy Norwegian Christmas. Nisse cards peaked in popularity in the 1960s, according to Stokker. From the O. M. Norlie Collection.