NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN SUFFRAGISTS HELP WIN THE VOTE
NEW PLATFORM, NEW DIRECTIONS

It was good to have so many NAHA members and friends at our virtual program “New Directions in Migration Research” on May 14. We were fortunate to have emigration scholar Terje Mikael Haste-Joranger, director of the Norwegian Emigrant Museum, as guest speaker. Joranger has done extensive work on the migration of Norwegians to America, some of it as a NAHA research associate. He is a co-editor of Nordic Whiteness and Migration to the USA: A Historical Exploration of Identity (Routledge, 2020). I would like to call out two aspects of the event that reflect several of the association’s new strategic goals.

The online platform enabled us to extend our reach, connecting with our members and others throughout North America and beyond. Today, individuals with Norwegian-American backgrounds are scattered across the United States and Canada, many without strong connections to historic immigrant communities like those in New York, the Midwest, and the Pacific Northwest. Moreover, NAHA strives to make our collections and publications available to a wide audience of scholars and historians. Virtual events like this program, along with improving the online catalog of our archives, digitizing selected parts of our collections, and placing Norwegian-American Studies in the JSTOR digital library, will help maintain NAHA as the national center envisioned by our founders in 1925.

Joranger's lecture highlighted some of the emerging research topics that will continue to enrich and deepen our understanding of the Norwegian-American experience. Migration studies focusing on such topics as gender, childhood, whiteness, transnationalism, and encounters with indigenous peoples can provide new perspectives and context on Norwegian Americans and their relationships with others. New questions and innovative approaches to research are fundamental to NAHA’s longstanding commitment to sound scholarship and a solid interpretation of Norwegian America.

Special thanks go to NAHA Executive Director Amy Boxrud, who nimbly transformed our in-person event to an online format in response to the pandemic, and to NAHA board member Daron Olson, who moderated the program from his post at Indiana University East. A video of the event is available on YouTube at youtu.be/wxVKqECQsLk.

A video of the event is available on YouTube at youtu.be/wxVKqECQsLk. We hope you can join us when we gather virtually for our NAHA biennial member event on October 24.

Dennis Gimmestad
President

on the cover

Elsa Ueland makes her pitch as a Minnesota organizer for the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage, later known as the National Woman’s Party, circa 1915 in Minneapolis.

in brief

BIENNIAL MEMBER EVENT GOES ONLINE

The NAHA biennial member event will be held virtually this year, Saturday, October 24, at 10:30 a.m. Central Daylight Time. Erika Jackson, associate professor of history at Colorado Mesa University, will be the featured speaker, on “Becoming White: The Case of Scandinavians in Chicago.” Following the presentation, NAHA will conduct its member business meeting.

Erika Jackson teaches courses on immigration, race and ethnicity, and other aspects of modern U.S. history. She is the author of Scandinavians in Chicago: The Origins of White Privilege in Modern America (University of Illinois Press, 2019), which explores whiteness and ethnicity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The biennial member meeting is an opportunity for members to hear updates from NAHA leadership about the organization, its financial health, and its progress toward goals in the strategic plan. The association also will elect new board members and recognize those who are completing their board service.

Watch for more information and registration instructions to be posted on the NAHA website (naha.stolaf.edu) by October 1.

Erika Jackson

ARCHIVES REMAIN CLOSED DUE TO COVID-19

The St. Olaf College campus will remain closed to the public this fall, including the Reilgaard Memorial Library, which is home to NAHA. While we are not able to schedule appointments for researchers to physically view archival materials, we will work with our members and patrons to provide access to digital materials whenever possible. Inquiries can be sent to naha-archivist@stolaf.edu.

We are grateful to all who have donated archival material since the Covid-19 disruptions began in mid-March. While the NAHA staff has been working from home, materials are still being delivered to the NAHA archives and securely stored there. We will acknowledge donations and resume our practice of highlighting new collections in the “New to the Archives” department of Currents as soon as we are able to work on site from our offices again. While working remotely, our staff still has been able to tackle several archival projects that are included in our strategic plan, such as updating archival policies and moving information into a new content management system.
MAJORS: History and English, with a concentration on women's and gender studies

As a NAHA summer intern, I am helping to develop a preservation plan for the physical and digital collections at NAHA. My job entails reading about archival standards, researching notable preservation plans, and looking for ways to implement these methods and preserve NAHA’s collections and archives.

