Director’s Letter

President’s Letter

NAHA 90th Anniversary

Campaign Update

Call for Papers

Heritage Day Antiques

Find Your Family’s Past

Heritage Keepers

New to the Archives

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION | SPRING 2015 VOLUME 157
CHANGE AND UNCHANGE

"Change is the heartbeat of growth." I came across this quote yesterday, and it immediately resonated with me. Already, 2015 — our 90th year — has been a year of change for the Norwegian-American Historical Association. You will notice our member newsletter has a new name and a new look. (I hope you enjoy it!) There are changing faces, too, as we’ve welcomed new members and board members. In February we celebrated the retirement of Jackie Henry, and I was honored to become the Association’s new director. We are now within striking distance of our Club 2014 fundraising campaign (see page 4 for an update), which means we can look forward to the prospect of improved climate control in our archives in the not-too-distant future. All the while, we consider new ways to share the stories of the Norwegian-American experience as we survey the changing landscape of communications in the 21st century.

While there is no doubt more change in store for NAHA, I can assure you that some things won’t change. We will continue to capture the cultural richness of the Norwegian-American experience and interpret it with accuracy, integrity, and liveliness. We will continue to be careful stewards of our archival collections, so they can be appreciated and utilized for generations to come. And we will continue to rely on you, our members, as an important partner in fulfilling our mission.

Do you have a vision for the Norwegian-American Historical Association you would like to share? I welcome your thoughts. Send me a note, or drop me an email at naha@stolaf.edu.

Amy Boxrud, Director

CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION

As I reported at the Norwegian Heritage Day luncheon, the Norwegian-American Historical Association is in a renaissance. The membership is growing, two significant books have been published in the last four years, and a climate control campaign for the archives is underway. We are in the third year of a three-year strategic plan shaped around our new mission statement: to locate, collect, preserve, and interpret the Norwegian-American experience with accuracy, integrity, and liveliness. And this fall NAHA will commemorate its 90th anniversary with a special luncheon at the Minnesota History Center. There will be good food, special music, a short speech or two, and kransekake! At our gathering we’ll ask an important question for these times: What is the future of our past? A panel of distinguished historians will provide interesting insight and forward thinking.

In 1925, a generation of scholars and historians brought together letters, papers, books, photographs, periodicals, and newspapers documenting Norwegian-American life for study and reference. And now each year more than 4,000 people discover the archives in person, by phone and email, and through our online search tools. The Archives are a destination for writers, scholars, and historians from across the United States and around the world who research texts, seek information, and find ancestral connections. Books, articles, and dissertations are written, and family histories are completed with the help of the NAHA collection — the stories of one generation to the next.

Savor the summer — and may there be plenty of time for reading Norwegian history.

Karen A. Humphrey, President

Karen A. Humphrey, President
FULFILLING A PROMISE

Club 2014 campaign update
Since 1925, the Norwegian-American Historical Association has served as the permanent home for North America’s largest archival collection related to Norwegian-American life. NAHA’s ability to deliver on its mission to safeguard its collections depends on a climate-controlled archive to ensure that its contents 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 nearly $120,000 — three-quarters of the way to our goal!

Interested in supporting the climate control project for the NAHA archives? For more information, or to donate online, visit naha.stolaf.edu/campaign/

CALL FOR PAPERS FOR CLENG PEERSON CONFERENCE

“The Legacy of Cleng Peerson” commemorates the 150th anniversary of the death of the trailblazer for Norwegian immigration to the United States. Peerson died at Norse in Bosque County, central Texas in 1865. The Norwegian government will be represented at the conference through the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Washington, D.C., and Norwegian Ambassador Kåre Aas will perform the official opening. The Institute of Culture and Languages, University of Stavanger, is coordinating academic content and fundraising for the conference, while local arrangements are being planned by the Cleng Peerson Research Library at Clifton’s Bosque Museum. The deadline for proposals is June 15, 2015. Send proposals or questions to Professor Gunnar Nerheim, Institute of Culture and Languages, University of Stavanger, gunnar.nerheim@uis.no, or call 47-41-36-57-54.

