Recipes for Change
The enterprising women behind a groundbreaking cookbook
One of the things I greatly enjoy in my role at NAHA is working with our partner organizations throughout the Norwegian-American community and abroad.

The close ties NAHA maintains with NAHA-Norge, a thriving partner across the Atlantic, is evident in several ways. Ingeborg Kongslien and Ellen Vollebæk’s article in this issue of Currents marks the 40th anniversary of NAHA-Norge, also known as Det norsk-amerikanske historielaget i Norge. In early November, NAHA collaborated with NAHA-Norge to host an online event commemorating the birth of Norwegian social reformer Hans Nielsen Hauge. If you missed the presentation by our shared member, Professor Vidar Haanes, you can find a video of the event on the association website at naha.stolaf.edu.

I am also pleased that NAHA-Norge plans to offer a long-awaited seminar next summer. Travel conditions permitting, NAHA members will have the opportunity to attend that seminar in June, and to spend an additional week exploring southern Norway together. See the facing page for more details.

Another opportunity for collaboration with our partner organizations is the 2025 bicentennial of Norwegian migration, marking the arrival of the sloop Restauration in New York in 1825. In 2017, seven organizations began planning for commemorations of the bicentennial, meeting then at the Vesterheim museum in Decorah, Iowa. Since then, groups have met online regularly, and there are now more than 25 organizations across North America represented on the bicentennial planning roster. Together we are building a shared website and calendar of events, and we are developing additional resources to aid Norwegian-American organizations in celebrating the bicentennial milestone. The country of Norway will mark this occasion as well, and it is an honor for NAHA to serve as a liaison between the North American planning group and the Norwegian national committee.

Another partner organization on the move is Norway House. I had the pleasure of attending the groundbreaking for its expanded campus in Minneapolis in September. While NAHA is an international organization, we naturally have close ties and many members in the Minneapolis–St. Paul metro area. The Norway House expansion is good news; it will offer expanded opportunities for NAHA and other organizations to host events in the Twin Cities. And the resources collected in the Norway House addition will provide a complementary experience for family historians who also conduct research in our archives.

In this season of gratitude, I am grateful for the many partnerships that NAHA enjoys. The cooperation and collaboration of partners enriches our mission to locate, collect, preserve, and interpret the Norwegian-American experience. We will continue to look for ways to contribute to their good work as well.

With best wishes for the holiday season,

Amy Boxrud, Executive Director
Consider these two opportunities to learn and explore in Norway.

Next summer, NAHA-Norge plans to offer its triennial seminar at the Norwegian Emigrant Museum near Hamar, Norway. The seminar, postponed from 2020, is called “Nordic Identity Formation in a Transnational Context” and is scheduled to take place in mid-June. Take part to enjoy the company of NAHA members from both sides of the Atlantic, explore the emigration museum, and learn about the ties that Nordic emigrants maintained with their countries of origin. For details, visit nahanorge.wordpress.com.

Immediately following the seminar, NAHA hopes to offer a week-long tour, “Artistry and Industry of Norway.” Those not attending the seminar will depart the United States on June 18. We will travel from Oslo to Bergen by bus, exploring the cultural, industrial, and agricultural history of southern Norway. Stops include the Oleana knitwear factory, fish and fruit farms in the Hardanger region, the Telemark Canal, and the Rjukan-Notodden Industrial Heritage Site, designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Along the way, we will observe spectacular natural beauty, experience the long days of midsummer, stay in historic hotels, and eat delicious, locally sourced meals. 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. At press time, travel to Norway by North Americans is still restricted. Visit naha.stolaf.edu or call 507-786-3221 for updates and more details.

