INTERPRETING THE STORY

Interpretation — it’s a concept that has been on my mind lately. The mission of the Norwegian-American Historical Association is to locate, collect, preserve, and interpret the Norwegian-American experience with accuracy, integrity, and liveliness. For much of our 90-year history this interpretation has taken the form of scholarly publications. From collections of letters, to biographies, to 36 volumes of Norwegian-American Studies, our dynamic program has brought the Norwegian-American experience into focus, along with its relationship to other ethnic groups in the United States.

And now — 90 years and more than 100 publications later — the NAHA staff and board asks itself: What does it mean to interpret the Norwegian-American experience to audiences in the 21st-century? What additional forms should it take? This is one of the important questions we will ask when our staff and board meet for strategic planning in May.

In recent years, another way we have interpreted the Norwegian-American experience is through our events. In 2014, we collaborated with the Minnesota Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians to create a Twin Cities bridge tour that explored the work of Norwegian-American engineers. And as I write this, we are finalizing plans for a sold-out preservation tour of Norwegian-American churches in Rice and Goodhue Counties. The response for these tours, from both our members and the general public, tells us we are offering something that resonates with many. Keep an eye on your newsletter for more of these types of offerings in the future. Are there other types of tours would you like to see NAHA host? Let us know by emailing naha@stolaf.edu.

At our biennial member meeting this fall, we will explore and interpret the contributions of Norwegian-American folk musicians. (See page 3 for more details.) Join us for a day that promises to be educational, entertaining, and an important part of the Association’s governance, as we elect new members to the board of directors and share the results of our strategic planning. Our biennial meeting is open to the public, so invite a history-loving friend!

NAHA can boast 90 years of interpreting the Norwegian-American experience due to the treasure trove of stories held in our archives for safekeeping. I’m thrilled to announce that our capital campaign for climate-controlled archives was successfully completed in April. Watch for more updates as we plan for our future, in collaboration with Rolvaag Memorial Library. Thanks to all of you, we can ensure that the stories continue to be told with accuracy, integrity, and liveliness.

Amy Boxrud, Director
Save the date — Saturday, October 29 — for the NAHA 2016 Biennial Member Meeting. The event will be held at St. Olaf College and focus on Norwegian-American folk music.

The keynote speaker is James Leary, professor emeritus at University of Wisconsin-Madison. A folklorist and scholar of Scandinavian studies, Leary is the author of So Ole Says to Lena: Folk Humor of the Upper Midwest (University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), and Polkabilly: How the Goose Island Ramblers Redefined American Folk Music (Oxford University Press, 2006), which won the AFS 2007 Chicago Folklore Prize for the best book in the field. His most recent work, Folksongs of Another America: Field Recordings from the Upper Midwest, 1937–1946 (book, 5 CDs, and DVD, University of Wisconsin Press, 2015), received a Grammy nomination for Best Album Notes.

Laura Ellestad, a Canadian Hardanger fiddler in a Ph.D. program at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo, will also present. Ellestad is researching performance practices among Norwegian-American Hardanger fiddle and regular fiddle players in the Upper Midwest 1900–1970.

Also speaking is Amy Shaw, associate professor at St. Catherine University, who is researching the life and work of Norwegian-American fiddler Ole Hendricks (1851–1935). Her presentation will include performances from his 100-page manuscript tunebook, which Shaw is working to transcribe for publication.

Along with presentations, NAHA will hold its biennial business meeting to hear the Association’s new strategic plan, celebrate its successful capital campaign, and elect new members to the Board of Directors. The governance committee is preparing a slate of candidates for the board. If you are interested in serving or have a suggested nominee, please forward those names to Amy Boxrud by October 1.

Watch for your invitation to the Biennial Member Meeting to arrive early this fall. Plan to come and invite a friend — non-members are welcome and encouraged to attend.

More information and online registration will be available at naha.stolaf.edu by July 1.
CLUB 2014 CAMPAIGN IS COMPLETE

We did it! Our capital campaign for climate-controlled archives is a success! Over the past two years, more than 200 members and friends of NAHA stepped up to help fund a state-of-the-art climate control system for NAHA and the Rølvaag Library Special Collections. Thanks to our donors, we will be able to better care for and preserve the remarkable stories that have been entrusted to the NAHA archive for generations to come.

Join us at our biennial meeting when we celebrate our successful campaign, recognize our donors, and learn about planning for the new facility. For more about the climate-control project for the NAHA archives, in cooperation with St. Olaf College Special Collections, contact Amy Boxrud at 507-786-3221 or email boxrud@stolaf.edu.