HERITAGE DAY HIGHLIGHTS ANTIQUES

About 125 NAHA members and friends of the Association celebrated Norwegian Heritage Day on May 8 at St. Olaf College, when NAHA hosted its own version of Antiques Roadshow. Participants were encouraged to bring a Norwegian antique to be part of the program, Antique ID. Of the nearly 50 objects that were brought, Laurann Gilbertson, chief curator at Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum, chose more than a dozen to feature in her presentation, describing their age, origin, and function. Items included a dress from the mid-1800s, wooden drinking vessels and bentwood boxes, and a brass mortar and pestle. “There were so many wonderful antiques — it was difficult to choose only a few for the program,” says Gilbertson. After her talk, Gilbertson fielded questions and shared more information one-on-one with participants. Prior to the presentation, the group enjoyed a Norwegian-themed luncheon, and the Lars Skjeverheim Spelemannslag — St. Olaf’s student Hardanger fiddle group — provided traditional Norwegian folk music. The program began with a reading to commemorate the 70th anniversary of Frigjøringsdagen, Norwegian Liberation Day, marking the formal acceptance of the surrender of Nazi Germany on May 8, 1945.

THANK YOU TO OUR CLUB 2014 DONORS!

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<td>Contributions and commitments to date</td>
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Genealogist and blogger Michael John Neill offers these tips for working with obituaries when piecing together a family history.

Look Beyond Home
Genealogists frequently look in the newspaper nearest to where their relative died for an obituary. That is a good place to start; other newspapers may have carried obituaries as well, and those write-ups might be different from the one published in the nearest town. Always check the county seat newspapers; they might have published death notices or longer obituaries for residents throughout the county.

Follow the Moves
If an ancestor moved throughout life, search in multiple locations. Try where they were living when they died, where they were born, where they lived the bulk of their life, and where their children were living at the time of their death. You might be surprised where an obituary pops up. And remember, there may be no obituary at all.

What’s Her Name?
Remember that obituaries for women may never mention their first name. It may be necessary to search for husbands’ names in newspapers, even long after they are dead.

Obituaries Are Fallible
Obituaries are a notoriously secondary source. As such, they can easily contain errors or omissions. Sometimes this is done intentionally, sometimes accidentally. Regardless of the reason, care must be taken. The spouse might not be the parent of all the children listed. Sometimes children and stepchildren are intermingled. The same is true of grandchildren. Remember that even marriages may be omitted.

Enjoy the Paper
When you locate an obituary or death notice for your ancestor, consider taking time to read the whole newspaper. Browsing an entire issue or two may give you some insight into the time and conditions in which your ancestor lived.

To access the Rowberg Collection online
1. Go to naha.stolaf.edu and click Archives, then click Rowberg Index.
2. Search using full names, surnames, or an associated place-name. The biographical field includes occupations when they are known. Married women are sometimes listed under their own names and sometimes under their husbands’ names.
3. A successful search may produce birth and death dates for a subject, as well as a scanned copy of the relevant clipping.
HERITAGE KEEPERS

FOR 90 YEARS, THE NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION HAS PROVIDED SCHOLARS AND FAMILY HISTORIANS A PORTAL TO THE PAST.

BY JEFF M. SAUVE, ASSOCIATE ARCHIVIST

What do you have regarding Norwegians who served with the Confederates in the Civil War?"

“I’m looking for information about traditional Norwegian folk customs practiced in America.”

“How can I learn more about my ancestors who emigrated from Larvik, Norway?”

When responding to scholars and family historians, the professional archivists and capable volunteers of the Norwegian-American Historical Association (NAHA) draw upon the organization’s vast materials.

At the heart of the archives is its extensive manuscript collection, which includes letters, diaries, journals and ledgers, newspaper clippings, obituaries, congregational records, family and local histories, and other resources related to Norwegians in America. The archival collection also includes photographs illustrating all aspects of Norwegian-American history.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARCHIVES

Founded in 1925, the Association established its archives just two years later, when the NAHA executive board convened in Minneapolis and approved the following two resolutions:

1. Be it resolved, that the Norwegian-American Historical Association accepts the kind offer of St. Olaf College to provide a safe place in which the Association may deposit its archives.

2. Be it resolved, that the Association, wishing to secure so far as possible all that has been written and published by men and women of Norwegian birth or origin, hereby expresses the wish that all those of our people who have published books, pamphlets, articles, and the like will donate copies to the Association for its collection.

Within the next several years, concerted effort was given to secure items for the archives. Through notices in regional Norwegian-American newspapers, published folders, and field agents, the initial collection was arranged. Carlton C. Qualey, a Spring Grove, Minnesota, native and NAHA board member, wrote that the Association appropriated $300 for him to canvass the region. In his report to the Board regarding his hunt for records, he wrote, “It is my hope, however, that the Association will recognize the imperative necessity of the proper care of the archives.”

