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**WHEN THE WINDS CAME UP AND HAIL FELL BY THE FOOT**

Photos unlock the story of a historic summer storm in Winneshiek County
Much of our work this year is focused on digitizing portions of the O. E. Rølvaag Collection. Our Archives Committee identified this collection as a priority for digitization based on its significance and fragility. It’s also a timely project, with the sesquicentennial of Rølvaag’s birth coming up in 2026.

Only on-site researchers could use the collection until now. Digitization will make it accessible to scholars around the world and in many fields of study. The project, which includes large portions of Rølvaag’s correspondence, manuscripts, and photos, is funded by a grant from the State of Minnesota’s Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund through the Minnesota Historical Society.

As we scan items, we are attending to those that are fragile and making note of those with professional conservation needs. We have already finished digitizing the photographs, which bring to life many chapters from Rølvaag’s life. Through them, we get a glimpse into the marriage and home of Ole, his wife, Jennie, and their children, Olaf, Ella, Paul, and Karl. Photographs humanize this important literary figure.

Rølvaag kept a correspondence with more than a thousand individuals, including Norwegian-American intellectuals such as Einar Haugen, Waldemar Agee, and Theodore Ileben. His communication with them and with family, teachers, students, and other writers—as well as his translator, Lincoln Colcord—reveals much about the man, his work, and his thinking. We are halfway through scanning this vast collection of letters.

Next, we will move on to Rølvaag’s manuscripts. The NAHA archives contain the original manuscripts for I De Dage (1924) and Rødegård (1925), which were combined to create the 1927 American edition of Giants in the Earth. Additionally, we will digitize the manuscripts for Concerning Our Heritage/Omkring Fædrearven (1922), Peder Victorius/Peder Seier (1928), and Langvolds Kå (1921), which was released in English after Rølvaag’s death as The Boat of Longing (1931).

This is a big endeavor. Already, we have created more than 9,000 digital surrogates of physical materials. We expect to complete the project in early 2023. Our new content management system, Omeka, makes it easier to search the database of NAHA collections and view digitized materials. We will archive recent gatherings and presentations there, so you can watch them at your convenience and share them with friends.

Enjoy Archived NAHA Events Online: For those who missed our virtual NAHA Spring Member Meetup—or who want to listen again to Kyle Ward’s presentation on the 99th Battalion—the meetup is now available to view on the Events page at naha.stolaf.edu/events. Any time you want to revisit or catch up on NAHA presentations, check the Events page.

We will archive recent gatherings and presentations there, so you can watch them at your convenience and share them with friends.

View Red River Girl at Norway House

Members of NAHA have a special opportunity to visit the exhibit Red River Girl: The Thortvedt Family’s Journey to America, on display through August 8 in the Norway House gallery in Minneapolis.

Artist Orabel Thortvedt (1896-1983) worked together with her father to preserve the story of their family’s migration from Telemark to the Red River Valley in Minnesota. In the process, they captured the history of an early Norwegian settlement and of surrounding Clay County.

Drawings and paintings by Thortvedt, who studied at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, illustrate the narrative. The exhibit features large panel reproductions of Thortvedt’s work and was created jointly by the Vest-Telemark Museum in Norway and the Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County.

NAHA will provide free admission to the Norway House gallery for the first 100 NAHA members who visit the exhibit. As Covid-19 restrictions ease, Norway House has adopted a mixed schedule of walk-in days and days requiring an appointment. Check norwayhouse.org for the latest information and take these steps to claim your free admission:

• As a walk-in, identify yourself to staff as a NAHA member;
• For an appointment, click the appointment button in the upper-right corner of the Norway House website and as you sign up, use the Redeem Coupon button to type in the coupon code NAHA100.

A guided tour of the exhibit can be scheduled for an additional $15. For those interested to learn more about Thortvedt, a bilingual book related to the exhibit is available through the online shop of the Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County at hcscconline.org.

All the Best,

Kristina Warner, Archivist

in brief

OUT OF THE ARCHIVES, INTO THE WORLD

On the cover
In some families with Norwegian relatives, the devastating 1908 storm is still passed down and shared today. One of the last first-person accounts was given by Regina Cecilia Broghammer in an interview with inspired magazine in Decorah, Iowa, in 2003.


