

The Norwegian-American Historical Association

Northfield, Minnesota

From the NAHA Office to the Association Members

NEWS LETTER



NUMBER 137

SPRING 2010

FROM THE NAHA PRESIDENT JOHN R. TUNHEIM

On behalf of the Board of the Norwegian-American Historical Association, I would like to give you an update on recent developments since our last newsletter. As you may remember, the Board has been spending the last several months looking to the future to ensure that NAHA can continue as a successful organization with an active publications program and Archives at St. Olaf College. The departure of our Administrative Director Kim Holland, due to a family move, and the international financial crisis prompted our evaluation. We explored different organizational models, including the possibility of closer ties to St. Olaf and also the alternative possibility of focusing our staff more fully on financial development.

On March 6, the NAHA Board met and decided that the timing was not right for a closer tie to St. Olaf. Our discussions with the College have been put on hold for now, with mutual good feelings. Instead the Board voted to maintain NAHA's current structure and focus on bolstering the administrative staff and strengthening the organization's financial resources. Fortunately, NAHA's current financial status is solid. The Endowment has come back considerably after losses due to the stock market decline. Further, NAHA does not have a deficit and can move forward with its current resources. The Board is eager to augment its Endowment, however and will concentrate on raising additional funds.

We are also pleased to announce that the next NAHA publication will be issued in the fall of 2010. This publication will be the 36th volume of *Norwegian-American Studies*, edited by Todd Nichol. Since 1926, NAHA has published a journal that explores various aspects of Norwegian-American experience and we are proud to continue this long-standing contribution to Norwegian-American scholarship.

A couple years ago, the Board voted to change the Triennial Membership meeting to a Biennial Meeting. The time is already upon us and our next Biennial meeting will take place October 23, 2010 at St. Olaf College in Northfield. Please mark your calendars and look for further information about the meeting and other festivities in upcoming NAHA newsletters.

Again, thank you for your interest and steadfast support of NAHA. Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns about developments at NAHA. We are always happy to be in touch with you.

NORWEGIAN HOME GUARD VISITS NAHA

NAHA welcomed members of the Norwegian Home Guard and Minnesota National Guard on Feb. 19, 2010. The Norwegian Home Guard is a rapid mobilization force in the Norwegian military. For 37 years, the Home Guard has had a troop exchange with the Minnesota National Guard. The exchange grew from Norwegian American soldiers sent to Norway to assist resistance fighters in World War II. Troops complete each other's winter training and tour the area to enrich their cultural understanding.

Officers visiting NAHA included Commodore Ketil Olsen, Norwegian Home Guard Chief of Staff, and Brigadier General Mark Johnson, Minnesota National Guard Chief of Staff-Air. A brief introduction to NAHA's history and a tour of the archives was presented by Professor Solveig Zempel and Jeff Sauve.



The future King Harald V and his mother Martha with Peik.

Particular items of interest shown to the touring group included photographs and films taken at Camp Little Norway and Camp Little Skaugum, Ontario, Canada, during World War II. The camps served as training grounds for Norwegian resistance fighters of the Royal

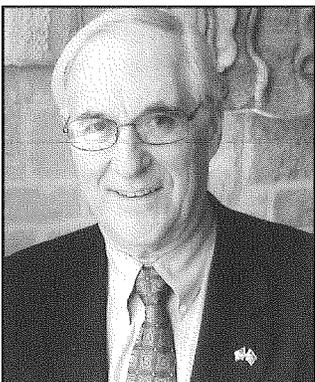
Norwegian Air Force. More than 2,500 men were trained at these bases during the war.

Recently “discovered” in the NAHA Archives was one particular film labeled “R.N.A.F. Bear Mascot.” This film and 20+ other World War II films were recently transferred to DVD for preservation. Upon closer viewing of the 1942 bear mascot film, it became apparent that the bear in question belonged to a young radio operator named Thor Heyerdahl who was stationed briefly at Camp Skaugum. Heyerdahl is captured on the 10-minute color film wrestling and playing with his pet bear named Peik. Incidentally, The Kon-Tiki Museum near Oslo is ecstatic to learn of this previously unknown and unique film.

Commodore Olsen was pleased to report that the newest frigate to be commissioned of the Royal Norwegian Navy (expected fall 2010) is named “Thor Heyerdahl.”

~Jeff Sauve

VISIT OF NEW U.S. AMBASSADOR TO NORWAY



The Archives has welcomed a number of visitors in recent months. Associate Archivist Jeff Sauve reports in another section of this newsletter about the visit of Norwegian Home Guard members. On Sunday, January 10th, the Archives opened for the visit of the new U.S. ambassador to Norway, Barry White. Mr.

White has been in Oslo for several months and was present for President Obama’s acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize in December. Ambassador White was accompanied by State Department officials, by the new Royal Norwegian Honorary Consul General Gary Gandrud, and by Ellen Ewald, director of education and research at the honorary consulate. We showed a representative sample of immigrant letters, photographs, diaries, local records, and Ole Rølvaag manuscripts and editions. Because Ambassador White is from Boston, we displayed some records about Norwegian Americans in Massachusetts. Because he is a Harvard graduate, we also displayed some of the papers of Einar Haugen, a student, friend, and biographer of Rølvaag, who was the long-time professor of Scandinavian Studies at Harvard. Mr. White is the most recent in a succession of distinguished visitors to the Archives that has included Norwegian ambassadors to the U.S. and members of the Norwegian royal family.

~Gary DeKrey

SAVE THE DATE!