A UNIQUE AND VARIED COLLECTION

Here are just a few examples of items held in the archives of the Norwegian-American Historical Association:

Manuscripts: Diaries of Thore Heggem, an Iowa Quaker, who experienced the 1906 San Francisco earthquake.

Audios: In June 1941, the Aaker family met at St. Olaf College for their 19th annual reunion. At their gathering three recordings were made (recently digitally transferred). These recordings include the voices of Knut Olafsen Lundeberg, who passed away the following year, and 84-year-old Josephine Norby reciting poems and personal reflections.

Church Records: Histories, constitutions, programs, yearbooks, and records of some 400 Norwegian-American congregations.

Missives: Letters written to their families in 1807 during the Napoleonic Wars by men in military service at Christianssand.

Artifacts & Ephemera:

Family Documents: A legal verdict from 1553 making it the oldest-known Norwegian document in the United States. Written on shorpakin, the verdict decided ownership of a large estate between contestants Erik Bollslen and heiress Margaret Nilslatter.

Photograph Collection: Several thousand historical images illustrating all aspects of Norwegian-American culture and experiences.

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THE ARCHIVES

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From top: Staff of the Leeds Hotel, Leeds, N.Dak., ca. 1906. (Gunderson Family Papers); Luncheon program with U.S. President Calvin Coolidge, Norse-American Centennial, St. Paul, Minn., June 8, 1925; Norse-American Centennial ticket stub for events at the Minnesota State Fair Grounds, June 8, 1925.

Miners In front of their log cabin near Dawson City, Northeast Territory, ca. 1898. (Flugbarth Nielsen Papers)
If you have Norwegian-American letters, diaries, photographs, family histories, and community and congregational materials at home, or if you know of such items in the hands of others, please contact us about donation possibilities. 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. Although we aren't able to acknowledge all donations here, we do appreciate every donation, large and small. Families may be sure that donations made to the NAHA archives will remain open for future family consultations.

DONATED JANUARY 1 – MARCH 30, 2015

MANUSCRIPTS COLLECTION

• Diaries kept by Ruth Gesley (1933–34), Grace Gesley (1934–35), Carolyn Gesley (1932) and Mrs. Myrtle Legg (1959–63).

• A compiled photograph album of the George and Luella Springen Gesley family (Volume 3).


MANUSCRIPTS COLLECTION


FAMILY HISTORIES, MEMOIRS, AND ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORIES


NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS

• Stoughton Academy, Stoughton, Wisc., catalogs: 1896–97 and 1899–1900 (P0127).

• Lutheran Normal School, Sioux Falls, So Dak., Mirror, October 1905 (P0505).

• Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, catalogs: 1882–93; 1886–87 (English & Norwegian); 1888–89; 1889–90; 1890–91; 1895–96; 1900–01 (English & Norwegian); 1901–02 (P0555).

• H. A. Preus Lutheran Academy, Albion, Wisc., catalog: 1901–02 (P0471).

• Lutheran Ladies’ Seminary, Red Wing, Minn., Cresset, March 1904 (P0504).

• Luther Academy, Albert Lea, Minn., catalog: 1898–99 (P0501).

PHOTOGRAPHS

• Panoramic images of stevne gatherings: 1913, Willmar, Minn.

• Photographs of the George and Luella Springen Gesley family.

• Photographs of the Hagen Family.

• Photographs of the Life of Rev. O. J. Hagen and his Family.

• Photographs of the Life of Rev. Ole Hagan’s ministerial acts.

• Photographs of the Minnesota Years.

• Photographs of the Montana Years.

• Photographs of the Minnesota and Montana years.

• Photographs of the Zumbrota Lutheran Church.

• Photographs of the Aaker Family Papers.

• Photographs of the Gesley family (Volume 3).

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Performers for the Norse-American Centennial, held in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. The handwritten photo caption reads: Xylophonists Miss Annabelle and Oliver Erickson, and pianist Miss Florence Nerheim, 631 Water St., Eau Claire, Wis.

Commemorating a century of Norwegian migration, the event also provided the stimulus for the founding of the Norwegian-American Historical Association. The celebration included performances by musical groups from the Norwegian-American colleges, a pageant celebrating the life of Col. Hans Christian Heg, and an appearance by President Calvin Coolidge.