RØLVÅGAS TRANSLATOR
A writer reimagines his work
What a pleasure it was to gather in August at the Norway House gallery in Minneapolis. After a hiatus from in-person events, we looked forward to co-sponsoring “Linked Histories: Norwegian Immigrants and Indigenous Peoples in Minnesota,” featuring speakers Brenda Child (Red Lake Ojibwe) and Betty Bergland, and moderated by NAHA Editor Anna Peterson. Given the gallery’s capacity and people’s strong interest in the topic, seats for the event filled in just a few days.

The evening’s goal was to contextualize the exhibit then on display at Norway House. It centered on a group of Norwegians who migrated to the Red River Valley, and it featured works by artist Orabel Thortvedt, a granddaughter of the group’s leader.

As we have so many times in the past 18 months, we found ourselves needing to adapt; Dr. Child was suddenly unable to join us due to illness. In light of her absence, we were not able to fully explore immigrant and Indigenous “linked histories.” But Dr. Bergland’s revised presentation, “Telemarkings in the Land-taking: From Houston County to the Red River Valley,” gave insightful context to the Norway House exhibit and was an excellent catalyst for the conversation that followed.

Bergland’s engagement with this topic goes back more than two decades. Because federal policies ceding Indian land made immigrant settlement possible, “the history of Norwegian immigration and the history of Native American tribes remain intimately connected,” she wrote in her article “Norwegian Immigrants and ‘Indianærne’ in the Land-taking.” (Norwegian-American Studies 35, 2000). Still, scholarship of 19th-century Norwegian immigration and Indigenous tribes remained “separate spheres of inquiry” for many years. Bergland and other present-day historians seek to lift up and examine what she calls a “historically-muted” relationship.

Swedish historian Gunlog Fur issues a similar call to scholars in her article “Indians and Immigrants—Entangled Histories” (Journal of American Ethnic History, 33, no. 3, 2014). Fur advocates “active collaboration among historians with different skills and backgrounds” to “bridge the gulf” between Scandinavian immigration history and Native American history.

In 2020, the NAHA Publications Committee created a research prospectus that outlines priorities for future NAHA publications. In it, the committee encourages the exploration of cross-cultural encounters between Norwegians and other groups, the exploration of new historical eras and new geographical areas, and the application of 21st-century theoretical models. In doing so, the committee seeks to place “the Norwegian immigrant experience in a larger context, suggesting linkages to the larger historical trends of world history.”

If this topic of immigrant-Indigenous encounters is of interest to you, I encourage you to explore the scholarship of Fur, Bergland, and other NAHA members. You will find a resource guide on the association’s website at naha.stolaf.edu/archives/resources. As always, I welcome your feedback and suggestions for future NAHA events on any topic. Drop me a line at naha@stolaf.edu.

Be well,

Amy Boxrud, Executive Director
We can’t wait to travel again. But as of press time, the effects of the pandemic on international travel are still uncertain. We invite you to keep two opportunities in mind for the summer of 2022.

If international travel conditions permit, NAHA will offer a tour, “Artistry and Industry of Norway,” blending cultural, industrial, and agricultural history. The group will travel by bus from Oslo to Bergen, enjoying spectacular natural beauty, stays in historic hotels, and delicious, locally sourced meals along the way. Stops include the Oleana knitwear factory, the Telemark Canal, fish and fruit farms in the Hardanger region, and the Rjukan-Notodden Industrial Heritage Site, designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. NAHA Editor Anna Peterson, associate professor of history at Luther College, will guide the tour, and Amy Boxrud, executive director of NAHA, will host it. Send an email to naha@stolaf.edu if you are interested in receiving more information and updates on this opportunity, tentatively scheduled for June 18–26, 2022.

Members may also consider attending the triennial seminar of our sister organization, NAHA-Norge, next June at the Norwegian Emigrant Museum near Hamar. The seminar, which was postponed from 2020, is titled “Nordic Identity Formation in a Transnational Context.” The seminar is slated to take place immediately prior to the NAHA tour. Seminar details will be forthcoming at nahanorge.wordpress.com.

