

The Norwegian-American Historical Association

Northfield, Minnesota

NEWS LETTER



From the NAHA Office to the Association Members

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SPRING 2006

AUTHOR of *THE CHILDREN'S BLIZZARD* SPEAKS ON MAY 9th

Seattle author David Laskin used the NAHA archives in his research of the deadly blizzard of 1888. **Laskin will speak about his book at 3:00 p.m. on May 9th in the Viking Theater of Buntrock Commons on St. Olaf College.**

The author illustrates how portions of the Dakotas, Nebraska and Minnesota had been heavily promoted as the land of "hope, freedom and land" to poor German and Scandinavian immigrants. Laskin introduces you to the Norwegian immigrant family of Ole and Gro Rollag. The Rollags left the Telemark area of Norway in 1873 and, after a brief stay in Decorah, Iowa settled in Rock County Minnesota, between Worthington and Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The severity of the prairie winters and the blizzard of January 1888 was unlike anything they had ever encountered even though they had been in America for over a decade. Laskin also interviewed NAHA member Brynhild Rowberg, whose father Andrew started NAHA's popular and much used Rowberg Collection. NAHA spans the generations!

If you grew up hearing stories about the winter blizzards your ancestors experienced before accurate weather forecasts were available, you will want to hear the author describe his research and the incredible dilemma faced by parents, children, and young school teachers in surviving this cruel and devastating storm. The event is free and open to the public. Bring a friend! May 9th, at 3:00 p.m.

REMEMBERING A NAHA LEADER

You are invited to join the faculty and staff of the St. Olaf College Norwegian Department in honoring our dear friend, colleague, and long-time

NAHA Secretary, Dr. Lloyd Hustvedt. Although Lloyd died in February, 2004, he has not been forgotten.

A tree planting ceremony will take place on **Saturday, May 27, 2006 at 1:00 p.m.** Please meet us at the front steps of Old Main. From there we will take a short walk to the planting location.

Old Main is the building in which Lloyd taught Norwegian language and literature classes for so many years and is the oldest building on the campus. The wooded area surrounding Old Main is a fitting location for a tree in honor of Lloyd's dedication to preserving Norwegian-American history and teaching the Norwegian language. We hope you can gather with us to remember Lloyd in this thoughtful way. We expect Lloyd's tree will help shelter Old Main for many years to come.

"SNOW BIRD" RETURN OPPORTUNITY

Many of you head to warmer locations for the winter months, and the NAHA newsletter was not forwarded to your alternate location. The winter newsletter contained a special offer for both you and NAHA if you are interested in the Norwegian-Americans who served in the Civil War. A reprint of the out-of-print 1936 NAHA publication *The Civil War Letters of Colonel H.C. Heg* is available to you with a \$50 tax-deductible donation to NAHA.

This giving opportunity is brought to you courtesy of Hans Christian Heg's great-grandson James Heg. Heg received permission from NAHA to reprint the book for his family's use and has donated 200 copies to NAHA for use as an incentive to support the Association which published the original book and whose archives contain so many wonderful resources about Norwegian immigrant life in America. NAHA will pay the postage fees when you make your donation of \$50 or more.

Simply mention the Colonel Heg book and send us your name and address along with your check and we will send you the book about Wisconsin's Civil War hero. This is the second offering of this fundraising challenge and the supply of books is dwindling. Do not wait too long!

DONATING A WRITTEN LEGACY

Recently NAHA received a gift of letters from Mary Ellen Hitchens Steele in Colorado. Mary Ellen donated these letters from her ancestors and their friends in fond memory of her mother, Jeannette N. Hitchens, who was the caretaker of this legacy for many years. Family members today no longer read Norwegian but shared a sense that the correspondence could shed light on the life of this immigrant family from Norway. Beginning in 1881, the letters include some correspondence to Norway and letters from Norway to St. Ansgar, Iowa and Evansville, Wisconsin.

The first letter back to Norway tells how much money the author made working first in Illinois and then in Wisconsin. The author also tells how different the work in "Wisconsin" is from the work they would do together in Norway. He also describes how "unbelievably hot it is here in the summer." The letters to America tell of who will be leaving the community in Norway to take their families to America. Later letters from St. Ansgar to Norway tell of those "who move to Dakota, but many return."

Do you have letters or diaries from immigrant relatives written in Norwegian or English that deserve a larger audience than just your immediate family? Consider a donation like Mary Ellen Hitchens Steele's, in honor of a family member who valued the written word and kept the letters safe from one generation to the next. Maybe now is the time to donate your letters to NAHA so scholars and other historians might read them for insights into immigrant life.

Remember NAHA when you are cleaning out the desk of that dear aunt or great grandfather. Wouldn't they be pleased to know the letters or diaries are kept in a safe place and can be used to help others understand the Norwegian experience in America? Letters, diaries and photographs describing life from more recent Norwegian immigrants are also welcome!