THANK YOU TO OUR CLUB 2014 DONORS!

$160,000 in contributions and commitments as of May 1, 2016

GOAL $160,000

FOOD AND FAMILY HISTORY

Gudrun’s Kitchen: Recipes From a Norwegian Family documents the life and cooking of Norwegian immigrant Gudrun Sandvold as told by her descendants. More than a cookbook, Gudrun’s Kitchen chronicles Sandvold’s childhood on the west coast of Norway, her journey in 1923 from war-torn Europe to the cities of New York and then Chicago, and her years of raising a family in Wisconsin. The book also features hundreds of Sandvold’s recipes, from Norwegian standards such as smørbrød and meatballs, to her adaptations of typical American fare of the mid 20th-century. By Ingeborg Hydle Baugh and Irene, Edward, and Quinn Sandvold, published by Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2011. $22.95, wisconsinhistory.org/whspress/

Nordics in the Pacific Northwest—Board members (from left) Cynthia Elyce Rubin, Katherine Hanson, Director Amy Boxrud, and board member Kim Kittilsby represented NAHA at an immigration conference hosted by the Nordic Heritage Museum in Seattle March 15–18. In collaboration with six cultural institutions from the Nordic countries, the Nordic Heritage Museum hosted a program that explored the impact of Nordic immigration to the Pacific Northwest from the 1850s to the present. To learn more, visit nordicmuseum.org/events/immigrationconference
St. Olaf College’s Rølvaag Library recently received a gift as unusual as it is significant: two manuscript pages of Petter Moens Dagbok (Peter Moen’s Diary, J.W. Cappelens Forlag, 1949).

During the WWII Nazi occupation of Norway, Petter Moen (1901–44) was heavily involved in the Norwegian resistance movement’s underground press. This led to his arrest by the Gestapo on February 3, 1944. While imprisoned in Oslo, Moen wrote a diary utilizing the only materials he could find: With a pin from a blackout curtain, he pricked dots to form letters on sheets of coarse toilet paper. These sheets were neatly labeled, rolled up in sections, and tucked under the floorboards of his prison cell.

Moen died on September 8, 1944, when the German ship Westphalen, which was transporting prisoners to Germany, ran into a Swedish minefield. While on the ship, he told a few fellow prisoners about his diary. After the incident, one of five surviving prisoners told the Norwegian police about the diary, and the pages were found intact under the floor of Moen’s former prison cell. The diary was published in Norwegian in 1949 and in English in 1951.

The Petter Moen Collection, which also includes a 1949 Norwegian edition of the diary, was donated to St. Olaf College in 2015 by Hans Magnus Aus and Berit Aus, children of Hulda Unhjem and the Rev. Ivar Asbjørn Aus. Aus was a close friend of Petter Moen’s brother, who gave him the diary pages as a gift. Berit Aus, the couple’s daughter, consulted with NAHA when the family was looking for a new home for the collection. While the items fall outside of NAHA’s collection parameters, it was a match for Rølvaag Library’s Special Collections, which specializes in Nordic studies and Nordic-language materials, and houses a large collection of Nordic-American publications.

“PRESERVING and sharing these kinds of materials enriches our understanding of the past, present, and future.”

— Aimee Brown, St. Olaf College special collections librarian

Petter Moen’s Diary is available in libraries and from used book dealers online. For more information about Rølvaag Library Special Collections, contact Aimee Brown at brown9@stolaf.edu or 507-786-3601.
Some people of Norwegian lineage have a surname (familienavn) that is a patronymic (patronymikon). Such a name is from the first name (fornavn) of a paternal ancestor. Examples are: Olson, Arnesen, Larsson. Another type of surname comes from a farm name (gårdsnavn). The name of a Norwegian farm can be very old and may relate to the history, geography, and characteristics of the farm. Examples are Aaseng (ridge meadow), Jensrud (Jens’ clearing), Bjerknes (birch promontory).

An important source for researching farm names is Norske Gaardnavne (Norwegian Farm Names), a 19-volume set of books based on research begun by University of Oslo Professor Oluf Rygh. The volumes are found in St. Olaf College’s Rølvaag Memorial Library, and some volumes can be purchased or accessed online. There is a volume for each of 18 amt (administrative subdivisions, now fylker), plus an introduction and a common register.

Included with a farm record is the pronunciation of the name. There may be examples of different spellings found in documents from several centuries. There also may be an explanation of the possible origin of the name.