Correction
In our 2020 Annual Report, we should have listed a gift from NAHA member Liv Paulson Norderhaug as being in memory of Archie Jalbert (not Talbot). We apologize for the error.

NEWLY DIGITIZED NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS

The Minnesota Digital Newspaper Hub recently announced the addition of more Norwegian-language newspapers, listed below. Visit the hub, a service of the Minnesota Historical Society, at newspapers.mnhs.org.

Folkets Röst, Minneapolis, 1918-1925
Minneapolis Tidende (more years added), Minneapolis, 1895-1928
Nordisk Folkeblad, Minneapolis and Rochester, MN, 1868-1875
Skandinavisk Farmer Journal, Minneapolis and St. Paul, 1893-1908
PEDERSON RECEIVES FIRST LOVOLL AWARD

The association is pleased to name Conrad Pederson of the University of North Dakota as the first recipient of the new Odd S. Lovoll Award in Norwegian-American Studies. His winning essay is “Public Art in North Dakota.” “I was thrilled that Pederson’s innovative and well-researched project won,” says NAHA Editor Anna Peterson. “His interdisciplinary approach to Nordic public art resulted in the creation of a digital atlas on the topic [UND’s North Dakota Digital Atlas]. His work brilliantly reflects the award’s intent.”

The Lovoll award recognizes originality, excellence, and creativity in undergraduate research and writing on any aspect of Norwegian-American studies. It is named for former NAHA editor Odd S. Lovoll, who gave dedicated service to the association from 1980 to 2000 and mentored scores of young scholars in immigration studies.

Pederson graduated in 2021 with highest honors and a bachelor of science degree in education. He receives a $500 prize and a year’s membership in NAHA. His essay will be considered for publication in the association’s journal, Norwegian-American Studies.

“I am incredibly grateful to have studied Norwegian at the University of North Dakota, and for the fantastic faculty members who have helped me along the way,” Pederson says. “Heading into college, I had no idea Norwegian existed as a program of study at UND. However, it has proved to be the most enhancing aspect of my education and has provided many opportunities to me, including this award.”

June 1, 2022, is the next entry deadline. Details at naha.stolaf.edu.

SUMMER INTERNS BUILD SKILLS

NAHA hosted four St. Olaf student interns this summer, whose work for the association helped them build skills in a variety of areas, from fundraising to digitization. Our nonprofit management internship, now in its third summer, and a new digital repository assistantship were made possible through the association’s Sigvald Quale Norwegian Society Fund.

Our appreciation goes to the St. Olaf College Norwegian department, which sponsored two new digital humanities internships. Those interns contributed to the creation of a primary source guide for our newly digitized O. E. Rølvaag Collection.

Nonprofit Management Intern

CECE SCHURKE ’23
MAJOR: Business Leadership and Management

“I never feel that I am doing the same tasks every day, which is great, as I have gained a multitude of skills. Whether it’s sending out membership renewals, working with our member database, or researching to improve our systems in the office, I have enjoyed it all.”

Digital Repository Assistant

CLAIRE STROTHER ’22
MAJORS: American Studies, Women’s and Gender Studies

“I’ve really enjoyed learning the ropes of archival work in such a hands-on way. As someone who tends to make use of other online archives regularly, it gives me an appreciation for the work that people do to make things more accessible and safeguard knowledge for the future.”

Nordic Studies in the Digital Humanities Interns

CAROLINE FLATEN ’23
MAJORS: Norwegian and Vocal Performance

“The thing I most enjoyed from the internship was not only learning more about Norwegian-American history but also learning more about Ole Rølvaag…. I am grateful for the experience this past summer.”

HELEN WHITE ’23
MAJORS: Norwegian and Linguistics

“It was fascinating to read material that has not been widely available in the past and help make it more accessible. I learned a lot about the history of immigration. It definitely has inspired me to continue learning about this topic.”
Ole Edvart Rølvaag wrote seven novels as well as many short stories, essays, and some poetry, nearly all of it in Norwegian, and most of his writings have been translated into English. His most celebrated work, *Giants in the Earth*, has always seemed to me such a quintessentially American novel that when reading it, I have seldom thought of the fact that it was originally written in Norwegian and then translated into English.