In brief

Members of NAHA can view Red River Girl: The Thortvedt Family’s Journey to America, on display through August 8 in the Norway House gallery in Minneapolis.

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KARI LIE DORER NAMED KING OLAV V CHAIR

In May, the St. Olaf College Board of Regents awarded the King Olav V Chair in Scandinavian-American Studies to Kari Lie Dorer, professor of Norwegian. This position, created in 1992, is held by a senior faculty member whose professional work contributes to the study of Scandinavian and Norwegian-American culture. As part of her appointment, Dorer will serve on the NAHA Board of Directors.

Dorer first joined the St. Olaf faculty in 2001 after teaching Norwegian at the University of Minnesota. She returned to the college in 2008 after completing her Ph.D. at the University of Texas at Austin. She serves as chair of the Norwegian department and the German department, as director of Nordic studies. Her area of specialization is foreign language instruction, curriculum development, and the use of technology for language learning. Dorer co-created the beginning Norwegian curriculum Sett i gang I & II. She also teaches Sámi studies and Nordic film courses. Dorer earned her B.A. at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, and her M.A. at the University of Minnesota. In an announcement to the St. Olaf community, Maree Sortor, provost and dean of the college and a member of the NAHA Board of Directors, wrote “Kari Dorer is particularly effective in fostering relationships between St. Olaf students and Norway, and helping students understand contemporary Norwegian culture.”

Odd S. Lovoll, professor emeritus of Norwegian and history, was the first holder of the King Olav V Chair (1992–2001), followed by Todd Nichol, professor emeritus of history (2001–2017), and the late Margaret Hayford O’Leary, professor of Norwegian, (2017–18). The chair was most recently held by Dan Dressen, associate provost and professor of music, who also represents the college on the NAHA Board of Directors.

NAHA WELCOMES NEW TEAM MEMBERS

Karen Annestad Humphrey recently joined NAHA as a senior advancement officer. Karen previously served as a senior major gifts officer for the Minnesota Historical Society (MNHIS) and vice president of advancement for Bethany College in Lindsborg, Kansas. She has chaired the boards of directors for both NAHA and MNHS, and she serves on the board of the National Lutheran Choir. “I believe it’s a privilege to hear people’s stories and to help them realize projects and programs that are meaningful to them,” she says.

Marisa Campanaro joined the NAHA staff February 1 as a project imaging archivist to digitize the O.E. Revalgå Collection, thanks to a Legacy Grant from the State of Minnesota. “By digitizing this important collection, we can make Revalgå’s stories accessible throughout the country and the world, all while preserving his collection of correspondence, manuscripts, and photographs,” she says. Earlier, Marisa worked with the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee, University of Wisconsin Law Library, and University of Wisconsin Archives.

DECIPHERING GOTHIC TYPE IN NEWSPAPERS

BY DALE HOVLAND

An extensive collection of digitized newspaper archives is available from the Library of Congress at its website chronlingamerica.loc.gov. It’s a rich resource for family historians and includes more than 3,300 newspapers in 24 languages, among them Norwegian-language papers. Users who don’t speak Norwegian can overcome the language barrier with translation apps such as Google Translate (though the results are not always entirely accurate). But what about another barrier, the gothic typeface in many old newspapers? Gothic or blackletter typefaces and handwriting were commonly used where Germanic languages were used—including the Scandinavian languages—until well into the 1900s. Many newspapers used a specific gothic typeface called Fraktur.

There are charts and tips available to aid in reading Fraktur type (see page 10). For those who want to use a translation app, however, a helpful first step is knowing how to extract newspaper text from a site like Chronicling America so it can be entered into the translation software. For starters, no special type of search is needed to access the newspapers that are published in Fraktur type. A standard search, using normal roman type, will include results that are in Fraktur.