For a searchable database from the books (for all counties except Finnmark), visit tinyurl.com/farmnames.
This story begins in 2000, when Richard Christopher of Letcher, South Dakota, read my query in a publication seeking information about an obscure Norwegian-American photographer, O.S. Leeland, who had operated portrait studios in nearby Mount Vernon and Mitchell, S.D. The correspondence that ensued between Christopher and me, at the time a New York City curator and writer who had collected early real photo postcards by Leeland, ended with a visit when I attended Memorial Day services in Letcher. At that time, I was amazed to find an 1883 one-room school in Christopher’s backyard.

Christopher loved the school that he had attended through the eighth grade. When the Elliott township school district was consolidated in 1968, Leet School, like so much in rural America, became a useless anachronism. Building and contents were sold at auction. In an immediate and direct act of grassroots historic preservation,

LESSONS FROM THE PAST

AFTER MORE THAN 80 YEARS ON THE SOUTH DAKOTA PRAIRIE, A ONE-ROOM SCHOOLHOUSE BEGINS A NEW LIFE IN NORWAY.

Editor’s Note: A version of this article appeared in the Nov. 6, 2015, issue of Norwegian-American Weekly.

BY CYNTHIA ELYCE RUBIN

The Leet-Christopher School in its new home at the Norwegian Emigrant Museum.

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF CYNTHIA ELYCE RUBIN
North Dakota State University  \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} Christopher money
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} Currents, Spring 2016
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} Christopher paid $115 for the
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} 85-year-old building and $64.50 for
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} much of the contents. Lifted and
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} carried by a local haystack mover,
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} the old structure was placed on a
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} new foundation in Christopher’s
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} yard. He then began collecting
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} furnishings, such as textbooks, a
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} cast-iron coal stove, a water cooler,
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} and the list goes on.

In the 1880s, the Norwegian
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} immigrants who homesteaded
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} the 160-acre land claims around
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} Letcher valued education.
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} Hardanger native Jens Christopher,
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} Richard Christopher’s great-
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} grandfather, wanted a centralized
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} school for the neighbor children.
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} After a community school bond
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} measure failed to pass, Jens joined
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} with early postmaster Lorenzo W.
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} “John” Leet and several neighbors
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} who made plans to build a school,
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} naming it for John Leet because it
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} was close to the Leet farm. He was
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} elected first Director of the Elliott
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} School Township in the spring of
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} 1884. By then, Leet School had
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} already been built and was used
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} for church services and as a polling
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} place and community center.

Mrs. Florence Uhre, who taught
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} at Leet School, wrote: “My
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} great uncle was Sunday School
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} Superintendent. This was our
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} church for the pioneers. When
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} they had a funeral the teacher
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} would wash the blackboard
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} and send the children out to play.
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} They would put the casket across
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} two of the double desks. When
the service was over, the children
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} would come in and proceed with
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} their classes.”

In June 2001 when I visited The
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} Museum of Migration in Hamar,
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} I learned from museum director
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} Knut Djupedal that there was
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} only one building he could not
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} locate for the open-air museum: a
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} Norwegian-American one-room
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} schoolhouse. When I returned
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} home, I wrote to Christopher.
The rest is history, so they say.

Before the dismantling of the
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} school in 2007, Christopher
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} hosted an open house. I attended
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} and watched as both shiny new
cars and mud-splattered pickups
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} arrived. More than 125 people
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} came, and among the special
guests were two Leet School
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} teachers and six of Christopher’s
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} fellow students from 1945 to
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} 1953. There were descendants

“THIS WAS OUR CHURCH
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} for the pioneers. When they had a funeral
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} the teacher would wash the blackboard
\hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} \hspace{1cm} and send the children out to play.”

— Florence Uhre
of John Leet and eight of Jens Christopher’s great-grandchildren.

“There comes a time when you should begin folding away your tents,” Christopher mused. No one in the family cared about the schoolhouse the way he did, and like any devoted parent, he wanted to protect it. Like a parting gift for a beloved child and in tribute to an ancestral land he had never visited, Christopher preened Leet School to show off its Sunday best. With customary attention to detail, he asked his sister-in-law Mary to sew new curtains from a specially chosen sunny yellow fabric. He had the rusted stove sandblasted to its original surface and then blackened it. He claims he did some washing, a little dusting, and “moved the broom,” then carried out everything that he deemed extraneous for a typical functioning rural schoolhouse. Looking around the room’s gussied-up interior, Richard admitted that in the old days the school would have been “a little less pretty and a lot less cute.”