As I began reading recent Rølvaag criticism by Norwegians such as Ingeborg Kongslien, I began to consider the whole translation process and what differences might be found between the Norwegian and the English versions. I also began to speculate on the possible effect of translation quality on the reception of Rølvaag’s works.

I began my study of style and translation in Rølvaag’s authorship by looking at the entire publication and translation history. This in itself is a fascinating story.
“English doesn’t sing for me”

Rølvaag’s earliest works were published in Norwegian in the United States and were aimed at a Norwegian-American audience. Only after he had achieved recognition in Norway with the publication of I de dage and Riket grundlegges [In Those Days and The Kingdom is Founded, later combined to become Giants in the Earth] was there any interest in his work by English-language American publishers. And it was not until Giants in the Earth became a bestseller that Rølvaag’s other works were gradually introduced to an American readership.

Rølvaag explained, in the manuscript of an article he wrote for The Editor, that he wrote in Norwegian because “English speech doesn’t sing for me…. Of course I have acquired a speaking knowledge of English; I can even write it after a fashion; but it is stiff and cold.”

He repeated that sentiment in an article about the Norwegian success of I de dage (headlined “Norway Extols St. Olaf Man”), in the Minneapolis Journal on January 31, 1926. That article serendipitously attracted the attention of an American author named Lincoln Colcord. Rølvaag said:

It was not my intention in the beginning to write my books for the people of Norway …. I didn’t think that I could compete with established Norwegian authors. The book was about Norwegians in America and that is where I expected it to sell. True, it was written in Norwegian, because, while I speak the English language, it does not sing for me.

Colcord’s interest was piqued, and he arranged to meet with Rølvaag. Through his connections in American publishing, Colcord was able to attract the attention of Eugene Saxton, editor of Harper’s in New York. Previous to this, Rølvaag had been completely unknown in the English-speaking literary world.

Rølvaag had engaged some local literary friends to rough out translations of I de dage. Unfortunately, these were not always accurate, nor did they “sing” in English. Colcord had been completely unknown in the English-speaking literary world.

Rølvaag liked this “double action” method of translation, as he called it. In Colcord, he gained not only a friend but also “the tutelage of a skillful native writer of the English literary idiom, American style;” writes Einar Haugen in his biography Ole Edvard Rølvaag.

In Rølvaag’s own foreword to Giants, he writes of the difficulties of translation. The idiom of the characters, he says, offered serious problems. These settlers came from Nordland, and though the novel is written in the literary language of Norway, the speech of the characters themselves naturally was strongly colored by their native dialect. “To get these people to reveal clearly and effectively their psychology in English speech seemed at times impossible,” he adds.

In the first printing of Giants, no translator was listed, but this was quickly changed to read: “translated from the Norwegian by Lincoln Colcord and the author.” In his preface, Rølvaag describes the translation process: “If the old
saying, that many cooks spoil the broth, is true, then surely the English text cannot be of much account, for many have worked on it.” He mentions Ansten Anstensen, Ruth Lima, Nils Flaten, Nora Solum, Olav Lee, Esther Gulbrandsen, and John Heitman, as well as Dr. and Mrs. Clarence Berdahl. “What I asked of these friends,” he says, “was a literal translation.” He goes on to express his gratitude to Lincoln Colcord:

…who unified and literally rewrote the English text. As I got the translation from others, I would wrestle with it for a while, and then send it on to him. When he had finished a division, he and I would come together to work it over, he reading the manuscript aloud, I checking with the text of the original. How intensely we struggled with words and sentences! It would happen frequently that several pages had to be rewritten. But he never tired….

Were it not for his constant encouragement and for his inimitable willingness to help, this novel would most likely never have seen the light of day in an English translation.

The vigor of honest cursing

The extensive and fascinating correspondence between Rølvaag and Colcord gives considerable insight into their translation methods. Colcord writes to Rølvaag from Minneapolis, where he was staying with his sister, and then they would meet, either in Minneapolis or in Northfield, to discuss the manuscript. On April 14, 1926, Colcord wrote:

The last part of the manuscript was very difficult. The translation [by the hack translators] was simply appalling; all sense of style had been lost—the sentences were simply a jumble of jarring words…you will recognize my main intention—to try to put smoothness and style into the narrative…. And now, promise me to take plenty of time over the manuscript, and not get yourself tied up in hard knots…. It does me good to know that you commend some of my suggestions.

