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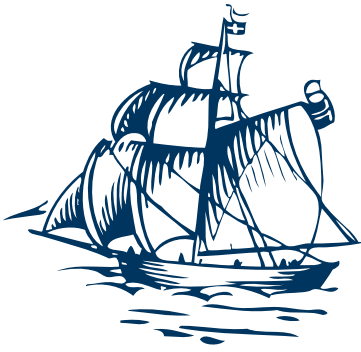
# Currents

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION | WINTER 2022 VOLUME 186

A vibrant, painterly illustration of a winter scene. In the center, a red and yellow building sits in a snowy valley. The surrounding mountains are covered in snow and dotted with evergreen trees. In the foreground, a horse-drawn sleigh is visible on a snowy path. The overall style is reminiscent of early 20th-century Norwegian folk art or Impressionism.

## Christmas Annuals

How julehefter spoke to  
and for an immigrant  
community



# GRATITUDE FOR SPECIAL DAYS AND EVERY DAY

## on the cover

This detail from the 1924 cover of the Nordmanns-forbundet Christmas annual shows the group fulfilling its promise to offer work by Norway's foremost artists—in this case, Thorolf Holmboe, a renowned painter, illustrator, and decorative artist for Porsgrund Porcelain.

As I write this, I think back to October with much gratitude. Gathering in person with NAHA members at our biennial meeting was a delight, especially because our 2020 meeting was virtual. This year, we celebrated the release of our newest publication, *Heart of the Heartland: Norwegian-American Community in the Twin Cities*, by David Mauk, co-published with the Minnesota Historical Society Press. Find more about the event on page four.

Just one week earlier, NAHA took part in hosting Her Majesty Queen Sonja of Norway. The purpose of the queen's visit was to mark the strong ties between Norway and the Norwegian-American community. We were honored to share our efforts to preserve and interpret the history of that community.

A program in the Rølvaag Library at St. Olaf College highlighted research that students are doing with our archives, as well as our most recent preservation efforts. Students read from immigrant letters and diaries, and they presented research posters to Queen Sonja and her travel companions, who included U.S. Ambassador Anniken Krutnes and Honorary Consul General Eivind Heiberg. An exhibit featured treasures from recently digitized collections: the O. E. Rølvaag Papers and the 1925 Norse-American Centennial Collection. (A shout-out here to the Legacy Grants program, funded by the citizens of Minnesota, for making this digitization possible.)

The program ended with a ribbon-cutting by Queen Sonja and St. Olaf College President David Anderson to celebrate the completion of our new climate-controlled vault. The opening of the new space marks a new chapter of collaboration in nearly a century of partnership between the college and our association. The program that day highlighted the fact that Rølvaag Library Special Collections, the St. Olaf College Archives, and NAHA share common Norwegian roots.

Immigrants who founded St. Olaf in 1874 had the vision and foresight to gather and preserve a historical record of their community. In 1925, in the wake of the Norse-American Centennial, they created NAHA, and in its first four decades, our association served as a repository for both the college and the larger Norwegian-American community. In 1969, the college created its own archive to preserve the unique history of St. Olaf. And the Rølvaag Library's Special Collections are now home to a distinctive set of Norwegian-American books and periodicals. The new vault will preserve these and other priceless collections.

In this season of gratitude, I'm thankful for the improvements in preservation that our new vault provides as we approach our next century of collecting. I'm also grateful for the many relationships that sustain NAHA—relationships with royal visitors, with the colleagues we work with every day at St. Olaf College, and with all of you who partner with us in our mission and make our work possible.

In appreciation and with best wishes for the year ahead,

Amy Boxrud, Executive Director



Her Majesty Queen Sonja and Amy Boxrud tour exhibits in the Rølvaag Library.



## in brief

### DIEDRICH IS LOVOLL AWARD WINNER

**T**he association is pleased to name Mathea Diedrich of Luther College as its second recipient of the Odd S. Lovoll Award in Norwegian-American Studies. Her winning essay is “Change in Norwegian-American Identity Expression, as Seen Through the Headstones at Washington Prairie Lutheran Church, 1864-1969.”

“I found it interesting that trends in name choices—either more typically American or more typically Norwegian—did not necessarily follow the shift in people’s language use,” Diedrich says.

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 2001 and mentored scores of scholars in immigration studies.

Diedrich, of Deforest, Wisconsin, graduates in 2023 with a B.A. in Nordic studies and allied health sciences. She receives \$500 and a year’s membership in NAHA.

