When I wrote my first director’s column for CURRENTS 18 months ago, I included a quote I found particularly inspiring: ‘Change is the heartbeat of growth. If this is true, and I believe it is, then the pulse of the Norwegian-American Historical Association is beating strong and steady.

Already in the past biennium, we have successfully navigated a key staff retirement, carried out a capital campaign for climate-controlled archives, and completed our strategic plan for 2013–16. More change awaits next year, with the announced retirements of NAHA archivist Gary De Krey and our editor, Todd Nichol, both slated for August 2017.

How will we manage these and other major changes as an organization? By planning for them. At our last meeting in October, the NAHA board approved a new strategic plan, which will provide a blueprint for change and growth to guide us through 2019.

The new strategic plan includes:

• Relocating the Archives to a new Special Collections area in Rolvaag Memorial Library while increasing our holdings and digitizing key collections.
• Publishing books currently in our pipeline and developing a framework for future publications.
• Continuing to hold regular programs and events offering sound scholarship and engaging interpretation.
• Developing and implementing a membership recruitment strategy.
• Refining a fundraising strategy for growth of both operations and endowed funds.
• Working closely with St. Olaf College during the transition of our archivist and editor positions.

It’s an ambitious list, but I’m confident that our staff and board have the skills and commitment to make these plans a reality.

Here’s where you come in: Your engagement, participation in our programming, and financial support make all the difference. Do you have friends or family members who would make great NAHA members? Invite them, or give them a gift membership this holiday season. Do you know of materials that belong in the Archives? Connect with our archivists. Do you have a suggestion for a tour or event? Let us know. Can you make a year-end financial gift or consider including NAHA in your estate plans? We thank you!

By working together and planning for change, NAHA will continue to thrive. It’s an ambitious list, but I’m confident that our staff and board have the skills and commitment to make these plans a reality.
GIFT MEMBERSHIPS FOR THE HOLIDAYS

For the history or genealogy lover on your list: A 2016 gift membership includes the third volume of Orm Øverland’s *From America to Norway: Norwegian-American Immigrant Letters 1838–1914* (630 pages, hardcover — a $60 value); a subscription to *Currents*; free use of the archives, and more. Memberships start at $55 ($40 for students). Order by Dec. 20 to ensure gift-wrapped book delivery by Dec. 24. For more information, visit naha.stolaf.edu.

ANNUAL FUND APPEAL

As 2016 draws to a close, NAHA looks back at a year of robust programming. In May, members enjoyed a tour of historic churches, and our October biennial meeting offered a day-long focus on folk music. This fall NAHA released Vol. 3 of *From America to Norway: Norwegian-American Immigrant Letters 1838–1914*. And throughout the year, we assist scholars, students, and family historians in their archival research. All of these accomplishments are made possible by member support. Help us finish the year in strong financial standing so we can carry out our plans for 2017. To donate to our 2016 Annual Fund, look for a year-end mailing, arriving soon in member mailboxes. Or donate online at naha.stolaf.edu.

2016 BIENNIAL MEETING WRAP-UP

More than 100 members and friends of NAHA gathered at St. Olaf College to attend its 2016 Biennial Meeting on Oct. 29. In addition to conducting the regular business of the Association, members enjoyed an educational and entertaining day focused on Norwegian-American folk music.

James Leary, professor emeritus at University of Wisconsin-Madison, kicked off the day with the keynote presentation, "Early Recordings of Norwegian-American Folk Music: History and Happenstance." Visit naha.stolaf.edu to watch a video of the presentation.

Also presenting was Laura Ellestad, a Canadian Hardanger fiddler in a Ph.D. program at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo. Ellestad presented "Competing for Survival: The Hardanger Violinist’s Association of America and their Kappleiks [1912–1952]."

Amy Shaw, associate professor at St. Catherine University, presented her work on the life and music of Norwegian-American fiddler Ole Hendricks (1851–1935). The presentation, "Vitality, Life, and Soul: Building Up a Town With a Fiddle," included musical performances with guitarist Chris Bashor, fiddler Beth Rotto, leader of the Decorah-based band FootNotes, and Minneapolis-based fiddler and composer Sara Pajunen.

The day ended with Leary facilitating a panel discussion with Rotto, Duluth-based folk vocalist Arna Rennan, St. Olaf College Professor Emerita Andrea Een, and LeRoy Larson, founder of The Minnesota Scandinavian Ensemble.

During a Nordic-inspired luncheon, NAHA held its biennial business meeting, shared plans for the future, and celebrated the successful capital campaign for climate-controlled archives. Dennis Gimmestad thanked and recognized the contributions of outgoing board members Karen Davidson, Katherine Hanson, Karen A. Humphrey, Liv Hustvedt, and Brian Rude. New directors are Jim Honsvall, Scott Knutson, Ann Marie Legreid, Debbie Miller, and Cindy Olson. Following the day’s presentations, the board elected an executive committee to serve for the next biennium: Dennis Gimmestad, president; Ron Johnson, vice president; Blaine Hedberg, treasurer; Leslie Lane Hoyum, secretary; and Kim Kittlesby, member at large.