Colcord then adds that he hasn’t tried to put life into the conversation; “that task should be entirely yours,” he says, and he goes on to give advice about cursing. “I believe the right rule to follow would be to put it back into the speech wherever you had used it in the Norwegian; for there your artistic sense and your feeling of style had full play.” And he tells Rølvaag not to be afraid of references to so-called “forbidden topics,” which have been eliminated from the translation. Apparently, the literal translators were squeamish about certain topics and language.

Colcord returns to the problem of direct speech in a letter written after one of their sessions together:

All the way home I was thinking of the matter of colloquialisms, and of the question of turning the direct conversation into living English. There is a great danger—a great danger. Treat it carefully. The vigor of honest cursing should certainly be imparted to Per Hansa’s speech, and probably to Tonsenet’s. But slang or colloquialisms I am afraid of, for the effect they would have is very complicated. Would it not be well to make a flat rule that, if any colloquialisms at all were permitted, they should be put only in Tonseten’s mouth?

He adds that he is finding the end of the manuscript more difficult. “A slip of translation counts for more
Certainly more descriptive than the Norwegian “de hadde nå bodt her i hele sommer,” they had now lived here the whole summer. “Gå,” walk, becomes “walk rapidly.”

And in the phrase “det holdt på å våkne noe bak trekkene,” there began to awaken something behind those features, the word “noe,” something, becomes “a new and ominous force,” and “trekkene,” those features, becomes “that impassive countenance.”

The expletives are certainly stronger in the English, when for instance “Bare gi dem det!,” just give it to them, is rendered as “Give ‘em hell!,” and “hadde det travelt,” were in a rush, becomes “were in a devil of a hurry.”

The sentence “Nå må du sannelig være flink til å oversette!,” now you must really be clever at translating, has been completely changed to read “God be with you, Henry …. Stand right up to him and talk him down.”

And one final example: “både han og de andre;” both he and the others, is translated as “the whole damned gang of sneaking swine.”

It has been said that some of Rølvaag’s poetry has been lost in the translation, but in many cases, the English text seems more poetic. The English passages cited here are more descriptive, often livelier, certainly more explicit. The livelier speech and action frequently function as a substitute for dialect variation and Norwegian idiom as a tool of characterization.

Though content changes may be few, there are some rather significant ones. At the end of Part Three of Chapter Two, called “Bufestning” or “Home Founding,” an entire paragraph has been added. Thus the Norwegian version ends with the sentence “Tønseten rugget hjemover til gammen sin; stegene syntes en god del tyngre end da han kom i eftermiddag og hadde motbakke foran sig;” Tønseten lumbered homeward to his turf house; his steps felt a good deal heavier than when he came this afternoon and had a climb ahead of him. In the English version, however, after Tønseten has walked home, this has been added:

Per Hansa returned with his other neighbor to the wagons, where Beret and the children were waiting. Again he inquired about the line between the two quarters; then asked Beret and Hans Olsa to help pick the best building place; his words, though few and soberly spoken, had in them an unmistakable ring of determination …. This vast stretch of beautiful land was to be his—yes, his—and no ghost of a dead Indian would drive him away! … His heart began to expand with a mighty exultation. An emotion he had never felt before filled him and made him walk erect. “Good God!” he panted. “This kingdom is going to be mine!”

This certainly is a significant addition to the content! And this type of thing occurs more than once in the English version. Though I have not found direct proof, I find it hard to believe that Colcord suggested such significant changes. Rølvaag clearly is rewriting as well as translating his work.

THE “HALO” AROUND THE WORD

Rølvaag’s sister-in-law, Evelyn Tripp Berdahl, helped him with the English version of Pure Gold, and she reminisced about the work nearly 40 years later:

“First of all, it was exciting to work with one who had an artist’s passion for the precise word. Often that led to warm discussions. To find the exact word, I would give him a list of synonyms and he would feel about until one word caught precisely what he wanted. Sometimes there would be discussions about the meanings of words. I remember ‘gingerly.’ ‘She picked it up gingerly,’ he had written. ‘That means,’ he said, ‘with ginger, with snap.’ ‘No,’ I said, ‘it means “cautiously,” “timidly.”’ Then came the argument. ‘It can’t mean that,’ he said. I had to have [his wife] Jennie’s corroboration and the dictionary to persuade him that he could not use ‘gingerly’ ….