TRY THESE STEPS

To see how a search works and get a sample of newspaper text to translate, we’ll look at a family event that became a political event in 1912. King Frederik VIII of Denmark, died on May 14 that year. Seven years earlier, in 1905, his son, Denmark’s Prince Carl, had become Norway’s King Haakon VII. The Norwegians chose him to be the first king of a free and independent Norway when they ended their union with Sweden.

When his father, Frederik, died, Norwegian-American newspapers reported on the funeral. Several accounts can be found on the Chronicling America site by choosing the Advanced Search tab on the home page, keying in a date range of 1912 to 1912, and typing the names Haakon and Frederik into the search field that says, “With all the words.” The search results will include several newspapers that have articles containing both of the search terms, Haakon and Frederik, and some of them will be in Norwegian. The Fergus Falls Upplad, or Fergus Falls Weekly Paper, from western Minnesota, will show up in the search results with more.

Continued on page 10
In September 2012, NAHA received a donation of 13 real-photo postcards. They show the devastation wrought by a tornado and hailstorm that swept through Winneshiek County, Iowa, on June 20, 1908. The county, in the northeast corner of the state, was heavily settled by Norwegian immigrants beginning in the 1850s and 1860s. Decorah, the county seat, is situated among the limestone bluffs of the Upper Iowa River Valley. The following narrative draws on contemporaneous reports from Decorah newspapers to tell the story behind the photographs.

The Gathering Storm

It was a morning that promised glorious weather in Decorah, Iowa. After several days of overcast skies and cool winds, on Saturday, June 20, the sun shone and lifted people’s spirits as they tended to chores. They weeded onion beds, harvested ripe strawberries, baked bread and gooseberry pies, and fixed harnesses. Corn fields soaked in the warmth and looked likely to affirm the old saying, “Knee high by the Fourth of July.”

Just across the state line, about 20 miles to the north, two rival Minnesota baseball clubs squared off against each other in a midseasonnoon contest. The visiting Spring Grove Indians, composed mainly of Norwegian-American players including Rosendahl, Solberg, Reuer, Walhus, and Reierson, prevailed against the Mabel team 8 to 4. Pitcher Reierson, mainly of Norwegian-American stock, took the mound. With another game scheduled for home, the 50-year-old farmer, Borseim, the resident Sidney Price wrote, “Then it started to rain torrents and the wind blew with torridic force. A funnel cloud was spotted in the northwest, and it gathered in the river bluffs. With another game scheduled for home, the 50-year-old farmer, Borseim, the resident Sidney Price wrote, “Then it started to rain torrents and the wind blew with torridic force. A funnel cloud was spotted in the northwest, and it gathered in the river bluffs. The Moment it started to rain, the wind blew with torridic force. A funnel cloud was spotted in the northwest, and it gathered in the river bluffs.

At a time when it was believed that the storm itself was due to a nervous trouble in the “private parts,” the county seat was mostly out of its uniforms and headed toward a bridge that was beginning to wash out. Later reports would note that area streams rose two feet in 15 minutes.

Close Calls

Borseim, the 50-year-old farmer, was four miles shy of reaching home when the storm broke. The pouding hail terrified his horse and the animal bolted down a hill toward a raging creek. Unable to control the runaway buggy, Borseim was helpless as the horse galloped toward a bridge that was beginning to wash out. Later reports would note that area streams rose two feet in 15 minutes.

The buggy and bridge crashed into the creek. Borseim’s arm was broken in two places, and now he found himself pinned down in the water by one of the buggy’s thills, the shafts that extend from the rig on either side of the animal pulling it. The horse was hemmed in as well. Borseim’s only chance of survival was to reach the small ax he’d had behind him in the buggy and chop himself free of the thill, but the water was rising fast.

In Decorah, calmity reigned. Telephone and telegraph lines were out of commission. Electrical power was out. The fire bell at Hose House Number 2 began ringing, alarming residents who feared it meant imminent flooding. In fact, a lightning strike had set fire to the Swenson Valve Works on the south end of town. Firemen were hampered in vanquishing the flames as they had to wade through flooded streets to reach the conflagration.

A funnel cloud was spotted in the northwest, heading for town. Meanwhile, the Gjetle family, still trying to get home, was batttered with hail. Nearing C. J.