ACCESS OUR JOURNAL ONLINE

Norwegian-American Studies, the scholarly journal of the association, is published in cooperation with the University of Minnesota Press. In addition to print copies, members of NAHA have access to the journal online, including all digitized back issues, as a benefit of membership. New members: Watch for an email from the journals manager at the university press, Diandra Coles, with instructions for accessing the journal on the website jstor.org. All members: If you haven’t received log-on instructions or need assistance, write to Diandra requesting help (coles069@umn.edu). Mention in your note that you are a member of the Norwegian-American Historical Association.
NAHA-NORWAY MARKS 40 YEARS

BY INGEBORG KONGSLIEN AND ELLEN VOLLEBÆK

NAHA-Norway, the hyphenated sibling organization of NAHA, was established in the fall of 1981. When the Oslo University Press organized a seminar on Norwegian emigration to the United States that year in connection with Professor Odd Lovoll’s upcoming book *Det løfterike landet* (published in English as *The Promise of America* in 1984), he suggested the forming of a Norwegian chapter of NAHA. The idea was well received, and on August 18, 1981, a committee was established. Among its members were Ingrid Semmingsen, the renowned Norwegian emigration historian and professor emeritus; Dorothy Burton Skårdal, associate professor of American culture and literature; and Kjetil Flatin, director of the Oslo International Summer School, all of them at the University of Oslo. Flatin was also a member of the NAHA board in Northfield.

In the beginning, the organization concentrated on two issues: recruiting new members and establishing a newsletter to inform members about seminars and projects related to the field of Norwegian-American history. It also collected dues (in Norwegian kroner) from NAHA members in Norway and transferred these to the NAHA office in Northfield, Minnesota. Finally, in the spring of 1985, a constitutive general assembly was held. Then the chapter was given bylaws and elected its first formal board, led by Dorothy Skårdal.

NAHA-Norway’s purpose over the years has been to stimulate both popular and scholarly interest among Norwegians in the emigration from Norway to America and in Norwegian-American history and culture, and in particular to promote research in this field. In recent decades, linguistic studies have also come up as a significant field of interest. There were studies conducted on Norwegian language in America in the Midwest in the 1990s, to follow up on Einar Haugen’s groundbreaking work in the middle of the century. After the millennium, the study of heritage languages, Norwegian among them, has grown into a major field internationally.

The first major event held by the new organization was a seminar on Norwegian-American literature and history. It was held in connection with the exhibition “The Promise of America/Reisen til Amerika” at the Henie Onstad Kunstsenter at Hovikodden, just outside Oslo, in the summer of 1984. The seminar, chaired by Kjetil Flatin and Dorothy Skårdal, was the first of its kind in Norway, and the participants, including academics and the general public, could hear papers presented by established scholars and master’s degree students. Major American scholars in the field, including Lloyd Hustvedt, Einar Haugen, and Odd Lovoll, were present and gave comments, and many of them continued to visit NAHA-Norway seminars in the following years. A book of proceedings was published in 1986, the same year
the next seminar took place in Stavanger, inspired by the success at Høvikodden.

A seminar followed by a publication soon became a pattern for NAHA-Norway’s work, with the publication series titled Norwegian-American Essays. As a rule, every third (and occasionally second) year a seminar has been organized at a Norwegian university or university college, as well as at the Norwegian Emigrant Museum at Hamar. One exception was in 2011, when Luther College invited us to organize our first (and so far only) seminar outside of Norway, in Decorah, Iowa. That event was part of their sesquicentennial, celebrating the founding of the college in 1861.

It brought a record number of participants, the majority from the USA, and more papers than ever were presented. Eleven articles based on a sample of the presentations can be found in volume 14 of Norwegian-American Essays, published in 2014. As a gesture of friendship to the American audience, a special edition of the previous volume (number 13), published in 2011, was printed in Northfield and sent as a gift to all interested NAHA members in the United States.

After some discussion, NAHA-Norway and NAHA in Northfield signed a memorandum of understanding in 2014, concluding that the formal ties between the two organizations should be changed. NAHA-Norway would no longer be a chapter of the main organization in the USA, but the two independent organizations agreed on forms of mutual cooperation. In 2016, the NAHA-Norway bylaws were changed accordingly.

Both organizations continue to share a common aim, namely to promote Norwegian-American historical and cultural research and literary work through publications and membership meetings. A sign of the good relations that have been sustained between them is that each organization may appoint a representative to serve on the board of directors of the other.

The program for our next seminar, originally planned for June 2020 at the Emigrant Museum at Hamar, was about to go to press when the Covid pandemic hit and forced us to postpone it.