Workers painstakingly deconstructed the school, board by board, taking two weeks to dismantle and pack the building into a 40-foot container. A truck headed to Kansas City, and some six weeks later the school had arrived safely in Hamar.

In June of 2015, after eight years of waiting, Christopher traveled to Norway for the Leet School opening. Djupedal explained that in honor of the man who saved the school, it would henceforth be named the Leet-Christopher School. The local Ottestad school band played and marched to the school on the museum grounds as everyone followed. Christopher rang the school bell and cut the ribbon, then we all entered the school. People quickly took their places at desks while Christopher sat at the school’s organ and played traditional school songs. The Norwegian audience enthusiastically sang along to “School Days” and “Home on the Range.”

The re-named Leet-Christopher School no longer teaches “reading, ’riting, and ‘rithmetic” on this side of the Atlantic. However, it is still educating. It will surely instruct timeless lessons in Norway, including self-reliance, stewardship of the land, and love of homeland.

Cynthia Elyce Rubin is a NAHA board member.
If you have Norwegian-American letters, diaries, photographs, family histories, recordings, and community or congregational materials at home, or if you know of such items in the hands of others, please contact us about a donation. Perhaps this list of recent donations will suggest some 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. We are particularly interested in Canadian materials and in materials that concern the experiences of post-World War II Norwegian immigrants; and we will be noting an important donation of post-World War II materials in the next newsletter. We welcome donations illustrating all aspects of Norwegian-American history and culture. For guidance on what we collect, please consult the guidelines near the end of the Archives page on the NAHA website: naha.stolaf.edu/archives/guidelines.pdf. 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 JANUARY 1 – MARCH 31, 2015

FAMILY HISTORIES, MEMOIRS, AND ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORIES

• First Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, Wis. Centennial book, From Glory to Glory (1965), with chapter, “History of First Lutheran Church,” by Trygve M. Ager and accompanying manuscript and notes. Added to P0537 Congregation Papers. Donated by siblings Tryg, Rolf, and Ella Ager Fossum, NAHA Lifetime Member.

• Hansen, Harold O. Family Papers. Includes copies of a Christian Wold farmhouse photo (Eagle Lake, Minn.) and of a family letter from Lillestrøm, Norway, posted February 27, 1946 (narrating the hardships endured under German occupation); as well as an original photograph of workers taken in front of lumber mill, circa 1905 (location unknown). Added to P0539 Family Histories. Donated by Harold O. Hansen.

• Rolvaag, Ole Edvard (1876–31) Papers P0584 Additions. Added original letters, photographs and newspaper clippings (1929–31) written by Rolvaag to Trygve Ager, translator of Their Fathers’ God (1931). NAHA held photocopies of these letters for many years. Donation also includes original letters from Rolvaag to Waldemar Ager (1910–31). Donated by siblings Tryg, Rolf, and Ella Ager Fossum, NAHA Lifetime Member.

• Tvedt Family Letters (585 photocopies, 1883–94). Correspondence between Johannes Tvedt and two sisters; photocopied clippings from the Skandinaven newspaper regarding the World’s Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893; and research regarding Norwegian-born sculptor, Kristian Schneider, who was Louis Sullivan’s primary modeler. Tvedt apparently lived with Schneider and his wife for some years before returning to Norway. Added to P0539 Family Histories. Donated by Cathrine Snyder, NAHA Lifetime Member.

• Ylvisaker/Erstad Family Letter Collection (twelve photocopies, 1863–1925). Includes three letters from Rev. Johannes Ylvisaker, Goodhue County, Minn., to older brother, Niels Th. Ylvisaker, Trondheim, Norway (1863, 1869). NAHA provided translations of some letters to the donor: an 1871 reference provided by the Stord Seminary, Bergen, Norway, regarding Rev. Rasmus Andresen Lavik’s attendance, character, and capabilities; two letters from
Rev. Daniel C. Jordahl, Norway Lake, Minn. (1893); and another letter from Johan F. Ylvisaker, Natal, South Africa (1925). Added to P0539 Family Histories. Donated by Ruth Y. Ylvisaker with the assistance and encouragement of NAHA board member David Holt.

PHOTOGRAPHS


CITATIONS

The Chicago Norske Klub was a hub for Norwegian-American social, cultural, and artistic activity from 1911-1971. To promote interaction between members, the club organized cultural events like the May 17th parade shown here, as well as banquets, parties, and art exhibitions. They also raised money for causes important to Norwegian-Americans, such as American Relief for Norway during World War II. The club hosted many prominent guests, including author Ole Ralvaag, explorer Fridtjof Nansen, and the King and Queen of Norway.