I look forward to continuing my education through graduate school, likely in the field of either archival science or general history. This internship has been instrumental in helping me toward my goals. In exposing me to rich digital collections and training me in archival standards, NAHA has been and continues to be a valuable resource to me.

ERIN MAGOON, ’21
PUBLIC HISTORY INTERN

MAJORS: History and women’s and gender studies

My focus has been administrative and archival tasks that will increase digital outreach and connection at NAHA. I am making a promotional video about the association’s services and creating digital teaching tools, like timelines and interactive maps. These will be available on the NAHA website soon.

I am interested in a career in archives. I have experience working in the St. Olaf archives, but I wanted to intern with a nonprofit historical organization to learn about the unique challenges and opportunities presented to nonprofits. I have appreciated how this internship exposes me to both the archival and administrative sides of NAHA.

I hope to get a master’s degree in library and information science. I would like to help collect and preserve historical items and stories for future generations of students and researchers.

MAJORs: Classics and religion, with a concentration on linguistic studies

My duties mainly consist of doing quality reviews on database entries that have been moved from the old NAHA content management system, Leaf, to the new one, Omeka. I also make new entries for records that have not been moved already. I ensure that the metadata (which is basically information about information) is correct for each entry, including its dates, creator, description, and more.

In addition, I am completing research about archival standards concerning privacy and how to best implement these standards at NAHA. I am also creating a research guide about the Haugean movement in America, a Lutheran movement started by a Norwegian pastor.

I feel very lucky to be working with NAHA’s archives because I plan to become an archivist one day. As a classics major, I am very interested in the past and I hope to do my part in preserving it.

ALYSSA MOORE, ’21
ARCHIVAL PRESERVATION INTERN

JULIA WALTER, ’21
CATALOGING AND USER EXPERIENCE (UX) INTERN

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AHA has been fortunate to have three interns working with us this summer, helping with a variety of projects drawn from the association’s strategic plan and mission. All three women are preparing for archival or library science careers.

Their experience with NAHA has been altered by the virus pandemic and requirements to work remotely, but “the field of archives is increasingly digital,” intern Julia Walter notes. “So even though I am unable to work with the physical collections right now, I am still gaining valuable experience with metadata and cataloging, in addition to learning about archival standards and expectations.”

NORWAY’S 20TH CENTURY CENSUS RECORDS

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The United States is holding its decennial census this year, though it’s been disrupted by public health concerns. Enumerators have been knocking on doors in August to reach people who have not already responded to census requests online or by mail.

Norway also has conducted a census in every decade since the 1890s, but many records from the 1900s are not yet accessible. In Norway, 100 years must pass before individual census records are made public. Records from Norway’s 1920 census will become available on December 1, 2020. In the United States, census records are publicly available after 72 years. Individual records from the 1950 U.S. census will be available in 2022.

In the Summer 2020 issue of Currents, we highlighted the kinds of information that can be found in Norway’s 19th century census records, going back to 1861. Here, we do the same for the 20th century records that are publicly available so far. They can be accessed digitally for free at digitalarkivet.no/en/content/1900 to 1949.

1900

The 1900 census was begun on December 3. For each household, the same types of information were recorded as in prior censuses, including each person’s full name, position in the family, whether married, and title or occupation. Birth years were recorded for everyone and full birth dates were recorded for children up to two years of age. For people living on farms, information about the farm was also included, but with less detail than in earlier censuses (see above).

A technology footnote: Punch cards and machines for tabulation were used in this census. The system was an innovation developed by Herman Hollerith for use in the 1890 U.S. census. Unfortunately, most of those valuable 1890 U.S. records were irreparably damaged by fire and water on January 10, 1921, in the Commerce Department Building in Washington, DC.

1910

Census taking began December 1 and was completed a couple of weeks later. It was the first census in which full birth dates were recorded for everyone. According to the National Archives of Norway, the 1910 census showed 2,392,782 people living in Norway. Today, the country has 5.3 million people.

An interesting feature of the 1910 census is that additional data were collected about Norwegians who had moved back to Norway from the Americas. Their records show: year of emigration, year of return to Norway, place of residence in Norway before emigration, etc. These records are publicly available at digitalarkivet.no/en/content/1900.