Mark your calendars! The next biennial membership meeting is **October 23, 2010** at St. Olaf College in Northfield, MN. We look forward to having both old and new members join the NAHA staff and the Board of Directors. Watch for more details in future newsletters!

HOW THE NAHA NEWSLETTER HELPED ONE AUTHOR WRITE HIS BOOKS

Several years ago, when I started working on *The Children’s Blizzard*, my book about the great Midwestern storm of January 12, 1888, I contacted Kim Holland, then administrative director of NAHA, for assistance. Kim offered to place a notice in the newsletter soliciting stories from Norwegian families whose ancestors had lived through this terrible storm. Through NAHA, I was able to make contact with Brynhild Rowberg, who recounted to me how the Rollag family left their farm in the Telemark region of Norway and ended up on the prairie of Rock County, Minnesota.

When, a few years after *The Children’s Blizzard* was published, I embarked on a new book about the immigrant experience in the First World War, I naturally enlisted Kim’s help once again. Kim agreed to post another item in the NAHA newsletter soliciting family stories – and lo and behold, I once again struck gold. It could not have been a week after the notice appeared that the phone rang and woman with a soft and melodious voice told me that she had a story that might interest me. Nellie Neumann described how her father Andrew Christofferson emigrated from Haugesund, on the west coast of Norway, in 1911, found work on a bonanza farm in North Dakota, underwent an intense religious awakening at a revival meeting, and homesteaded near Havre in north-central Montana. In the summer of 1918, this tall, thin, gentle son of Norway was drafted into the United States army and shipped out to France a few weeks later with the 81st Wildcat Division.

I knew right away that Nellie’s father would be one of the heroes of my book. Nellie and I had several other conversations, exchanged a series of letters, and sat down together one winter day in Washington, D.C., to talk about her father’s lifelong love of Norway and his pride at serving his new country. But pride was not the whole story.

Andrew really did believe that the Great War was the “war to end all wars,” and he was bitterly disappointed in December, 1941, when the U.S. entered the Second World War and his sons went off to fight in Europe just as he had.

The book that grew out of my conversations with Nellie Neumann and scores of other descendants of immigrant Doughboys has just been published as *The Long Way*

Home: An American Journey from Ellis Island to the Great War (www.thelongwayhomebook.com). In the book, I tell the story of how Andrew Christofferson and 11 other immigrants came to America for freedom and opportunity and were swept into the armed forces when their adopted nation went to war.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Kim Holland and NAHA for once again helping me get my research off the ground – and to encourage all NAHA members to read the story of a simple Norwegian farmer/carpenter who fought in the trenches for his new country.

~ David Laskin

NEW MATERIAL IN THE ARCHIVES

The Archives has also received many donations since the last newsletter. We are not able to list all of them here, but every one of them has been greatly appreciated. Please keep them coming! The following are of particular note:

- Waldemar Ager Papers: several photographs and addresses donated by Borgny Ager. Includes an image of Ole Olson of the *Reform* newspaper and handwritten addresses and notes about such matters as the Norwegian-American Temperance Movement and the 17th of May.
- Aaker Family Papers: The book *I Lived There Once: A Family Farm Memoir* by Jerry Aaker (2009) has been added. It is a tribute to the family farm, which was sold after generations of use.
- Family Histories and Genealogies: Fossum Family. Funeral sermons prepared by Andrew Fossum of Spring Grove, Minnesota, ca. 1880s, have been donated by Darlene Fossum, Decorah Iowa. A farmer, Fossum was asked to deliver several sermons in place of the local pastor, when a diphtheria epidemic kept him too busy to perform all services. A few sermons have been translated.
- Civil War Papers: A new book has been added: *Letters of Bernt Olmanson: A Union Soldier in the Civil War, 1861-1865*, translated with new information by Keith Olmanson (2008). Norwegian Immigrant Bert Olmanson was a member of the Second Regiment, Minnesota Volunteer Infantry. He fought at Mill Springs, Chicamauga, Missionary Ridge, Kenesaw Mountain, and Atlanta. He writes in his letters about his war experiences.

- Lavik Family Photo Project (CD): Donated by John Laird. A collection of more than 300 scanned images (1880-1930), left in a Lavik family household in North Dakota after the last family member passed away. Most of the photographs are of the Rasmus Lavik family and the Ofstedahl family lines. John Laird has spent countless hours since 2000 identifying the images and documenting the collection with a detailed index.

USING THE ARCHIVES IN PERSON

We ask that all visitors call (507-786-3229) or e-mail (naha-archivists@stolaf.edu) in advance to make an appointment. Our public hours are generally 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, and afternoon appointments can also often be made on week-days. However, the archivists do have work that takes them outside the archives; and vacation days, illnesses, and special events require occasional closures. Advance appointments minimize disappointments and help the archivists plan their work. The presence of several volunteers with family history expertise on Thursdays provides us with superior staffing on that day. We also appreciate advance notice of what materials visitors will request: this can easily be done by using Leif to identify appropriate items and by e-mailing the information to the archivists. We will try to help visitors without appointments to the extent that other work allows, but we cannot always guarantee that any help will be available or even that the archives will be open. Use of the archives is free for current NAHA members: lapsed memberships may be renewed at the beginning of a visit. Non-members pay a daily fee of \$15.00 or may join NAHA upon arrival. Visitors should bring coins for any copying to be done.

THANKS TO OUR SUPPORTERS

Thank you to the members and friends of NAHA who have given financial support during our annual appeal in the fall of 2009.

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John Rokke ~ Merry Chirstmas and Happy Birthday to Lee Rokke
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