“The committee was thrilled with the strong applications this year,” says NAHA Editor Anna Peterson. “Mathea’s paper won because of her creative use of gravestones as primary source material. I look forward to sharing her research in the 2023 issue of *Norwegian-American Studies*.”



**The next entry deadline is June 1, 2023.** Details at [naha.stolaf.edu](http://naha.stolaf.edu).



### IN MEMORIAM: MARY HOVE

Dr. Mary Hove, 99, of Northfield, Minnesota, died October 1, 2022. Hove provided editorial assistance to NAHA Editor Odd Lovoll from 1978 until he retired in 2001. She later worked as an indexer.

Born in Lexington, Kentucky, she entered the University of Kentucky at 16. While earning her bachelor’s degree, she worked as a translator for the U.S. Office of Censorship from 1942 to 1945. She earned an M.A. at Smith College and a doctorate in English literature at Johns Hopkins University.

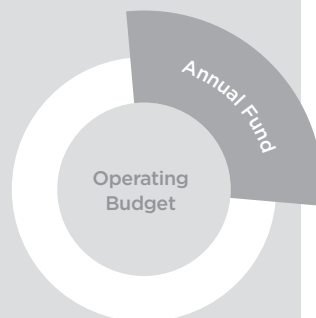
Hove taught college English at Hood, Mount Holyoke, and Agnes Scott. While teaching, she also constructed and graded advanced placement English exams for the Educational Testing Service in New Jersey. She moved to Northfield when her husband, Haldor Hove, was a professor of English at St. Olaf College.

Her final editorial project for NAHA was *America-America Letters* (2001). In the foreword, Odd Lovoll writes, “This volume will conclude a productive partnership of nearly 22 years. Words cannot adequately express my gratitude to Mary Hove for her professionalism, dedication, and friendship as my treasured co-worker in the editorial enterprise. I am deeply thankful to her.”

### YOUR GIFT MATTERS

When you make a gift to the NAHA Annual Fund, you help us in our mission — to inspire discovery, scholarship, and stewardship of the Norwegian-American experience. From hosting events for members and the public to preserving our collections and improving access to them, our work is made possible by your generous support.

Contributions to the annual fund make up more than a quarter of our operating budget each year. Help us meet our financial goals for 2022. Please use the envelope provided or consider giving online at [naha.stolaf.edu](http://naha.stolaf.edu). Thank you!



## in brief

### HISTORY OF TWIN CITIES NORWEGIAN-AMERICANS IS THE THEME AT THE BIENNIAL MEETING

**N**early 100 members gathered for the association's 2022 biennial member meeting, held October 22 at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota. The event included a keynote presentation from David Mauk, professor emeritus of American studies at the University of Oslo, on "Voyages of Discovery in the Norwegian-American History of the Twin Cities." Mauk also signed copies of his new book, *The Heart of the Heartland: Norwegian-American Community in the Twin Cities*, co-published by NAHA and the Minnesota Historical Society Press.

Other presenters that day were:

- Daron Olson, NAHA board member and associate professor of history at Indiana University East, who spoke about the experiences of Norwegian Americans of the Twin

Cities in World War II.

- Anna Peterson, editor of the NAHA journal *Norwegian-American Studies* and associate professor of history at Luther College, who gave a history of the Scandinavian Woman Suffrage Association in the Twin Cities.

- Mona Holm, curator of Norway's Women's Museum and a Ph.D. fellow at the University of Oslo, who presented on the 1882 visit to Minneapolis by Norwegian suffragist pioneer Aasta Hansteen.



David Mauk signed books after his keynote presentation (above). NAHA thanked term-limited board members Kim Kittilsby, Daron Olson, and Ron Johnson for their service (right).

Michael Lansing, professor of history at Augsburg University, was moderator for the day's discussions.

Over a noon luncheon, the association held its biennial business meeting, including updates from the staff and board, and members of the association's Legacy and Leadership Circles. New board members were elected. The association also thanked board members Marit Barkve, Ronald Johnson, Kim Kittilsby, and Daron Olson, who have completed their service as directors.

## BOARD AND OFFICER ELECTION RESULTS

NAHA welcomes the following new board members, who were each elected to a four-year term at the biennial meeting.

### JOHN NILSON,

of Regina, Saskatchewan, served in the provincial legislature from 1995 to 2016. He has a B.A. in history and Norwegian from Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, Washington, and spent a year at the University of Oslo (playing on the Norwegian national basketball team while there). He earned a law degree from the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. He served as a NAHA director, 2010-2018.



### ANNA RUE,

Madison, Wisconsin, is associate director of the Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She has an M.A. in American studies from the University of Massachusetts-Boston and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Scandinavian studies and folklore from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She works on the collaborative project Sustaining Scandinavian Folk Arts in the Upper Midwest.