The day ended with a social hour and an open Nordic folk music session in downtown Northfield.

Members of the 2014-16 NAHA Board of Directors gather for a final group photo. Five new board members will replace five departing members for the 2016-18 biennium.
BY DALE HOVLAND

Reading the Gothic script used in some old Norwegian printed materials can be a challenge. To complicate matters, the language of these materials is Dano-Norwegian: the Danish-based language that was used in Norway by the church and government. Shown below are verses 1–3 of Psalm 23 from a Bible printed in Christiania (Oslo) in 1854.

To date, no online tool exists to automatically translate from Gothic Script to English, so readers must manually rewrite the text in modern script. The key, provided below, may provide useful reference.

After rewriting in modern script, a translation tool such as Google Translate (translate.google.com) can be helpful. Google Translate detects the language of the rewritten text as Danish (which it basically is). The resulting translation shown is somewhat understandable and much better than if the language is specified as Norwegian.

Alternatively, some readers may prefer to use the Dansk-norsk-engelsk ordbog (København, 1897). This dictionary converts Dano-Norwegian words in Gothic script to English in modern script, saving the reader the step of using an online translation tool. Find the dictionary online at tinyurl.com/ordbog-online.

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**TRADITIONS OF CHRISTMAS PAST**

Editor’s Note: A version of this article first appeared in the Dec. 14, 2015 issue of Southern Minnesota Scene.

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**Eating lutefisk and lefse, making sandbakkels and rosettes, and opening gifts on Christmas Eve instead of Christmas Day: These are all holiday traditions still practiced in many Norwegian-American families. But over the years, other immigrant yuletide traditions have fallen by the wayside. Sharing a bundle of grain with the birds, brewing Christmas beer, and Christmas masquerading are, for most Norwegian-American families, lost traditions of past generations.**

**Christmas Brewing**

Since Viking times, beer has played an important role in Norwegian celebrations. And while there may not seem to be an obvious connection between brewing beer and the religious holiday of Christmas, a long-standing association exists in Norway, stretching back to early Christian times.

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**Laws. In Keeping Christmas, Yuletide Traditions in Norway and the New Land (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001), Kathleen Stokker writes that King Haakon the Good moved the mid-winter jól festival to coincide with the Christian celebration of Christmas in the 10th century. He also mandated that every peasant brew a supply of beer for the occasion. Medieval laws upheld the custom and imposed stiff fines on any landowner who didn’t brew an ample amount for the celebration. The local priests enforced these laws, going from farm to farm to inspect and test the quality of the beer. In time, a farm’s reputation within the community rested on the quality of the beer it produced, and brewing became an important part of Christmas preparations.**

The Norwegian website, Òlakademiet.no, describes Christmas beer as it was made “in the old days” as “full of malt flavor and not too bitter.” On the organization’s blog, “Bjarte Brewmaster” advises: “Christmas beer should be both sweet and strong!” In some areas, juniper was used as an ingredient for bitterness, and blueberries for sweetness.

Norwegians were a superstitious lot, and brewing was no exception. They followed careful rituals to ensure the strength and quality of the beer, including consecrating...
the brewing vessel with hot steel or a burning branch, protecting the vessel with a knife or a piece of steel, and screaming at the yeast to “startle” it into action.

Norwegian immigrants continued the practice of brewing when they left the old country, and some maintained the folk beliefs of their Norwegian ancestors, according to Stokker. But the landscape of homebrewing changed with the advent of Prohibition in 1919, banning the manufacture, sale, and transportation of alcohol, including beer made at home. While Prohibition was repealed in 1933, the legislation left out the homebrewing tradition.

A Feast for the Birds

A popular Norwegian tradition with an unknown origin is the sharing of a julenek, or bundle of grain, as a Christmas feast for the birds. The first written reference to the tradition is in 1753, when a prominent clergyman Erik Pontoppidan described it as the “Norwegian peasant’s hospitality extending to the birds which he invites to be his guests by placing an unhthreshed sheaf of grain on a pole against the barn door.”

Many priests in the 1700s denounced the tradition as a pagan custom, which has led to speculation that the Christmas sheaf tradition goes back to pre-Christian times. In the folk tradition, the sheaf was said to predict the following year’s harvest. If many birds flocked to the sheaf, it predicted a good harvest, but if few birds came and ate only a little, famine or a bad harvest was in store.

Over time, the tradition became a popular motif in works of art as part of an idealized Norwegian Christmas, particularly during the mid-1800s. “The julenek has become a symbol of Christmas generosity and commonly appears on Norwegian Christmas cards, wrapping paper, and gift tags,” writes Stokker.

This custom of providing the birds a special meal at Christmas was carried over to the new land. But while the tradition is still practiced widely in both rural and urban areas in Norway, it is not widely seen in the United States.