The 1920 census was a kitchen garden (kjøkkenhagen), but no orchard (frukthagen).
WHEN SUFFRAGISTS LOOKED TO NORWAY

IN WOMEN’S FIGHT TO WIN THE VOTE IN THE U.S., ETHNIC IDENTITY AND NORWAY’S EXAMPLE WERE TOOLS OF PERSUASION

BY DENISE LOGELAND

A NORDIC-AMERICAN SUFFRAGE TIMELINE

1838 Kan-bucky grants some taxpaying women the vote, but only on school issues. Many U.S. states and territories grant similar limited voting rights during the 19th century.

1848 The Seneca Falls Convention on women’s rights in New York names the injuries done by man to woman, including that “He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise.”

1866 The first proposal of a constitutional amendment for women’s suffrage is introduced in Norway’s Storting. It is finally considered in 1890 and voted down.

1869 Kansas Territory grants equal suffrage to women.

1885 Kuam-inskerammets Forening (the Women’s Suffrage Association, AWSA), and the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA)

1886 The first organization form different strategic visions for gaining nationwide voting rights for women in the U.S.: The National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), and the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA).

1890 NWSA and AWSA merge and work together as the National American Woman Suffrage Association.

1891 Ole Roe, a “SUFFRAGENT”

1893 Colorado Territory grants equal suffrage to women.

1894 The Women’s Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. By 1869, two groups dedicated to attaining national voting rights for women had emerged, but decades later, no national change in law had resulted. Many states had given women limited rights to vote, but only in local elections or on certain issues. A few western states had given women voting rights equal to men’s, but 11 years had passed since more states were added to that list. At a time when momentum had stalled, why would suffragists in the Upper Midwest pin hopes on the Scandinavian Americans?

Noteworthy Numbers: Part of the answer, of course, is the number of Scandinavian immigrants living in the Midwest and in other pockets around the country. By 1910 in Minnesota, for example, just over a quarter of the population was foreign born and of those, 22 percent were Swedish and 19 percent were Norwegian. In North Dakota in 1910, 28 percent of the state’s population were Scandinavian immigrants.

The women’s suffrage campaign in the United States was nearly 60 years old in 1907 and its progress had been halting. It had started at the Women’s Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. By 1869, two groups dedicated to attaining national voting rights for women had emerged, but decades later, no national change in law had resulted. Many states had given women limited rights to vote, but only in local elections or on certain issues. A few western states had given women voting rights equal to men’s, but 11 years had passed since more states were added to that list. At a time when momentum had stalled, why would suffragists in the Upper Midwest pin hopes on the Scandinavian Americans?

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OLE ROE, A ‘SUFFRAGMENT’

The women’s suffrage movement can’t be reduced to a battle of the sexes. Many men supported women’s right to vote. Frederick Douglass and other mid-19th century abolitionists were early allies. By 1910, a Men’s League for Woman Suffrage had formed in New York, and around the country hundreds of thousands of men had voted “yes” for state measures that would extend voting rights to women.

“The secure these rights, women activists had to win allies among men in influential positions,” said Debra Steidel Wall, deputy archivist of the United States, at a National Archives program on women’s suffrage last November. “It was men who sat in the state legislatures that would ratify or reject the 19th Amendment.” The support of so-called suffragists was needed.

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THREE MADISONS, THREE WINDOWS INTO THE MOVEMENT

Madison, South Dakota, 1898
Unrikka Feldman Bruun speaks on women’s suffrage at the town’s Norwegian church. Bruun toured as a speaker for the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. WCTU women often worked for the suffrage cause as well.

Madison, Wisconsin, 1914
The Wisconsin Woman Suffrage Association hosts a “suffrage school,” where participants can learn to be movement organizers, fundraisers, and public speakers.

Madison, Minnesota, 1916
Women in this largely Scandinavian farming community stage a suffrage march down the main street during the Lac qui Parle County fundraisers, and public speakers.

SUFFRAGE TIMELINE

1905
Not able to vote on the question of dissolving the union with Sweden, women in Norway show their political power by sending nearly 300,000 petition signatures to the Storting.

1906
Finland, a duchy belonging to Russia, grants women equal voting rights. Finland sustains those rights when it becomes independent in 1917.

1907
Norway’s income-limited suffrage for women is amended to the constitution, enabling women to vote in national elections.