### DAN RILEY,

Bloomington, Minnesota, is a retired finance and real estate executive who worked for Target Corporation. He has an M.B.A. from Harvard Business School and an undergraduate degree in history from Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota. He chairs the finance committee for the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, a nonprofit that digitizes, catalogs, and shares ancient manuscripts.



### JEFF KINDESETH,

Minneapolis, Minnesota, is retired from the Mayo Clinic. He has a B.A. in history from St. Olaf College, and an M.A. in management from Winona State University in Minnesota. He studied at the 1981 Oslo International Summer School and did a six-month management internship in Bergen. Jeff was chair of the Kenyon Area Historic Preservation Commission. He has served on the NAHA Finance Committee.



## Executive Committee

In a virtual session held in November, the NAHA board of directors elected the following officers for the 2022-24 biennium.



### President:

Scott Knudson,  
St. Paul, Minnesota

### Vice President:

Kristen Walseth,  
Bloomington, Minnesota

### Secretary:

Scott Richardson,  
Northfield, Minnesota

### Treasurer:

Kyle Jansson,  
Monmouth, Oregon

### Representative at Large:

Deborah Miller,  
St. Paul, Minnesota

Several NAHA directors were re-elected to a second term at the biennial meeting. They are:

**Kristin Anderson,**  
St. Paul, Minnesota

**Gracia Grindal,**  
St. Paul, Minnesota

**Kyle Jansson,**  
Monmouth, Oregon

**Paul Rolvaag,**  
St. Paul, Minnesota

**Ingrid Urberg,**  
Camrose, Alberta,  
Canada

For a full list of board members, see page 12.

## CONFIRMATION REGULATIONS AND RECORDS

BY DALE HOVLAND

Confirmation was made mandatory by King Christian VI of Denmark-Norway in 1736. The church back then was an arm of the state.

The following year, to fill the need for instructional material, theologian Erik Pontoppidan wrote *Sandhed til gudfrygtighed*, Truth unto Godliness, an explanation of Martin Luther's catechism. The book includes 759 questions and answers for use in training confirmands. It was required reading for young people in Norway's churches for 150 years.

Demands on those preparing for confirmation were high. They had to memorize large portions of Pontoppidan's work. When they stood in church for examination by the pastor, it was not uncommon to fail. An early confirmation record in the church books for Askøy, Norway, dated April 21, 1743, lists 23 confirmation candidates. Only 14 were successful. Some who did not succeed had insufficient reading skills, according to the record. Those who failed were expected to try again.

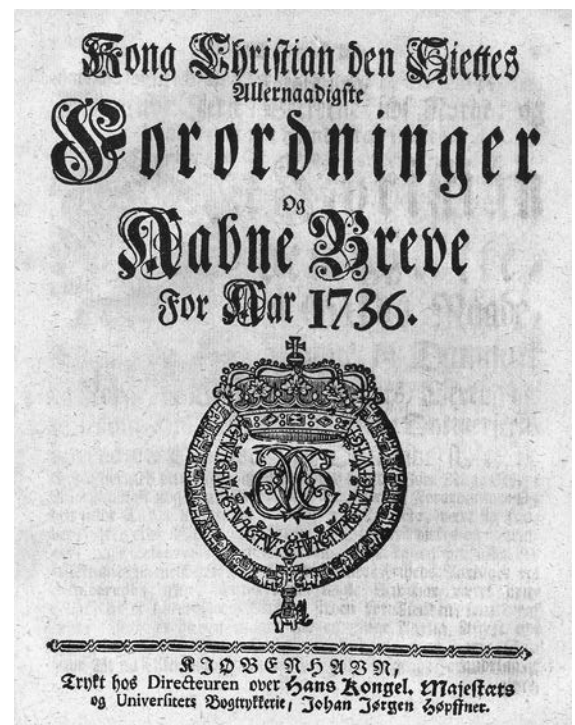
A person who wasn't confirmed was barred from aspects of adult life. They could not be a witness in a trial, fulfill their military service requirement, marry, or be a baptismal sponsor for a child, wrote historian Torgeir Landro, associate professor at the NLA High School in Bergen, Norway, in his short article "Confirmation in the Old Days." Most people were confirmed around age 14. Those who turned 19 and still were not confirmed could be pilloried or put in prison.

The Storting, Norway's Parliament, ended mandatory confirmation in August 1911, but many people continued to be confirmed. Records from before and after that year are available to family histo-

rians in the digitized National Archives of Norway at [digitalarkivet.no/en](https://digitalarkivet.no/en).