“Ole’s desire for the word with the right meaning was also a desire for the right connotation, for the halo that surrounded the word, and also for the sound of the word. He had a poet’s ear for the music of language … He turned [words] over, felt them, delighted in them.”
“Translate mood, and let the story take care of itself”

Though I have found very few instances of actual mistranslation, certainly some things have been lost, or at least changed, in the English version. As well as the use of dialect and idiom in the Norwegian text, we find the very subtle effect of the gradual introduction of Anglicisms into the Norwegian speech of the characters, as pointed out by Ingeborg Kongslien in *Draumen om fridom og jord: ein studie i skandinaviske emigrantromanar*, The Dream of Freedom and Land: A Study of Scandinavian Emigrant Novels. The Anglicisms add authenticity and indicate the gradual process of assimilation in a way that simply cannot be indicated in the English text.

_Giants in the Earth_ is the only Rølvaag novel in which Lincoln Colcord had a hand. However, Rølvaag liked the “double action” method of translation, and continued it as long as his health permitted. He worked with a St. Olaf colleague, Nora Solum, on _Peder Victorious_.

Rølvaag also played a significant role in the translation of _To tullinger_, Two Fools, into _Pure Gold_. As Einar Haugen observes, “the text has been so thoroughly revised that one can almost speak of a new book.” The editors at Aschehoug apparently thought so, for when they brought out a Norwegian edition under the title _Rent Guld_ in 1932, they had it retranslated from the English version.

As Rølvaag’s health deteriorated, he had less and less energy to give to his writing and translating. His name is not listed as co-translator on either _Boat of Longing_ or _Their Fathers’ God_. But further evidence of the differences between Rølvaag’s style in English and Norwegian can be found by comparing his own translations of his short stories (found in manuscript in the NAHA archives) with the published Norwegian versions.

Trygve M. Ager, in the “Translator’s Foreword” to _Their Fathers’ God_, writes, “In this translation, I have frequently found myself in positions where it has been necessary to commit assault and battery on both literature and language. Certainly, all translation is a most difficult task and all translators are criminals, if not at heart at least in deed.” Rølvaag’s advice to Ager was to “translate mood, and let the story take care of itself.” It seems that Rølvaag as translator followed his own advice, and that may be one reason that his most successful book in English was the one in which he had the greatest input into the translation.

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**IN NORWEGIAN, A DARKER VOICE**

Rølvaag translated more than just his own work. In the NAHA archives, his manuscript translation of Nini Roll Anker’s play _Kirken_, The Church, may be found in a folder dated 1929. Rølvaag titled it _The Wrath of God_ in English. Apparently, he felt more sure of his English style by the time he took on this task, as he seems to have translated the text entirely on his own.

He also translated from English into Norwegian a short piece about the Minnesota politician Einar Hoidale, written by Martha Østensø. A cursory examination reveals a very different style when he translates into Norwegian. The sentences are shorter, the description darker and more sparse. For example, there’s the opening sentence: “A small boy stood by the thickly frosted window, peering into the west through the clear circle he had made on the pane with his warm breath.” In Norwegian, this has been turned into two sentences: “Sprængkaldt og storvinter ute. Ved vinduet i et lite shanty stod en gut og aandet paa ruten,” Icy cold and deep winter outside. By the window in a little shanty stood a boy and breathed on the windowpane.

Farther along, a cozy picture, “… would soon be singing sweet Christmas carols in the gathering dusk,” has been turned into a question and made darker: “Kvelden sank i vinterødet. Snart sat de vel rundt kveldsbordet og sang,?” Evening settled in the winter emptiness. Soon they would sit around the supper table and sing, wouldn’t they?