We hope that in the summer of 2022, we will be able to welcome people to our 14th seminar! With the experience earned during the shutdown, we are considering presenting the program in a hybrid version, physical meetings combined with virtual transmission, in real time and/or made available afterwards. Several American presenters had signed up for the 2020 event, and we hope to have them on board for the program we finally present in 2022.

In 2025, the bicentennial commemoration of the start of organized emigration from Norway to America could open new possibilities for cooperation, reinforcing our mutual interests.

To learn more about NAHA-Norway, see our website at nahanorge.wordpress.com. There you will find an overview of all our seminars and all 16 volumes of Norwegian-American Essays. There are also links to digital resources, for instance to the website The Promise of America, which was developed by the Norwegian Emigrant Museum and the National Library of Norway for the 175-year anniversary of emigration from Norway, in the year 2000 (nb.no/emigrasjon/emigration/). Dina Tolfby, former NAHA-Norway chair and curator for the Norwegian-American Collection at the National Library of Norway, was project manager for the website.

Should you have questions, feel free to contact our chairperson, Associate Professor of Østfold University College Arnstein Hjelde (arnstein.hjelde@hiof.no) or Ellen Vollebæk, membership secretary (evollebaek@gmail.com).

Ingeborg Kongslien is professor emeritus and a former chair of NAHA-Norway. Ellen Vollebæk is the organization’s treasurer and membership secretary.
The idea generally prevalent is that the college girl knows or cares but little for the art of cooking, begins the Phi Kappa Phi Cook Book, published by the women's literary society of St. Olaf College in 1907. “This, however, is not the case among the girls of our own institution, and we hope a few years of college life will never counteract the good influences or training along these lines which they have received in their good Norwegian homes.”

The Phi Kappa Phi Cook Book is a groundbreaking document that contains a number of important firsts in the history of Norwegian-American cookbooks. It was one of the first cookbooks used as a fundraiser in Norwegian America; it was one of the first cookbooks produced entirely by Norwegian-American women; and it contains what appear to be the earliest recipes for lefse and flatbread published in a cookbook in the United States.

How and why were the women of Phi Kappa Phi spurred to preserve the traditions of their “good Norwegian homes” in this seminal work? The social context surrounding the book’s publication includes the fight over coeducation at the college and the phenomenally successful Norwegian suppers held at St. John’s Lutheran Church in Northfield, Minnesota, just down the hill from the college campus.

The women of Phi Kappa Phi included their portraits in their cookbook, and what are likely the earliest recipes for lefse and flatbread published in a cookbook in the United States.
that there was no running water and wood was hauled in for the stoves. Professor Ole G. Felland, who lived there with his family for 18 years, lamented that the Ladies’ Hall was the coldest house he had ever lived in: “It had been put up in the flimsiest manner imaginable, old siding with many of the old nail holes left open, open space between the studdings, opening into a cold attic.”

Still, the women who lived there were lucky. Fewer than two dozen of them could be housed in the building. Most of the remaining female students had to room in town, where they were disconnected from the social life of the campus and had a long walk to classes in rain, ice, and snow.

In 1899, the United Norwegian Lutheran Church affirmed St. Olaf as the official college of the synod. With an influx of church support, the college’s male students soon received a new dormitory. But coeducation remained a major topic of debate within the United Church; St. Olaf was one of just three coeducational Norwegian-American Lutheran colleges in the United States at the time. For the next decade, the rickety Ladies’ Hall stood as a symbol for Melby (now preceptress), Hegland, and other St. Olaf women, of continuing inequality at the heart of the institution.

St. Olaf women were vocal in their support of coeducation. Frida Bu (class of 1902), wrote a treatise on the subject in the student newspaper, the Manitou Messenger. Far from undermining a woman’s role in the home, education would strengthen it, Bu argued. In addition to learning foundational church teachings, a woman seeking higher education would “strengthen and increase her homemaking abilities,” learning to be “the intellectual companion of her husband” and a “capable adviser and instructor of her children.”