Confirmations were recorded in church books, typically one kept by the pastor and a duplicate book that was kept by the *klokker*, the sexton or pastor's assistant. Some church books have been indexed and can be searched using a person's name. Often, the books are not searchable and must be browsed. To know which church books to browse requires knowing or guessing at the parish an ancestor lived in and calculating what year it was when they turned 14.

A confirmation record can lead to many other records with the details it contains, among them the person's birth date, birthplace, smallpox vaccination date and location, and parents' names. Among the confirmation entries on September 30, 1860, at Nykirken (the New Church) in Bergen, Norway, is one for a boy named Edvard Grieg, destined to become Norway's most famous composer. Along with the usual details, the record shows he had "very good" knowledge of Christianity, and even indicates his family's home address in Bergen.



"King Christian VI's most gracious ordinances" of 1736 made confirmation mandatory, and spelled out the duties of parents, pastors, and others.





# “NORWAY IN THEIR LIVING ROOMS”

JULEHEFTER AND THEIR MIGRATION TO AMERICA BY DENISE LOGELAND

Christmas was on the horizon when the October 5, 1922, *Minneapolis Tidende* (Minneapolis Times) reported on a new holiday offering: “The Norseman’s Federation will, for the first time, publish a Christmas annual this year,” the newspaper said (in Norwegian that has been translated here).

Nordmanns-forbundet, the Norseman’s Federation, had received “appeals from every corner of the world to have a Christmas annual where the Norwegian emigrants could find themselves and theirs,” the article said, quoting a statement from the federation’s Oslo headquarters.

“Norwegian nature and folk life, art and culture, the Norwegian emigrants and their new homes ... will be presented in articles, stories, sketches, and illustrations.” Readers were promised an impressively large format, beautiful design, and writings by prominent authors. The annual would be on sale at Norwegian bookstores in New York, Chicago, and Minneapolis, from the federation’s own representatives, and at Sons of Norway lodges.

“Our best authors and artists have given us their enthusiastic support in a deeply felt wish to produce a Christmas annual that meets our expatriate countrymen’s need to have Norway in their living rooms at Christmastime ....”

Publishing a volume of literature and art to celebrate Christmas was new for Nordmanns-forbundet in 1922, but they were relatively late to the party. In December that same year, *St. Paul Tidende* carried an ad from the C. Rasmussen Company, a Danish-American publisher

and distributor, selling a whole list of *julehefter*, or Christmas annuals. Some were imported from Denmark. Then there was *Julegranen* (the Christmas Spruce), published in the U.S. primarily for a Danish-American audience. But the ad also offered *Jul i Vesterheimen* (Christmas in the Western Home), a Norwegian-American annual that Augsburg Publishing in Minneapolis had begun to produce already in 1911.

In fact, by 1922, Norwegians at home and abroad had been finding themselves and their Christmas customs in the pages of *julehefter* for quite a few years.

## A Tradition in Transit

Seasonal volumes of Christmas literature were published in Norway as far back as 1817, but the earliest were one-offs, not a series of annual editions, according to the *Store Norske Leksikon*, an online encyclopedia published by Norway's universities. The first such book was called *Julegave, eller en liden Samling af udvalgte Selskabs- og Drikkeviser, af norske forfattere* (Christmas Gift, or a Small Collection of Selected Ballads for Gathering and Drinking, by Norwegian authors).

The first Christmas publication to come out annually in Scandinavia was *Juleroser* (the Danish name for the flower the helleborus.) Publisher Ernst Bojesen launched *Juleroser* in 1881 in Copenhagen, but he appealed to readers in other Nordic countries, too, by including writings from Norway and elsewhere. *Juleroser* was sometimes subtitled a "Scandinavian Christmas magazine" or "Nordic Christmas magazine."

Bojesen modeled his annual on forerunners elsewhere in Europe, especially a French annual, *Paris-Murcie*, begun in 1879. Special Christmas publications grew rapidly in popularity in Europe in the late 19th century, a time of mass migration to North America. It's not surprising, then, that Scandinavian immigrants in America were familiar with annuals from back home. They imported, purchased, and wrote about them, and ultimately mimicked them by creating their own Scandinavian-American julehefter.

Consider that the *Fergus Falls Ugeblad* (Fergus Falls Weekly) had a readership of Norwegian-speaking prairie-dwellers in northwestern Minnesota. Nonetheless, in December 1892, the editor deemed it worth reporting that in Copenhagen, *Juleroser* had a new competitor, an annual called *Jule-album* (modeled on another French title, *Figaro Illustré*). Similarly, in December 1898, the Norwegian-language *Decorah-Posten* in Iowa commended to its readers a

Christmas annual titled simply *Jul*, from publisher John Fredrikson back in Norway.