1908
Denmark lets women vote in municipal elections. The Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Iceland are part of Denmark at the time.

1909
Ann Rogstad is the first woman in Norway elected to the Storting, as an alternate representative. In 1911, she is called to serve.

1910
Washington is the fifth U.S. state to grant equal voting rights to women. California follows suit in 1911; Oregon, Kansas, and Arizona in 1912; Montana and Nevada in 1914. Equal suffrage is a western-state trend.

1910
Income limits for women are dropped in Norway’s municipal elections.

and their American-born children. Where Scandinavians were the people at hand, it made sense to seek their support. No doubt some Scandinavian immigrants already were supportive of women’s suffrage. Those who had left Norway in the mid-1800s or later—or who kept in touch with family and friends back home—might have been familiar with Kvinnenemmerets Forbund, the Women’s Suffrage Association, which formed in Christiania (Oslo) in 1885 under the leadership of Gina Krog. Krog was a powerhouse of Norway’s feminist movement and encouraged mutual support among feminists and suffragists globally. She toured and spoke in North America in 1909. But even before that, it’s clear that some Norwegian immigrant women were paying attention to developments in their homelands.

When women in Norway gained a constitutional right, they kept supporting those in their homelands. Women who had immigrated and their American-born children. Where Scandinavians were the people at hand, it made sense to seek their support. No doubt some Scandinavian immigrants already were supportive of women’s suffrage. Those who had left Norway in the mid-1800s or later—or who kept in touch with family and friends back home—might have been familiar with Kvinnenemmerets Forbund, the Women’s Suffrage Association, which formed in Christiania (Oslo) in 1885 under the leadership of Gina Krog. Krog was a powerhouse of Norway’s feminist movement and encouraged mutual support among feminists and suffragists globally. She toured and spoke in North America in 1909. But even before that, it’s clear that some Norwegian immigrant women were paying attention to developments in their homelands.

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THE UELANDS: ON TWO SIDES OF A DIVIDE

Divisions formed more than once in the women’s suffrage movement as activists disagreed about priorities and strategy. That is the reason why two big national suffrage organizations formed in 1869. Founders of the National Association of Woman Suffrage favored working immediately for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution, while those who formed the American Woman Suffrage Association believed it would be more practical to change laws state by state and then pursue an amendment. By 1890, tensions eased and the two groups merged to become the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA).

But in the 1910s, a new question split the movement: How confrontational should their efforts be? At least one Norwegian-American family found itself on both sides of the issue. Elsa Ueland, the daughter of Norwegian immigrant and Minneapolis attorney Andreas Ueland and his wife, Clara, joined the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage, founded by Alice Paul. (It was soon renamed the National Woman’s Party.) Paul’s group had splintered from NAWSA in 1913, frustrated by slow progress and NAWSA’s reliance on persuading male voters. Paul believed in being more brash. She organized a vigil of pickets outside the White House, something that had never been done before in the country’s history. The Minneapolis-based Scandinavian Woman Suffrage Association (SWSA) took part in the picket line in 1917, and at least one member of the SWSA joined the National Woman’s Party for the longer haul. Bertha Berglin Molter, a Minneapolis teacher who was born in Sweden, was jailed many times for her picketing and activism. While Elsa Ueland openly favored Paul’s provocative approach, her mother Clara Ueland was more cautious. A pillar of the suffrage movement in Minnesota, Clara served as president of the Minnesota chapter of NAWSA from 1914 to 1920. She was known for a conservative but effective leadership style, according to her biographer and suffrage historian Barbara Stuhler.

Still, the mother-daughter relationship didn’t sour over their differences. In fact, Clara had been an early supporter of Alice Paul’s efforts. She grew less vocal about it, however, as public opinion of Paul and her tactics turned negative. A current Library of Congress exhibit, Shall Not Be Denied: Women Fight for the Vote, describes the Uelands as bridge figures who “sought cooperation among the groups.”

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Anna Rogstad is the first woman in Norway elected to the Storting, as an alternate representative. In 1911, she is called to serve.

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Washington is the fifth U.S. state to grant equal voting rights to women. California follows suit in 1911; Oregon, Kansas, and Arizona in 1912; Montana and Nevada in 1914. Equal suffrage is a western-state trend.