Bu’s writing illustrates a duality of thinking in these early years of coeducation: a woman’s education could prepare her for a career outside the home, but it could also support her work in the home. The careers of the women of Phi Kappa Phi bear this out: 85 of the 197 women cataloged in the group’s directory of graduates became housewives; 95 became teachers; 17 pursued other work, including journalist, artist, osteopath, missionary, and insurance agent.

Homemaking skills were therefore an important part of education for St. Olaf women, and though conditions were spartan, cooking was a central preoccupation in the Ladies’ Hall. Agnes Melby remembered that while “opportunities for practicing the nobler art of cooking were so few, we were never daunted…. We would often undertake to make chicken soup on a little upright heater with raw wood and a tin kettle.” Georgina Hegland recalled that when Thea Felland, wife of Ole Felland, would cook her “unsurpassed” doughnuts, “the girls could, on the spur of the moment, invent an errand to her kitchen.” Thea Felland, a beloved surrogate mother for many of the women, “never complained of the sticky doorknobs and the messy stove she had to clean.”

In an 1898 ode to the Ladies’ Hall, student Martha Knutsen recalled a bevy of youthful cooking experiments:

Could the walls of the old Ladies’ Hall talk, it would have many an interesting story to tell. It might tell you of coffee parties, tea parties, candy pulls, and receptions . . . . It might tell you why it is that the girls in room No. 5 never crack cocoanuts on the floor with a stick of wood after 10 o’clock any more. Or what the girls in room No. 4 and 7 did with the cabbage they carried up the hill one evening last week. I am quite sure that it could tell you the quickest way of baking sweet potatoes, and why it is that eggs cannot be baked on coals. This and many other interesting things the old hall could tell, if it only could talk—but it can’t.

Fortunately, a decade later, a cookbook would do some of the talking.
Northfield's Norwegian Suppers Are a Defining Event
While fun was had with food in the Ladies' Hall, some of the first and biggest "Norwegian suppers" in the Upper Midwest began to take shape, both on campus and a few blocks away, at St. John's Lutheran Church. Many St. Olaf students were congregation members.
Norwegian-themed suppers would become a common fundraising tool for Ladies Aid groups in Norwegian-Lutheran churches in years to come, but at the turn of the 20th century they were not yet common. In 1894, women students at St. Olaf hosted one of the very first Norwegian suppers in Northfield, for which they dressed the part.

The Manitou Messenger described a table filled "to overflowing with all the old country delicacies which the fertile minds of our cooks could think of." After supper, the students sang Norwegian songs, St. Olaf professors gave talks, and John Eltun, a famed musician who lived in Northfield, played the langeleik.

The successful college supper was likely an inspiration for the genre-defining Norwegian suppers put on by the women of St. John's. The church's annual suppers began in 1897. Just five years later, in 1902, the Ladies Aid was estimated to have fed nearly 800 people at the event. The women of St. John's also included songs, talks, and John Eltun's music at their suppers.

Mrs. Berit Lysne, an immigrant pioneer in Northfield, served flødegrød, cream porridge, in a replica of a mountain-pasture cabin, dressed as a Norwegian dairy maid.

Cookbooks as a New Kind of Fundraiser
It was in this historical moment that the Phi Kappa Phi Cook Book was born. In 1906, only 22 of the 136 women enrolled at St. Olaf lived in the Ladies' Hall—an egregious lack of support for what amounted to more than one-third of the student body. The United Church finally moved beyond the objections of its more conservative members and agreed to build a new structure for women students. While that effort faltered initially, it inspired the women of Phi Kappa Phi to action.

Gertrude Hilleboe, class of 1912 and dean of women at St. Olaf from 1915 to 1958, remembered this time well in her memoir. Fundraising for the new building became important to women students. Phi Kappa Phi, the center of women's extracurricular activities, came up with the idea of a cookbook of family recipes to sell. Their 117-page book included American recipes, hints for a pioneer home, and 21 pages of Norwegian foods.