AUTHOR SEEKS YOUR HELP

NAHA members helped David Laskin several years ago with their stories about Norwegian-American ancestors and the blizzard of 1888. Now Laskin is looking to NAHA members again to share stories about First World War stories. "I'm writing a book about the immigrant experience in The First World War, telling the stories of foreign-born men (or sons of immigrants) who fought in the US Army. I'm especially interested in hearing from people with letters, memoirs, and diaries written by soldiers and/or their families before and during the war."

As evidenced by *The Children's Blizzard* we know the fine job Laskin does in researching and telling a compelling story. Please contact David Laskin at (206)-546-8856 or d.laskin@verizon.net.

REMEMBER TO CHECK WWW.NAHA.STOLAF.EDU

We are continually striving to make the NAHA website more user-friendly and straight forward so that you know more about our holdings and the descriptions of the materials at NAHA. We thank NAHA Docent Dale Haaland from Byron, Minnesota who has worked with the St. Olaf College Information and Instructional Technologies Department to capture the Norwegian vowels that fall outside the regular English alphabet. Please check our three search engines at either the "Archives" directory or the "Online Resources" directory.

Leif is the online search engine for the NAHA manuscript collection and allows **keyword searching** of collections and groups of documents.

A published **guide to the archives** is available in the PDF format.

The **NAHA site index** searches volumes 1-33 of the Norwegian-American Studies that have been scanned in their entirety.

SUMMER VISITS TO NAHA

If you are planning a visit to the NAHA archives this summer we look forward to meeting you. **Please call us at 507-646-3221** or **email us at naha@stolaf.edu** to schedule an appointment. We are staffed by part-time employees and can better assist you when we

know you are coming and the general topic of your research. There is a modest \$5/day archives use fee for NAHA members and \$10/day fee non-members. During the summer months Mondays through Thursdays are the best days for your research.

MEET NAHA'S HEAD ARCHIVIST

While you know that Forrest Brown has retired as NAHA's archivist, we haven't yet introduced you to the team of Dr. Gary DeKrey and Jeff Sauve who are Archivist and Assistant Archivist for both NAHA and St. Olaf College. This newsletter will introduce you to Gary DeKrey and the upcoming newsletter will feature Jeff Sauve.

Gary's degrees include a B.A. from St. Olaf in 1971, and an M.A. from Princeton University in 1974 with fields in Early Modern English and European history and Eighteenth-century America. Gary was awarded his Ph.D., from Princeton University in 1978. Before returning to St. Olaf College, Gary was a History Professor at Colgate University. While these are the important academic things to know about Gary there are also fun things to know about NAHA's new Archivist. The following information is from the History Department website about the engaging side of this academic!

"De Krey grew up in the same small Midwestern community that produced Lawrence Welk. Like Welk, he loves music; but he doesn't polka. He did play baritone saxophone in the band at St. Olaf. After trying out math and English majors, he became a history major instead. Fortunately, as a boy, he had read Richard Halliburton's Complete Book of Marvels and knew what to expect.

When DeKrey arrived at Princeton for graduate school, he decided to study English history because the American historian he intended to work with had just skipped town. He also studied the Reformation and finally became a Lutheran. Somebody told him, when he was a student, about Samuel Johnson's comment that "when a man is tired of London he is tired of life." Dr. Johnson may have been wrong; but after writing a book and several articles about seventeenth-century London, De Krey hasn't figured out why. He is currently writing about London and the Restoration (1660-88). He married Catherine Doherty at Princeton; and, in 1985, he became the

father of Will. He enjoys biking, hiking, state parks, and exploring rural Minnesota and Wisconsin. Will is helping him improve his computer skills."

One of the first things Gary did after returning to Northfield was pick up a copy of O.E. Rolvaag's *Giants in the Earth*. Because one of his grandmother's was Swedish he balanced his reading with Vilhelm Moberg's *Emigrants*. Gary's parents now live in Valley City, North Dakota. Between Northfield and Valley City he has a good and now growing exposure to Norwegian American life. We invite you to meet Gary when you are at NAHA.

NICHOL AWARDED ROYAL NORWEGIAN ORDER of MERIT

Dr. Todd Nichol, King Olav V Professor of Scandinavian-American studies at St. Olaf, was awarded the rank of Officer of the Royal Norwegian Order of Merit on March 9, 2006. The award was conferred by Norwegian Ambassador to the United States Knut Vollebaek.

Nichol received the award in recognition of the education, research and other services he has performed for the good of Norwegian-American relations. Nichol is a grandson of Scandinavian immigrants who settled in Illinois shortly after World War I, and it was their story that first interested him in Scandinavian-American studies. The interest continued throughout his years at St. Olaf, and his subsequent study for the ministry at Luther Theological Seminary in St. Paul and his doctoral work at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, Calif. He recently edited a volume of essays, *Crossings: Norwegian-American Lutheranism as a Transatlantic Tradition*.

