

The Norwegian-American Historical Association

Northfield, Minnesota

NEWS



LETTER

From the Secretary's Office to the Association Members

NUMBER 78

Editor, LLOYD HUSTVEDT

AUGUST 1989

Rølvaag Film Completed

The Rølvaag documentary film entitled *Letters from America: The Life and Times of O. E. Rølvaag* had its premiere showing at the Grand Theater (now a restaurant) at Northfield, Minnesota, on the evening of May 17.

The showing was preceded by a dinner attended by a capacity crowd of 200 and by statements from former Governor Karl Rølvaag, Ella Valborg (Rølvaag) Tweet, Celeste Holm, who narrated the film, and Lloyd Hustvedt. Christine Craton and Tim Schwab, who constitute the firm called Unity Productions, shared some of their experiences in producing the film and acknowledged their many funding sources. Total production costs exceeded \$100,000.

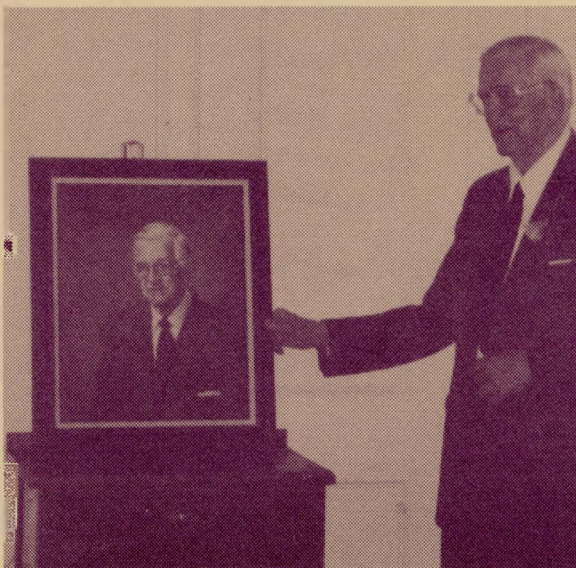
It proved to be an exquisite film both in terms of art and information. Some of the photography taken on the island of Dønna (Rølvaag's birthplace) off the coast of Northern Norway as well as scenes from the Rølvaag cabin in northern Minnesota reached the highest levels of film making. As a documentary, one-half hour in length, it managed to put two pounds of product into a one pound bag. Erik Bye, an outstanding Norwegian TV personality, narrated the lines attributed to Rølvaag himself, many of them quotes from his letters or novels. Erik Bye was not present at the showing.

Precise patterns of distribution are being planned. We anticipate that it will be shown on PBS and make its rounds throughout the American educational system. It is a must for Norwegian organizations wherever located. The NAHA will in time possess a video copy of the film. The premiere performance in Norway took place at Hamar, June 28, as a part of the program of the Norwegian-American History and Literature Seminar, June 26-29, held at that city.

Bjork Turns 80

Some fifty persons assembled at the Woman's Club of Minneapolis for a luncheon on May 13 to congratulate our former editor, Kenneth O. Bjork, on reaching his 80th birthday and to review some of his outstanding contributions. The luncheon was sponsored jointly by the NAHA, the Department of Norwegian, and the Department of History at St. Olaf College. Dr. Ingrid Semmingsen crossed the Atlantic to be present. Besides Dr. Semmingsen, statements were made by Professors Odd Lovoll, Einar Haugen, and Robert Nichols (chairman, Department of History). Lloyd Hustvedt served as master of ceremonies.

A portrait of Kenneth O. Bjork had been commissioned and was unveiled. The ultimate in embarrassment came when the picture proved to be upside down. But the hilarity this produced only heightened the good will and fellowship that characterized the mood of the day. This portrait, though a gift to Kenneth, will ultimately hang in the Norwegian-American Room in the St. Olaf College library. Dr. Bjork's birthday is actually July 19. The earlier date for a party was in deference to friends and family members who had summer plans.



Bjork and portrait

Lovoll Honored

Honors seemingly come to our editor, Odd S. Lovoll, on a "daily dozen" basis these days. He was duly installed as a member of the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters on May 3, 1989. Dr. Lovoll was present to receive his diploma of membership at the annual installation dinner given by the Academy which has its own quarters on Drammensveien, Oslo. He is the only Norwegian-American historian holding membership in the Academy. The late Theodore C. Blegen, the NAHA's first editor, was a member.

Next, the Illinois State Historical Awards Committee named him for the "Award of Superior Achievement" for his book, *A Century of Urban Life: The Norwegians in Chicago before 1930*. The presentation took place in Springfield, Illinois, April 29. Rolf Erickson accepted the award on Lovoll's behalf.

Arlow Andersen's New Book

The Balch Institute Press announced its forthcoming (December, 1989) publication of *Rough Road to Glory: The Norwegian-American Press Speaks out on Public Affairs, 1875 to 1925*, by Arlow Andersen. The commentary on Andersen's work concludes as follows: "In general, the immigrant press was optimistic and reformist — they kept before them the vision of a better society in the rapidly developing republic in the Western world. Yet they were realistic enough to concede that the road to glory for America was both winding and unpaved."