NAHA member Sarah Halvorson Brunko of Andover, Minn., is a third-generation Norwegian-American who has revived the julenek tradition in her own family. Having learned of it while living in Norway, she now makes the bundles using grain from her family farms in western Minnesota. “Dad plants regular field wheat, which I generally cut in late July or early August before the combine comes to harvest. We originally toyed with the idea of using an old-fashioned binder, but now I cut by hand,” Halvorson Brunko says.

Christmas Fooling

Maybe the most unusual bygone holiday tradition is to gö julebukk, or julebukking, as it is often called in America. A julebukk is literally a “Christmas buck” — a male goat. The name also has pre-Christian roots in Norwegian mythology. The goat is used to carry the gifts of the god Thor. The tradition has continued in art and literature, with its depiction on Norwegian Christmas cards, wrapping paper, and gift tags.

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W e welcome donations illustrating all aspects of Norwegian-American history and culture. The most recent NAHA strategic plan emphasizes the continuing solicitation of new collections.

The Archives continue to benefit from the generosity of members and friends who have made important donations, and we welcome your help in building the collection. Do you have Norwegian-American letters, diaries, photographs, family histories, recordings, and community or congregational materials at home? Do you know of such items in the hands of others? If so, please contact us at naha-archivists@stolaf.edu. Perhaps this list of recent donations will suggest some possibilities.

For guidance on what NAHA collects, please consult the guidelines near the end of the Archives page on the NAHA website: naha.stolaf.edu/archives/guidelines.pdf. We are particularly interested in Canadian materials and in materials that concern the experiences of post-World War II Norwegian immigrants. Although we aren’t able to acknowledge all donations here, we do appreciate every donation, large and small. Families may be sure that important donations made to the NAHA archives will remain open for future family consultations.

DONATED JULY 1 – SEPT. 30, 2016

FAMILY HISTORIES, MEMOIRS, AND ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORIES

• Berntsen-Jacobsen Letters. Three letters (with translations) sent from Anna Berntsen, Kamperhaug, Telemark, Norway, to her cousin Mrs. O. A. Jacobsen (Anna), Willmar, Minn., ca. 1948. Added to P1685 Norway-America Letters. Donated by Judith Christensen, NAHA Sustainer Member.

• Larsen, Ole P. [1888–1972] Family Archives. Larsen emigrated from Norway in the early 1900s and settled in Rock Springs, Wyo. He worked for the Union Pacific Railroad. In 1915 he married Julia Hollevaak, and together they homesteaded a farm at Millburn, Wyo. The collection contains two albums of photographs and postcards (some sent from friends and family in Norway) depicting a variety of subjects: American West and ranch life; Native Americans; Norwegian scenes and people (including the Sami); and holidays (Christmas). Added to P0539 Family Histories. Donated by Andeana Fisher.


• Union State Line Church, Estherville, Dickinson County, Iowa (now Jackson, Minn.). 1899–1907, confirmation attendance register. Probably kept by Rev. Thor C. Thompson, subsequent editor of the Chicago Lutheran and other publications. Added to P0537 Congregations Papers. Purchased by NAHA Archives.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND POSTERS

• Heen Photograph Collection. Five photographs kept by Christopher J. Heen (1855–1921) and family, Dennison, Minn. Images include: Rev. Paul Knudsen Dybsjord and the Heensåsen Church, Vang, Oppland, Norway, ca. 1902; daughter Mabel Heen Wasilie, ca. 1917, and Vang-area countryside, ca. 1902. Added to Photograph Collection P0653. Donated by C. DeMann.


• Winge, Dennis. In Search of a New Scandinavia: The Story of the Norwegian Winge Immigrant Family (2016). Account of the immigration of Vinge family members from Skatval parish in Nord-Trøndelag. From the author’s note: In Norway, “the Vinges were stable, independent landholders … Their emigration and subsequent pioneering in Goodhue and Lac qui Parle Counties in Minnesota is a story typical of many Norwegian families. The enclave of the Vinge, who became the Winge, family in Wanamingo Township in Goodhue County became a new Scandinavia for them. Considerable emphasis is placed on the family life in Norway and in pioneer settlements in Minnesota as well as history of … the Hauge Synod in America.” Added to P0539 Family Histories. Donated by Dennis Winge.

Above: Postcard from the Ole P. Larsen papers, 1905. Left: Rev. Paul Knudsen Dybsjord and Heensåsen Church, Vang, Oppland, Norway, ca. 1902.
Faculty ensemble of the Minnesota Lutheran Seminary and Institute, Willmar, Minn. The school was incorporated in 1882 and enrolled 116 students its first year. While most Lutheran academies were feeder schools for one of the synods’ colleges or seminaries, the Willmar Seminary catered to all Lutheran groups as well as other Protestants. The institution grew its roster to more than 400 students each year in the early 1890s. During the school’s 35 years of operation, 75 faculty members served the more than 7,000 students who passed through its doors.