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Rølvaag translated from English into Norwegian for Norwegian-American journalist and author Martha Østensø (left), giving her work a darker, terser tone.
Marcus Møller Thrane (1817–1890) was the leader of the first organized labor movement in Norway. After a few years as an office worker and a teacher, Thrane began his campaign to improve conditions for Norway’s industrial workers and for the husmenn, cotters, who were their rural counterparts. He used his platform as editor of the Drammens Adresse newspaper. In 1848, he founded the Drammen Arbeiderforening, Drammen Workers’ Association, which quickly grew to around 300 local affiliates and 30,000 members around Norway.

Thrane advocated universal voting rights, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and measures to close Norway’s 19th century wealth gap. The 1848 February Revolution in France was an inspiration for him, but for the authorities in Norway, it was a source of worry. They kept a close watch on Thrane and his labor movement. In 1851, they arrested him based on rumors that he’d been fomenting revolution during a labor conference. The charges did not hold up to scrutiny. Records show that the judges knew Thrane was innocent of any crime. Still, they sentenced him to prison, and in all he spent eight years there.

In 1863, Thrane immigrated to the United States, where he renewed his work as an editor and activist. He started the short-lived newspaper Norske-Amerikaner (1865–1866) and a philosophical and religious monthly called Dagslyset (1866–1878), both in Chicago. Thrane clashed with the Norwegian Lutherans, which led to a war of printed words. The church published “Advarsel til Alle Kristne,” A Warning to All Christians, in 1866, condemning the socialist ideas in Thrane’s Norske-Amerikaner. His response was slow in coming (1881), a sharp satire of the Wisconsin Synod Lutherans that he titled Den Gamle Wisconsin Bibelen, The Old Wisconsin Bible.

His son Arthur had followed him to America and became a physician at Rush Medical College in Chicago in 1868. Arthur Thrane and his wife, Amalie Struck, moved to Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Together they had eight children, several of whom became professional musicians.

Victor, their eldest son, attended St. John’s University at Collegeville, Minnesota, and the Chicago Ophthalmic College. But it was his passion for music that became his career. He was considered a musical tastemaker around the country and managed the careers of numerous artists, among them the well-known American coloratura soprano Ellen Beach Yaw, Eugène-Auguste Ysaÿe, Stéphane Pugno, and Elsa Ruegger. Victor Thrane’s siblings, Irma (piano), Ella (soprano), Robert (cello), and Lucille (violin) performed together as the Thrane Concert Company.
Victor Thrane (inset above) managed the performances of American and international artists from an office in New York City. His siblings Lucile (right) and Robert (left) studied and performed in Europe and the U.S.

Several of Marcus Thrane’s grandchildren pursued careers in music.

Together, four of the Thrane grandchildren toured as the Thrane Concert Company. At left, a promotion for their performance at the Mabel Tainter Memorial Theater in Menomonie, Wisconsin.

Marcus Thrane was photographed on June 18, 1889, with his beloved bloodhounds. He died less than a year later, on April 30, 1890. Decades later, in 1949, his remains were moved from Wisconsin back to his native Norway, where they rest in the “grove of honor” at Vår Frelsers Gravlund, Our Savior’s Cemetery, in Oslo.

Robert Thrane, ‘cellist.

Robert Thrane, pupil of the celebrated Carl Böhlau, of Vienna, given an unexcelled education of composition and execution of the fascinating instrument, the violoncello. In Germany Thrane played with great praise the Saint-Saëns Concerto, with the Court Orchestra (Berolinische Concerts), and was often called upon to play in symphony concerts, where he received the most flattering praise. Young Thrane’s style is notable, tranquil and simple, full of sentiment, power and melody. Excellent interpreter, his work distinguishes his work and undoubted genius promises for him a place among the best of the younger generation of cellists.
MAKE HISTORY—LEAVE A LEGACY!

When you make a planned gift to NAHA and become a member of the Legacy Circle, you become a vital partner in our mission to collect, preserve, and interpret the Norwegian-American experience. Your gift benefits NAHA and the whole Norwegian-American community.

Have you already included the association in your estate plans? If so, we want to recognize your generosity.

For more information, please contact NAHA Executive Director Amy Boxrud at nahastolaf.edu or 507-786-3221.