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Income limits for women are dropped in Norway’s municipal elections.
according to Liz Almlie, a public historian who works for the South Dakota State Historical Society and recounts the state’s suffrage history in her personal blog. By 1910, the SDSA employed Anna Urin as a field worker. A Norwegian immigrant, Urin had language and culture in common with the audiences she tried to reach.

“Miss Urin is doing excellent work among the Scandinavians, visiting from house to house in country districts, speaking in school and meeting houses, anywhere she can get a hearing,” reported the SDSA newsletter, The Bulletin.

In Minnesota, the Scandinavian Woman Suffrage Association (SWSA) likewise “worked to reach men and women who might not have identified with suffrage organizations, but might respond to information communicated in their native tongue,” wrote Anna Peterson, now NAHA editor and associate professor of history at Luther College, in a 2011 article about Scandinavian descent. Some SWSA members were the wives of prominent local men, but “married women from working-class backgrounds as well as single working women also joined. The SWSA policy of not charging dues most likely accounted for this socio-economic diversity and solidified its reputation as a club of hard-working women.”

**Norway as a Model**

Jenova Martin, an immigrant from Norway, was the SWSA’s first president, from 1907 to 1913. Nanny Mattson Jaeger, born in Minnesota to Swedish immigrants, was president from 1913 to 1920, when the group disbanded. Because ethnic identity was a tool that the SWSA used to connect with people, they sometimes performed Scandinavian music or plays at fundraising events, and appeared in traditional Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish folk dress. That was true on May 2, 1914, as SWSA members marched in bunader and other folk dress through downtown Minneapolis in a suffrage parade. By now, however, their ethnic identity signaled something new.

A year earlier, in June 1913, Norway had amended its constitution to give women voting rights equal to men’s, making Norway the first independent country in the world to do so. Increasingly, Norwegian and Scandinavian ethnic identity were more than just a way to connect with the immigrant community. Norway’s equal suffrage for women could now serve as an inspiration and a goad.

The SWSA received and fulfilled requests for help beyond its home base in Minnesota. As Peterson noted, Jenova Martin went on a speaking tour in North Dakota in 1913, and the request from the North Dakota Votes for Women League, And as late as 1920, the National Woman’s Party in Washington, DC, asked the SWSA to send speakers to communities in Delaware.

Carrie Chapman Catt, president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, also held up Norway as a model of what U.S. suffragists could achieve. Catt had traveled to Norway several times and she made an appeal to Norwegian Americans in New York in 1915, as a vote on women’s suffrage in that state neared.

“In Norway, men and women vote,” Catt said to the newspaper Nordisk Tidende. “A Norwegian woman has equal rights with her husband in Christianity, but when she becomes an American citizen, she has no political rights at all in New York. I appeal to you to help give the vote to the women of this state.”

The SWSA was almost ready to go national, but funding was still a problem. It was still an all-volunteer organization, and they only made a meager amount of money from dues. Mattson Jaeger and the rest of the committee decided to appeal to the people of Norway.

“Who can argue that women voters should be in an environment where they will be preserved photographs, and audio-and visual and paper materials. There will be a ‘clean room’ for conservation work and more cold storage for preserving photographs.

“The project is on track for completion before the college’s sesquicentennial in 2024,” says Mary Barboza-Jerez, head of strategy for library collections and archives at Rølvaag Library. “These really wonderful NAHA materials are going to be in an environment where they will be more stable,” she adds. “The kinds of paper and ink that were used in the period when these items were created degraded much more quickly than the materials from previous eras. . . . Once they are all in the new vault, their life will be extended, and that’s really gratifying.”
Nurses from the Norwegian Lutheran Deaconess Hospital march in the Norse-American Centennial parade in New York City. The hospital, located in Brooklyn, was established by Sister Elizabeth Fedde in 1885. It thrived and Fedde was invited by the Norwegian-American community in Minneapolis to extend her work into that city, which she did. Deaconesses provided health care for Norwegian-Americans and the surrounding community. This photograph is part of the Norse-American Centennial Papers that NAHA has digitized in collaboration with the Minnesota Digital Library. View the entire centennial collection and explore other digitized collections at reflections.mndigital.org. Learn more about Sister Elizabeth Fedde in Norwegian-American Studies and Records, Vol. 20 (NAHA, 1959), soon available digitally at jstor.org.