The Royal Norwegian Order of Merit was instituted by King Olav V in 1985 for conferment upon foreign nationals (among others) as a reward for outstanding service in the interests of Norway.

BRIDGE TO THE PAST IN CHICAGO

A retired engineer for the city of Chicago contacted NAHA for information about a man who was a legend among the older engineers when this gentleman first started his engineering position in the late 1950s. The fellow had heard that the King of

Norway had given the Norwegian born engineer some sort of award. The Norwegian-American engineer's name was Thomas George Pihlfeldt.

A trip to the Rowberg Collection was rewarding. Thomas Pihlfeldt was born at Vadsø, Norway in 1858 and received his technical education at the Polytechnicum in Dresden, Germany. In 1879 Pihlfeldt came to America and in 1901 became the head of Chicago's Bridge Building Department, a position he held until his death in 1941. One source credits Pihlfeldt with inventing the bascule bridge, however Pihlfeldt was quoted as saying, "The bascule bridge was not invented; it was developed."

At the turn of the century Chicago needed its traditional bridges to be faster and have lower maintenance costs. Forty-nine bascule bridges were built in Chicago under Pihlfeldt's direction. Pihlfeldt said his greatest achievement was the rebuilding of the Lake Street and Wells Street double-deck bridges with delay of only seventy-two hours in the "L" traffic! In 1928 he was given the challenging engineering task of straightening the South Branch of the Chicago River. Pihlfeldt directed the building of the

Michigan Avenue Bridge over the river which led to an expansion of the city's central business district to the North Side.

In 1932 King Haakon VII of Norway decorated Pihlfeldt with the Order of St. Olaf, recognizing him as the Dean of Norwegian Americans who have given notable public service in the land of their adoption. For more information about Norwegians and Chicago see 1988's *A Century of Urban Life, The Norwegians in Chicago before 1930*, by NAHA's former editor, Odd Lovoll.

**UNDAUNTED: A NORWEGIAN WOMAN
IN FRONTIER TEXAS**

The latest book on Elise Wærenskjold is now available at the St. Olaf Bookstore at (507)-646-3048 or 1- 888-232-6523, stolafinfo@collegebookstore.org. The cost of the book is \$29.95. The book may also be ordered from the publisher, Texas A & M University Press by calling 1-800-826-8911 or at the website www.tamu.edu/upress.

CONTRIBUTION FORM FOR CIVIL WAR LETTERS OF COLONEL H.C. HEG

Enclosed is my tax-deductible check or money order for \$ _____. For each \$50 I donate to NAHA I will receive a copy of *The Civil War Letters of Colonel H. C. Heg*. Postage is paid by NAHA:

Name: _____

Address: _____

___ Please send my copy of *The Civil War Letters of Colonel H. C. Heg* to:

Name: _____

Address: _____

ADDITIONS TO THE ARCHIVES

Received from Lloyd Svendsbye, *One Family's Story*. Soft-Cover, 208 pages. The story of Anders A. Svendsbye and Gudrun Birkelo. At the age of 22 Anders left Snarum, Norway, immigrated to the United States, and homesteaded in North Dakota. The family included 10 children. Includes information from many sources which placed the family and their North Dakota years in context of what was taking place politically and economically. The book follows up on the succeeding generations, the small congregations, schools, and communities that were important to the family. Includes photos from Norway and the farming prairie of North Dakota.

Received from Lorna Mandt Robertson, *The Mandt's of Upper Telemark*. Twelve pages. This piece updates and completes the Telemark segment of *Relatively Speaking: A Mandt Family Saga* by Paul H. Mandt. The addition delves into the first two generations of Mandts in Norway and follows the style of Olav L. Mandt and his son Kristoffer.

Records from the 1690s and later were used to assemble the information. Also includes colorful stories involving murder, escape, and buried treasure! True information about the silversmith and jewelry trade is added as well as the sources used by the author.

Received from the Norwegian Emigrant Museum and Abel Abrahamsen, *Jewish Life and Culture in Norway, Wergeland's Legacy*. Hard-cover, 112 pages. This book accompanied the exhibit curated by the Norwegian Folk Museum, Oslo, Norway. The exhibit was also shown at the Scandinavian House in New York City. Includes photos of the exhibit and remarks from prominent Norwegians. Henrik Wergeland, who was born in 1808, devoted his writings to concern for human rights and proposed to the Storting that the "Jewish clause" in Article 2 of the Constitution of 1814 be repealed because it prohibited Jews from entering the Kingdom of Norway. Six years after Wergeland's death in 1851, the Storting repealed that clause and Jews were then welcome in Norway.

