Using Secondary Resources to Tell your Family’s Story

By Jackie Henry, Director
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Many of us are in this situation:

- My family didn’t keep anything (or lost everything!)
- Other family members inherited the written documents and we don’t know where they are
- I have lots of photos but nothing is written on them or about them
- Our family left Norway so many generations ago, nothing much is now known about the earliest immigrants
Expand your story by going beyond the names, dates and locations
How do we answer the question, “Why did they leave?”

- Histories of immigrant groups (those who came from the same communities and/or settled in the same communities) can begin to answer the question.

- Norwegian-American Studies published by NAHA has histories from a number of regions.

http://www.naha.stolaf.edu/pubs/nastudies.htm
What was their journey like?

Amerika breve - collections of letters written from Norwegian-American immigrants to their families back in Norway

They sometimes include first person accounts of the journey from Norway to the United States and accounts of the first year(s) of adjusting to their new circumstances.

Collections of those letters include: “Land of Their Choice” [1955], “America-America Letters”[2001], “In Their Own Words” [1991], “Letters from America” [2012] as well as individual letters in the NAHA archives. Search by parish name or fylke.
Lag newsletters, magazines, yearbooks all contain information about early members and frequently include extensive obituaries of deceased members. Many are collected by NAHA and available to view in the St. Olaf College Library.
Anna Lovise Paulsen Hofstad
Obituary

Published in the September 1934 issue of Nord-Norge (Nordlandslaget)

The obituary describes how she was raised by her aunt after her father died when she was nine.

A translation of the obit was found on Ancestry.com
Three Sisters

Tollina (Lina) Iversdatter

Marie Iversdatter Hofstad

Johanna Iversdatter Pederson
County Histories

County histories frequently contain biographical sketches of early and/or prominent community members. Available in full searchable text through Google books, local libraries and historical societies. Many can be requested via interlibrary loan from the Library of Congress.
RUDOLF HOFSAD.

Rudolf Hofstad, a well-known and substantial farmer of Storden township, Cottonwood county, proprietor of a fine farm of two hundred and forty acres in the vicinity of Storden, and for many years actively identified with the work of developing the community in which he lives, is a native of Norway, born in Helgoland, October 14, 1853, son of Peter and Marie (Lund) Hofstad, natives of that same country, who spent all their lives there. Peter Hofstad was a farmer and a sailor. He and his wife were members of the Lutheran church and their children were reared in that faith. There were eight of these children, of whom the subject of this sketch was the second in order of birth, the others being Johannes, Hans (deceased), Morton, Jacob (deceased), Peter, Knute (deceased), and Ole (deceased).

Upon completing his studies in the high school in his home country, Rudolf Hofstad began farming and has continued farming ever since. He married in 1879 and three years later, in 1882, came to this country, proceeding directly to Minnesota and settling on a farm in Grenville county, where he lived for three years, at the end of which time, in 1885, he moved to this part of the state and located on his present farm in Storden township, Cottonwood county, where he has made his home ever since. Mr. Hofstad is an excellent farmer and has increased his original holdings there to two hundred and forty acres. He has erected all the buildings on the place and has brought the same to a high state of cultivation, long having been accounted one of the leading farmers in that part of the county. Mr. Hofstad is an ardent Prohibitionist and has done much in his community to advance the anti-saloon cause thereabout.
Historical Newspapers

Genealogybank.com has scans of early newspapers from large and small communities with new titles being added monthly. Check with your local library if you don’t want to subscribe yourself.
Online digital collections of county historical society photographs including individuals, towns, institutions, social groups, religious groups, etc.

Compare your photos to those of a known age to estimate when photographs were taken.

www.familychronicle.com/phototip.htm has an online tutorial to assist families in dating their photographs
Confirmation class of Storden Norwegian Methodist Church - 1900

Back: Anna Hofstad, Gudrun Hofstad

Front: Petra Hofstad, Rev. Schollert, Hans Mork
Norwegian-American Studies

Published by NAHA
First 33 volumes are online
Wide variety of topics including immigration stories, church histories, factors that influenced immigration and movement within the U.S., institutional histories (churches, lags, communities), etc.
Other resources at NAHA

- Rowberg obituary file
- Family history collection
- Church history collection
- Local history collection
- Bygdebok collection in the St. Olaf Library