There are countless examples like those, of annuals from Scandinavia being promoted to an immigrant audience in the U.S. But exports went in both directions. Another item from *Decorah-Posten* in the winter of 1898, about the Danish-American annual *Julegranen*, reveals that fact—and a bit of competitive feeling:

*"The Danish Americans have put the Norwegian Americans to absolute shame. They have now, for the past two years, published a beautifully illustrated Christmas annual, which has even won broad distribution back home in Denmark. But the one they have produced this year puts the other two in its shadow. This latest one can, in every regard, match the magnificent Christmas annuals from the Old Country."*

Small items about julehefter in the Scandinavian-American press underscore a few things. First, some annuals had a cross-Atlantic audience, and in both Europe and the U.S. that audience might cross ethnic lines and be pan-Scandinavian. Second, julehefter were part of a larger custom of giving reading material at Christmastime; they often appear in ads or articles about newly published works—fiction, poetry, devotional writings, almanacs—for gift-giving. And third, julehefter held a special place aesthetically among the volumes that people might give as gifts. Wherever julehefter are described, the emphasis is on their colorful covers, beautiful illustrations, renowned authors—even advanced

printing methods. The article from Fergus Falls notes that illustrations in *Jule-album* were produced using photogravure and chromotypogravure processes.

## Jul i Vesterheimen

More fragments of the Christmas annual tradition survive in the NAHA archives. Collections from several people include stories they wrote for *Jul i Vesterheimen*, among them Emma Quie Bonhus, John Midtlien, and Ole Rølvaag. Rølvaag's papers include copies of *Julen* (Christmas), another annual he wrote for. It was published in Oslo by Riksmålsforbundet, which advocated for the *riksmål* variant of Norwegian.

By the early 1900s, julehefter were produced not only by publishing companies but by groups as diverse as labor organizations, youth clubs, homemakers'



(Top) Frameable reproductions of paintings by Herbjørn Gausta were inserted in several early editions of *Jul i Vesterheimen*. The 1917 issue included this print, *The Table Prayer*. (Bottom) Richly illustrated pages and high-quality printing were hallmarks of *Jul i Vesterheimen*.



associations, religious groups, and the Norwegian-American immigrant societies called *bygdslag*.

In this glut of offerings, Augsburg Publishing managed to make *Jul i Vesterheim* stand out as a premier Christmas annual among Norwegian Americans. Augsburg, the publishing house of the United Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, also aspired to be known as a literary publisher, wrote Kristin Risley in her 2003 article "Christmas in Our Western Home: the Cultural Work

of a Norwegian-American Christmas Annual" (*American Periodicals*). Augsburg recruited great authors for its annual and used sophisticated design and printing methods that earned admiration, even in the printing industry.

Risley quotes a 1920s excerpt from the trade magazine *Inland Printer*. It praises the profuse illustrations in *Jul i Vesterheimen*, including "four process plates in four colors, reproduced from original paintings." Those were art prints that were inserted into the annual, reproduced from paintings by the likes of Herbjørn Gausta and Nels Hagerup. Augsburg printed them in full color and mounted them on heavy paper stock that could serve as matting, so a reader could easily frame the art and hang it on a wall at home.



## IT WAS CHRISTMAS AFTER ALL

### ERIK HETLE (1873-1962)

wrote this story, "Det ble jul lell," for the 1951 edition of *Jul i Vesterheimen*. His character Kari expresses the loss felt by a generation of immigrants as their children adopted a new culture. Hetle himself was an immigrant and a close friend of Ole Rølvaag when they studied at St. Olaf College. Hetle had a long career as a professor of physics there.

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Translated from Norwegian by Denise Logeland.

The little town out on the prairie was taken by the Christmas spirit. Christmas was in the air. An increasingly feverish busyness. On the sidewalks, streams of people flowed back and forth in a continual rush. Out of and into the stores. It was nearly impossible to move, no matter where one turned. But move forward they must, stream against stream, those with their arms full of packages against the steadily growing flock who pushed against them in order to come in and get theirs while there was still a selection.

And the traffic stretched itself out even onto the country roads. Luxury

cars and old jalopies chugged along, here and there, from and to the farms as the day wore on.