The book went on sale in 1907. "Every girl was given books to sell in her home community. When we went home for Christmas, we all brought with us an extra piece of luggage, cookbooks to sell,"
Hilleboe joked. The books sold out in a year and a new edition was printed in 1908. When the United Church recommitted to raising funds in 1910, Hilleboe recalled that the college women intensified their sales efforts, “setting up booths at homecoming, commencement, and other festival occasions that brought visitors to the campus.” When the building was finally completed in 1912, “it was the women students who through the sale of their cookbooks provided the curtains, draperies, and rugs for these rooms.”

Ladies Aid societies at churches were raising funds through textile auctions and food sales in this era, but cookbook sales were novel. Historian and NAHA board member Debbie Miller has shown in her research that Norwegian Lutheran church cookbooks became popular relatively late, preceded in the Upper Midwest by books from Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian women’s groups. To develop a fundraising campaign around cookbook sales required negotiating printing costs, selling advertising space, and handling promotion and sales of the finished product. Few such efforts were made by Norwegian-Lutheran women before the 1920s. That might demonstrate that coeducation laid a foundation of skills among women over time that helped later generations in their fundraising endeavors.

Only two other recipe collections exist today that were developed by Norwegian-American women around the time of the Phi Kappa Phi Cook Book. One, the North Star Cook Book, was created by the Norwegian Women’s Auxiliary of Fairview Hospital in Minneapolis (1908)—another fundraising cookbook. The other is Kvinden og Hjemmet’s Kogebog (1908), a commercial book published by the magazine Kvinden og Hjemmet, Woman and Home, which was helmed by Norwegian immigrant sisters Ida Hansen and Mina Jensen in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

It is possible that other books appeared briefly in small runs in other churches or communities, but they are lost or remain under the radar today. For its part, the Phi Kappa Phi Cook Book went through four editions by 1920, supported by a built-in market among students and a deeply motivated sales force.

Earliest Lefse and Flatbrød Recipes

Two of the most unusual additions to the Phi Kappa Phi Cook Book hardly seem unusual by today’s standards, but they were novel at the time: recipes for lefse and flatbread. That adds to the book’s value as a historical document.

Neither the North Star nor the Kvinden og Hjemmet’s cookbook includes such recipes. Three other early cookbooks published for a Norwegian-American audience before or around the time of the St. Olaf book could conceivably have beat it for the distinction of having the earliest recipes for lefse and flatbread. The Skandinavisk Illustreret Kogebog (1884) depicts a mix of old- and new-world dishes, while the Ny Norsk-Dansk-Amerikansk Kogebog (1905) is decidedly American in focus. The Norsk-Americanske Kogebog (1907), which was put out by the newspaper Minneapolis Tidende, focuses largely on Norwegian foods and on economizing through food preparation. None contains recipes for lefse or flatbread. The Phi Kappa Phi Cook Book is the only book among its contemporaries to document these recipes.

There are surely reasons for this. One might be that lefse and flatbread were such common foods that one hardly needed a recipe for them. Norwegian cookbooks of the 19th century also give these two food items little or no attention.

Timing also could have played a part. Peak emigration from Norway overlapped with the cultural trend of Norwegian National Romanticism. But many emigrants left Norway before admiration for bondekultur, farmer culture, reached its full flowering, and at least a few might have been happy to leave behind memories of a meager life in the countryside.

The women of Phi Kappa Phi, some a generation or two removed from emigration, had a different perspective. They were steeped in a Norwegian-American culture that was now beginning to celebrate Norwegian foods to a spectacular degree, as witnessed in the success of the St. John’s suppers.

Examining the recipe for lefse in the Phi Kappa Phi Cook Book, one notes the simple and inexpensive ingredients: potatoes, flour, and salt. Cream is mentioned as an afterthought for mashing the potatoes. There is no sugar or shortening. But as if to show their importance on the table, lefse and flatbrød are the first two recipes in the Norwegian section of the book. What a contrast to their invisibility in other cookbooks of the era.

The two recipes persist through the four virtually unchanged editions of the Phi Kappa Phi Cook Book that eventually were published. By persisting, they come into full view. By persisting, they come into full relief not only as two of the most beloved foods among Norwegian Americans, but as two of the more important Norwegian recipes ever to be preserved in America.