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but as the newspapers reported, torrential downpour of 3.9 inches. and flooding in some areas due to windows broken, trees uprooted, at every turn with roofs torn off, spared. Devastation was apparent damage. Not a city block was out of their homes to survey the shining again. Townsfolk came rain had stopped and the sun was after it began, the worst storm ever who had regained his senses. The rescued, by her brother, Willie, bruised. Her sister was also dress. She was alive, but severely screaming and rushed to the farmhand at Tellinghast’s, heard storm, Clarence Ellingson, a rescue. Without thought for somehow, over the din of the storm, Clarence Ellingson, a companion in the past four years. had been an unwelcome falling lumber, leaving her to raise seven children alone.

Somehow, over the din of the storm, Clarence Ellingson, a farmhand at Tellinghast’s, heard screaming and rushed to the rescue. Without thought for his own safety, he swam out in the dangerous current and just managed to catch one of the girls by grabbing the edge of her dress. She was alive, but severely bruised. Her sister was also rescued, by her brother, Willie, who had regained his senses. The family gathered in tearful relief. By 6:30 p.m., just half an hour after it began, the worst storm ever witnessed by Decorah’s residents was abating. By 7:00 p.m., the rain had stopped and the sun was shining again. Townsfolk came out of their homes to survey the damage. Not a city block was spared. Devastation was apparent at every turn with roofs torn off, windows broken, trees uprooted, and flooding in some areas due to torrential downpour of 3.9 inches. There were rumors of lives lost, but as the newspapers reported, they proved to be untrue.

The Aftermath
The tornado had swept through Winneshiek County on a path 20 miles wide. Trees were stripped of their bark and crops were flattened. Farmers lost livestock, too. At Phil Halse’s place, 70 sheep, 20 head of cattle, and 20 hogs, plus all of his farm machinery was gone. Damage caused by the hailstones was nearly unbelievable. It took four railroad boxcars loaded with glass to replace all the broken windows in Decorah. Some houses had as much as a foot of ice inside as a result of smashed-in windows. In corners around buildings, there were reports of hail piled four or more feet deep.

Decorah’s business district was hard hit. The roof of John O’Neil’s blacksmith shop was partially torn off. Bagge’s shoe store shared a similar fate. No doubt numerous shoes belonging to horses and humans were strewn about town. Symond’s Green House suffered nearly 8,000 square feet of broken panes, and a stack of ruined plants and flowers. Luther College was fortunate and sustained little damage. Without electricity, the majority of the town was pitch black at nightfall. Residents carrying lanterns roamed the streets and conversed with their distraught neighbors. Trains were unable to leave town as the tracks needed repairs. For a time, Decorah was “marooned,” as one reporter noted, unable to connect with the outside world.

As for farmer Borseim, his dire predicament lasted the entire night. Not until the swollen creek receded—after the water had reached up to his chin—did he manage to somehow grasp his ax with his loose hand. He pecked away for hours at the thill that restrained him, until he finally freed himself around 8 a.m. Chilled to the bone and in severe pain, he crawled up the creek bank and collapsed. An hour later, Borseim and his surviving horse were discovered and taken home. Unfortunately, no physician was available to treat him until Monday. The Decorah Journal said of him, “Only a man of the strongest constitution could have stood the accident.”

Play Ball!
After riding out the storm at Ole Selness’s place, the Spring Grove ball club started out for Decorah once again on Saturday evening. They got as far as the Big Canoe bridge, where they found the river impassable. The men retreated to an abandoned farmhouse, where they settled in for the night. The accommodations were sparse, with one table, four chairs, and a single, sagging bed. The wood floor was topping wet and covered with broken glass. Four of the fellows tried to share the bed, but understandably found sleep unattainable. They christened the place “Hotel Knapp-Naring” in recognition of their scant larder that evening: a little sour milk and syrup and six hard biscuits. At sunrise on Sunday, the team set out again, and this time were caught in a rain shower. Exhausted and wet, they arrived in Decorah and were met by a sorrowful scene of destruction. Despondent, they figured their game at 3 p.m. would surely be canceled, but to their surprise, it was not. The local consensus was that as long as the Spring Grove club was there, the game should go on.