Within the rooms there was the same busy eagerness. Here, for the most part, it was mother, at work in the kitchen. She ruled with inescapable authority in these days, which was met with a bemused and obedient helpfulness by every member of the household. There was whisking and whispering. The children, father and mother, sister and brother, each one would surprise and be surprised with something really extra special and at just the right moment. In the meantime, one should not look here and not look there. It was all so tinglingly mysterious for the little ones that it was almost more than they could stand. For the grownups, too, good will and a smile came easily, for no matter how it appeared to be out in the world now, with war and ominous rumors, their thoughts went to traditions, memories, and the message of Christmas as the very best things they had ever experienced. That's why the Christmas spirit had taken most of them.

But for Kari Tomten it wasn't like that; for her it was heavy and mournful. For her, the strains of the past year had been hard. In the early summer, she had lost her husband through a sudden illness, and now in the late fall, her boy had been called into military service. It was lonely for Kari. She didn't usually lose her pluck so easily, but now she couldn't take much more. Memories didn't help much, they only made the loss feel greater. Before, they had always had it so nice, with Christmas the way they were used to it from back home. But now she sat with nothing but her memories of it.

Her worries about Arne had also grown in these last few days, because she hadn't heard from him in a while.

She had prayed so fervently to God that her boy would be with her for Christmas, but the days passed and she heard nothing. She couldn't understand it. He had written so regularly and with such liveliness about life at camp, but lately the letters had been more rare and more hurried. She had not read or heard anything about his unit being deployed, but something must have happened. She found no peace within. There had to be a letter today. He must know that she was worried. She went constantly to the window and looked for the mail carrier. Yes, there he came, and thank God, he came toward the house. She met him on the steps, reached hastily for the letter and came back inside. Now she would finally have word. Her heart pounded and her hands shook, as she feverishly ripped open the envelope.

As she read, her face went from hope to confusion to disappointment. She didn't even manage to read to the end, just sat and stared without comprehension at one sentence. She couldn't even believe her own eyes, but the words really were there on the page. Her boy had gotten married.



*Jul i Vesterheimen* stood out for its writing as well. As Kathleen Stokker wrote in *Keeping Christmas, Yuletide Traditions in Norway and the New Land*, only a couple of periodicals in the United States provided a venue for contemporary Norwegian-language fiction at that time, and *Jul i Vesterheimen* was one of them. Editor Andreas Sundheim “commissioned some of the most insightful Norwegian-American writers of his day—including Waldemar Ager, O. E. Rølvaag, Simon Johnson,

Dorothea Dahl, and George Strandvold.” Their stories gave voice to the Norwegian immigrant community as it moved through stages of arrival and aspiration in a new place, acceptance and assimilation into American society, and eventually dissolution, as later generations fell away from Norwegian language and traditions.

The stories in Augsburg’s annual were “not necessarily great literature,” Stokker wrote. But “*Jul i Vesterheimen*’s fiction remains valuable for accurately reflecting significant aspects of the Norwegian Americans’ changing moods and perceptions during the first half of the 20th century.”

Christmas annuals have faded as a tradition in the United States. *Jul i Vesterheimen*, which began with articles in both Norwegian and English, became a

Norwegian-only publication in 1931, when Augsburg launched an English-only annual called *Christmas*. But after 1957, *Jul i Vesterheimen* ceased publication. The last edition of *Christmas* came out in 1993.

In Norway, the julehefte tradition continues, but in a different way. There are still literary, religious, and other Christmas annuals. But by far the most common style of julehefte in Norway today is one that emerged in the 1910s: the comic book.

She was completely at a loss. She barely understood what she had read. She finally pieced together that a Gretchen, who had suddenly become her daughter-in-law, was going to come to visit for several days. She would come on Christmas Eve. He himself could not come, unfortunately. No one had leave for Christmas, because they could be deployed any time now. He imagined she was probably surprised and thought it was all too hasty, but she knew how things were these days, and Gretchen would explain it all better than he could in writing. “It was just that Gretchen wanted so much to meet you, Mother. And we knew that it would be sad for you to be alone at Christmas. I’m just so sure that you’ll like her.”

Yes, that’s what it said. The letter was somewhat meandering and disjointed. He repeated several times that Gretchen would explain things better, and that Kari was sure to like her. As an afterthought, something he had almost forgotten, he wrote in the margin: “She is not Norwegian.”

She stared ahead, deflated and lost. What had her boy gotten involved in? First her husband and now her son. What more was there? It didn’t matter anymore what happened.

Ja, what could she do now? The Christmas preparations were all made with Arne in mind, in case he came

home. Everything was done in the traditional way, just like they’d always had it. But now she would have a stranger in the house, and then it would certainly not be possible to have a Norwegian Christmas. She was at a loss for what to do. That her boy could do such a thing, to go outside! So this was the “melting pot” she had heard so much about. And her own son was the one who was suddenly going to pull her into it. And he was sure she would come to like it! Oh, ja, it’s easy for the young ones.