Marika Josephson, PhD, is an independent scholar researching the history of lefse in the United States.
One of the earliest known skiers in the United States was John Albert Thompson, though he was better known by his nickname, Snowshoe Thompson. When he was born, in 1827 in Tinn, Telemark, Norway, he was christened Jon Torsteinson Rue.

In 1837, when he was 10, Thompson and his mother migrated to America. After moving around the Upper Midwest, Thompson eventually homesteaded in California’s Alpine County. From 1856 to 1876, he delivered mail between California and Nevada using the style of skiing that he had learned as a boy in Telemark. His nickname, Snowshoe, is misleading: He actually got around on a pair of 10-foot skis and used a single sturdy pole for balance.

In areas of North America settled by Nordic immigrants, ski clubs and organizations have sprung up for more than 120 years. One such group, whose records are part of the NAHA archives, is the National Ski Association, which began organizing in 1904 in Ishpeming, Michigan. Carl Tellefson, considered the “Father of Ski Sport in America,” was the group’s first president, and Aksel Holter was the first secretary. Holter also served as editor of one of the first periodicals for skiers, the NSA member journal The Skisport.

Important ski organizations and ski events with Nordic roots continued to form in the second half of the 1900s. The American Birkebeiner, the largest cross-country ski race in North America, was started in 1973 by Tony Wise, a founding member of the Worldloppet Federation of cross-country ski marathons. Wise drew on his Norwegian heritage to organize the race, which is held each February in Wisconsin. His American event is named for the famed Norwegian Birkebeinerrennet. The Norwegian ski race commemorates a pivotal event in the country’s history in 1206, when a group of Birkebeiner soldiers, who fought for Sverre Sigurdsson and his descendants in the Norwegian civil war, smuggled the illegitimate son of Norway’s King Håkon Sverresson from Lillehammer to safety in Trondheim.

Ski For Light, a nonprofit organization that provides opportunities for visually impaired and mobility-impaired people to experience skiing, was founded in 1975. The group’s annual event takes place at different locations across the United States and, like the Birkebeiner in Wisconsin, it builds on a ski event that was first held in Norway. Erling Stordahl, a blind Norwegian musician, is credited with the idea of giving blind people assistance to ski. His efforts led to the creation in 1964 of the Ridderrennet, or “Knights’ race,” which is held at Beitostølen in the Valdres region of Norway.

The Bronze Broom Award is for one of the Wisconsin Birkie’s last finishers but one who best exemplifies the spirit of the event. In 1985, it went to Joe Bozicevich.

MORE TO EXPLORE

American Birkebeiner Ski Foundation records, 1973-2010 (NAHA 2020/014)
Ski for Light records, 1975-2017 (P1722)
Aksel H. Holter papers, circa 1925 (P0168)
National Ski Association records, 1904-2002 (P0673)
“Sondre Norheim: Folk Hero to Immigrant,” John Weinstock, Norwegian-American Studies, Vol. 29
The Skisport fed the enthusiasm of early members of the National Ski Association of America. The association initially brought together Nordic ski clubs from Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Today, its name is U.S. Ski and Snowboard.

Aksel Holter was a steady hand who helped the National Ski Association survive its infancy. Born in Oslo, he lived most of his life in Ashland, Wisconsin, and was a ski instructor for many years.

The top placers in the Men's American Birkebeiner took the winners' stand in 1981. From left: Tim Cadwell, Bjorn Arvnes, and Mark Ernst.

(Ski for Light) • Ski for Light events provide impaired skiers with escorts on the slopes. • A souvenir patch recalls the 1989 Ski for Light gathering in Bozeman, Montana. The 2022 event takes place January 30–February 6 in Granby, Colorado.

(Crossword) Crossover competitors take part in the Norwegian and American Birkie races. In 1982, Norwegian skier Gry Oftedal won the American women's race. Shaking hands are other top placers, Jennifer Caldwell and Jean Groothuysen.

(Left) The Birch Scroll, the newsletter of the American-Birkebeiner race at the Telemark Ski Area near Cable, Wisconsin, carried race-related news. This early edition, from 1975, told racers about opportunities to train for the “Birkie” and to improve their performance.
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