Playing in front of a small crowd on an improvised grass
More Help with Fraktur Texts

Family Tree magazine offers a no-cost downloadable chart that shows a Fraktur alphabet and two other gothic typefaces side-by-side with roman type. An added bonus is that the chart includes examples of each letter of the alphabet in gothic-style handwriting. Family Tree requires you to provide your email address in exchange for the chart. The download is at familytreemagazine.com/freebies/free-germanic-alphabet-chart/

Martin Roe Eidhammer produces a helpful blog for Norwegian and Norwegian-American genealogists at martinroe.com/blog/. Eidhammer, who lives in his native Norway, blogs in English and covers a range of topics that can be helpful in deciphering old records. Use the Search this Blog field on the right-hand side of his blog page and search for “gothic” to see his posts on reading gothic handwriting.

THE MEANING BECOMES CLEAR: ONE PARAGRAPH THREE WAYS

1. In Norwegian and in Fraktur type


2. In Norwegian roman type, after the Fraktur was copied and pasted


3. Translated into English by Google Translate

One attributes to it a great diplomatic Meaning, that the three Scandinavian Kings, King Christian of Denmark, King Haakon of Norway and King Gustav of Sweden, met each other at the Funeral. It was the first time in a thousand years, and that it is said that the three kings at dinner after the funerals became such good friends, that they agreed to meet later in Stockholm and Kristiania.

ORGANIZING AND STORING HOME PHOTO COLLECTIONS

Photos connect us to the past and are a treasure for those who come after us. With a bit of time, a few archival-quality supplies, and some expert tips, printed photographs can be preserved for generations to come. Here are a few things to keep in mind.

Condition

Choose storage-solutions based on the condition of your photos. Consider storing important, fragile, or damaged photos in their own protective sleeves, but not all photos need this treatment if cost is a concern.

Viewing

Are there some photos you are more likely to view often? Clear enclosures make it easy to view them without touching them each time, and prevent wear and tear. Archival envelopes and boxes will protect less frequently viewed photos from light, are easy to label, and are less expensive.

Quality of Enclosures

Look for sleeves, envelopes, and folders called “photo-safe” or “archival quality.” Paper enclosures that are simply labeled “acid-free” with no further qualifiers may only be acid-free when they are produced. They can become acidic in a relatively short amount of time and damage photos.

Size

Photos should fit fairly snugly into enclosures and boxes to prevent damage caused by shifting around, but enclosures should not be overfilled.

Provenance

Group photos of the same provenance together in a folder, sleeve, or envelope. Photos should all face the same direction, not face to face, to prevent them from sticking together.

Environment

Keep photos in a cool, dry, stable environment with limited light exposure. In general, photos are better off stored in a home’s living spaces, with a temperature around 70 degrees Fahrenheit and relative humidity under 55 percent. Basements and attics often have greater temperature and moisture fluctuations. Photos should fit fairly snugly into enclosures and boxes to prevent damage caused by shifting around, but enclosures should not be overfilled.

Files and Online Resources

Find supplies and learn more from the Guide to Collections Care on the Gaylord Archival website at gaylord.com/resources/guide-to-collections-care/section-2. Created by conservators, this free, online guide has information on caring for photographs, negatives, albums, and discs.

Margaret Note offers more practical tips for organizing based on archival principles in Creating Family Archives: A Step by Step Guide to Saving Your Memories for Future Generations, published by the Society of American Archivists. The 178-page manual ($24.99) is available in print or digitally in the online bookstore under Publications at archives.org.
(Right to left) Mr. and Mrs. Nils Paul Xavier picnicking with Mrs. Lunde and Mrs. and Mr. Ole Hoimyr near Franklin, Minnesota. Nils Paul Xavier was a Sámi teacher and pastor who was born in Kautokeino, Norway, in 1831. He attended seminary and worked as a teacher before migrating to America in 1873. After his ordination in the Norwegian Synod, Xavier homesteaded and served as pastor to the Fort Ridgely, Dale, and Palmyra congregations in Nicollet and Renville counties in southern Minnesota.