Kari felt dread, for Christmas but especially for the first encounter. It could be truly embarrassing. To go to the station and receive this stranger, where friends and neighbors might make it necessary to explain how things were, no, that she could not stand. Her daughter-in-law would have to find her way there the best she could. Then they could try to get acquainted, just the two of them alone.

It was the the afternoon of Christmas Eve. Kari had walked around in a daze since the letter came, but she had managed to do a few things. There were signs of Christmas in the living room. The tree stood there with its usual glittering ornaments and the star on top. But there was no joy in it. Not like before. Not like all the years from Arne’s childhood and right up until last year. It brought tears, the thought that now she would no longer be able to fix things for Arne, not at Christmas and not other times, either.

As the time for the train approached, she went more and more often to the window. At last she stayed there. She was relieved every time young women walked by without looking toward the house; it gave her one more reprieve. But finally one came who there was no mistaking. She carried a suitcase and looked for the house numbers. Kari drew herself back from the window. She didn’t usually go to the door until the bell had rung.

Kari had felt such dread for those first moments, but it went so strangely well: their actions moved them along

and before they could think about it they stood in the living room and smiled at each other through tears. And so the worst was over.

As soon as they had settled in, Gretchen hurried to explain everything. It was that they were so fond of each other and that Arne could be shipped out at any time. And so, yes, then they had gotten married! “You know how it is,” she added. Kari had to admit that she did, for she had her memories, too.

It was late in the evening before they thought about getting some rest. There was plenty to talk about. Arne was a favorite topic for both of them, so everything reminded them of him. In that way, Gretchen got to know about him, all the way from the cradle to the camp, and it wasn’t dull for a moment. And then there were Christmas arrangements and customs. Gretchen showed such an understanding and liked everything so well that she completely won Kari’s heart. She would surely show her daughter-in-law to the neighbor women. She would hold a party for her, that she would. They could say what they would about the melting pot. It was certainly not as dangerous as they thought it was. And when Gretchen suggested that they read the Christmas Gospel before they went to bed, Kari was taken by the Christmas spirit.

# DISCOVERING AN ARTIST— AND FAMILY MEMBER— IN THE NAHA COLLECTIONS

BY KRISTINA WARNER,  
ARCHIVIST

One day in the NAHA archives, flipping through a book on Norwegian-American painters, I landed on a page about Axel Eugene Schar, a name I knew well. Throughout my life, paintings by Schar decorated our walls at home. Schar had married into my family a couple generations earlier, but I knew little about him. While digitizing the 1925 Norse-American Centennial papers, I came across more information about Schar and have learned about this man I never met. Archives are about discovery, and it's special when it's a story close to your own family.

Axel Eugene "Gene" Schar was born in Oslo on April 12, 1888, to Ole Larsen Skar and Marie Aase Pedersdatter. One of 12 siblings, he immigrated to the United States in 1905, at the age of 17. He first settled in Ada, Minnesota, and lived with his brothers, Walfred and Peter Schar, according to the 1905 Minnesota Census. He worked for two newspapers, an English-language paper in Ada and a Norwegian-language paper in nearby Crookston. These were most likely the *Norman County Herald* and *Vesterheimen*.

Another early job in Minnesota was at a mission in Duluth, where he met his first wife, Blenda. Schar wrote in his memoir, "I felt very

sorry for her and the family. We worked together for a while, and I thought we should get married so I could help her with her burden." Over the next 18 years, they had seven children. In Duluth, Schar ran a photography shop and worked at the *Duluth Herald*.

While on an assignment for the paper, he met and befriended President Calvin Coolidge. The Coolidge family vacationed on the Brule River in northwestern Wisconsin in the summer of 1928. According to a 2016 article about Schar in the *Worthington Daily Globe*, a newspaper in southwestern Minnesota, where Schar spent his later years, he fished with the president and went with Grace Coolidge to watch the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus.

By then, he had embarked on his work as an artist. In 1924, he participated in the Scandinavian Arts Exhibition at the Odin Club of Minneapolis with two works, *April Day* and *Breaking Water*. In 1925 at the Norse-American Centennial, he exhibited *Norway Pines*. He showed his work regularly at the State Fair from 1926 to 1950. In 1931, he took part in the Arrowhead Art Exhibition at the Duluth Art Institute, which he helped to revive. During his time in Duluth, marine subjects dominated his work.

According to *Who's Who in Art*, Schar studied in Minneapolis with Frits Thaulow, a Norwegian

impressionist painter known for his landscapes. Schar's obituary says he earned an art degree from a college in New York.

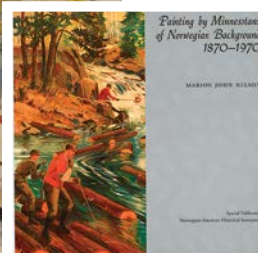
His family disintegrated when his oldest son was killed in World War II. Blenda took their youngest daughter and moved to California. Schar wrote in his memoir, "We had long ago drifted apart, and I really had no right to object to her leaving." His friend and fellow artist, Arne Karhu, persuaded him to move to Worthington, Minnesota, in 1943.

Schar offered art classes as a way to get acquainted in his new community, and it was in a class that he met his future wife, Naomi Moles, the local children's librarian. In 1948, they married, and true to their passion, they built an art studio onto their house. Five years before his death in 1984, Gene Schar helped found the Nobles County Art Center.

## MORE TO EXPLORE

- ➔ *Painting by Minnesotans of Norwegian Background, 1870-1970*, Marion John Nelson, published by NAHA, 2000
- ➔ *A memory sketch of Axel Eugene Larsen (Skar)*, A. E. Schar and Naomi Schar, published by the *Worthington Daily Globe*, 1984 (Note: This book is not widely available, but can be accessed at the Minnesota History Center library in St. Paul)
- ➔ "Norwegian-American Artists' Exhibitions Described in Checklists and Catalogs," Rolf Erikson, *Norwegian-American Studies*, volume 31, 1986





Schar got this exhibit receipt for the oil painting *Norway Pines*.

NORSE-AMERICAN CENTENNIAL  
ART EXHIBIT 1925  
JUNE 6-7-8-9, 1925

ENTRY BLANK NO. 324  
Please fill out one card for each object.

Artist A. Eugene Schar  
Address 2629 W. Superior St. Duluth  
Title Norway Pines  
Class Oil painting

Price \$150.00  
Do you object to publication of price? No

Action of jury \_\_\_\_\_  
Received \_\_\_\_\_  
Condition when received \_\_\_\_\_  
Returned \_\_\_\_\_  
Received above object in good condition \_\_\_\_\_

To be signed when object is returned.

NORSE-AMERICAN CENTENNIAL  
ART EXHIBIT 1925  
EXHIBITOR'S RECEIPT NO. 324

Received from A. Eugene Schar  
Subject to conditions of exhibition.  
Object Oil painting  
Title Norway Pines  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

NORSE-AMERICAN CENTENNIAL  
By \_\_\_\_\_  
This receipt will be cancelled by exhibitor or authorized agent signing receipt on entry blank upon return of work.

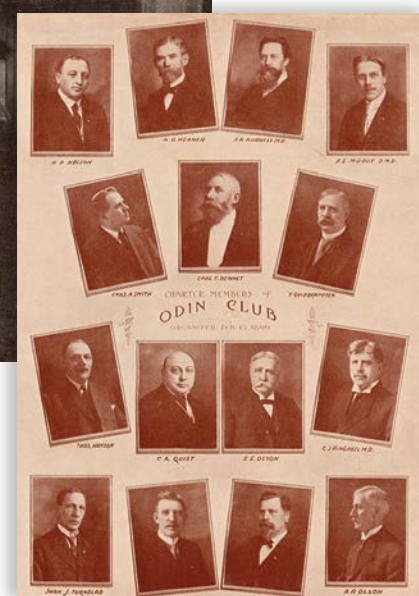


(Above, left to right) A group looks on as Gene Schar paints in 1949. // This watercolor painting was gifted to a relative of Naomi Schar at Christmas in 1967. // The cover of *Painting by Minnesotans of Norwegian Background* features Schar's work titled *Logging Drive on River*. This painting is one of four panels on the "Industries of Duluth."

(Above) The Odin Club Art Exhibit pamphlet from 1924. Schar had two works on display during this exhibit called *April Day* and *Breaking Water*.



The lounge of the Odin Club in 1917, in the Metropolitan Bank in Minneapolis.



Founders of the Odin Club of Minneapolis included Swan Turnblad, editor and publisher of the Swedish-language newspaper *Svenska Amerikanska Posten*.

## WHAT WAS THE ODIN CLUB?

A social club for Scandinavian business and professional men, the Odin Club was founded in Minneapolis on February 15, 1899. Its first quarters were on Hennepin Avenue and South Seventh Street. In 1917, a gala with hundreds of attendees marked the club's move to the top of the Metropolitan Bank Building on Second Avenue and Sixth Street South.



NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN  
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