A Major Work on Major Immigrant Novels

In her recently published *Draumen om friedom og jord* (The Dream about Freedom and Land), Ingeborg R. Kongslie examines the novels of Johan Boyer, O. E. Rølvaag, Vilhelm Moberg and Alfred Hauge. Boyer's emigrant group left Trondheim, Rølvaag's characters from Northern Norway, Moberg's Karl Oskar and Kristina came from Småland, Sweden, and Hauge's Cleng Peerson grew up in Rogaland. Yet, they pursued a common dream of freedom with social, religious, and material implications. Because a freer life was envisioned through the ownership and cultivation of land, land itself became a major symbol for the freedoms sought. Kongslie earned her Norwegian doctorate for this work.

Det Norske Samlaget, Boks 4672 Sofienberg, N-0506 Oslo 5, 314 pages. Kr. 269.

20th Century Radicalism in Minnesota

The symposium in St. Paul on May 20 entitled "The Minnesota Radical Press, 1910-1920, An Open Forum," attracted an interested audience of about 200. The forum sponsored by the Norwegian-American Historical Association and the Minnesota Historical Society heard a panel of six humanities scholars who considered the influence in shaping public policy of three English-language, one Swedish, one Norwegian, and two Finnish-language radical labor newspapers. The audience, including a number of radical political activists, engaged in a lively discussion with the panel. The event was a part of a two-year project of the Minnesota Historical Society on 20th century radicalism in Minnesota.

Norwegian-American Seminar II

The third Norwegian-American Seminar was sponsored by what we have come to call "NAHA Norway." The seminar ran over a four-day period (June 26-29) at the Hedemark Museum located at Hamar, Norway. One afternoon and evening was set aside for travel to Gjøvik and Lillehammer to see Vesterheim's "Norsk i Amerika" exhibit. One portion of this exhibit was at the Hamar museum where the conference took place. Darrell Henning, the curator at Vesterheim, guided the tour. A second evening was given to the first showing of the Rølvaag documentary film in Norway under the supervision of Solveig Tweet Zempel.

This well-planned conference included 22 papers. Ten of the participants were Americans, including three who are residents of Norway. Of special interest was Knut Djupedal's progress report on the "Returned-Emigrant Project." Copies of the program will be sent upon request.

"NAHA Norway" operates with its own set of officers. Dorothy Burton Skårdal, who is president of the Norway chapter, is also a member of our executive board. She has been responsible for the promotion and planning of these conferences. Because Dorothy spent this past semester on leave in the United States, the details of this seminar were efficiently administered by Ingeborg R. Kongslie.

The fact that a conference of these dimensions can be sponsored by the NAHA without the assistance of its American officers, and that all financial requirements have been raised in Norway, is a remarkable development. It speaks well for our future. We owe our counterpart in Norway very much.

Editorial

"The Norwegian-American Historical Association is Norwegian America's best kept secret" said a member who had learned about the NAHA in an accidental manner late in life. He was not pleased over having missed out on what had preceded.

It is true the NAHA is underpublicized. Extravaganzas that capture the public eye do not and perhaps should not accompany the work of the NAHA. Save for researchers who use them and those who maintain them, archives are really dull places. The appearance of a new book may cause a momentary stir, but few are mindful of the drudgery that preceded completion. Within the NAHA our bookmakers are our quiet heroes: the author receives no royalty and the editor no salary. The world should somehow know about this. But, then again, when idealists brag about their idealism, they cease to be idealists.

When the NAHA was founded in 1925, there was an abundance of Norwegian newspapers to lend a hand. This is no longer true. Commercial advertising is costly and the little we have done of it has been of questionable value. There is also an ethical question: how much of one member's dues can be spent to recruit another one? Our members might take comfort in knowing that to date their dues have been mainly directed towards archives and publication. On the other hand, the members might justly wish that there were more of them to share the burden.

The members of the executive board are currently conducting membership campaigns in their respective regions. They can use your help. Please argue our cause as you go about your daily affairs. Provide us with names that we should solicit. Bear in mind that we hope to enlist as members all Norwegian-American organizations. In all likelihood we will be preserving their records. We hope to develop the support of business firms that have Norwegian-American connections. In all events, do what you can to make "the best kept secret" charge a future fallacy.

L.H.

Coming Up!

Our next publication, *Immigrant Idealist: A Literary Biography of Waldemar Ager, Norwegian American*, by Einar Haugen will see publication this coming November. This book constitutes volume 7 of our Author Series, fills 185 pages, and offers 29 illustrations.

In his Foreword to this book, Odd S. Lovoll comments as follows: "Waldemar Ager, as editor

and author, was one of the most original and influential men of letters among Norwegian Americans. He was an idealist who tirelessly and valiantly did battle for the causes he believed in, the two major ones being temperance and Norwegian American cultural growth. The foremost expression of the latter would be an independent immigrant literature."

Dues Increase

The Executive Board of the NAHA passes a resolution to increase the dues in all membership categories. Dues have remained the same for the past 15 years despite major increases in costs of bookmaking, and not least the later cost of mailing books to members.

The dues statements to members beginning January 1, 1990, will reflect the following dues structure: Associate \$20; Sustaining \$30; Patron \$50 or more; and Life (one payment) \$200. We will continue to solicit voluntary gifts beyond the assessed dues. In fact, membership generosity in this respect has spared the NAHA from frequent hikes in dues. Members may convert their membership to Life for \$150 up until December 31, 1989. Associate members who might find the dues increase burdensome are encouraged to convert.

Random News

- Received from the estate of Nancy O. Wick a bequest of \$1000. Nancy O. Wick, a member of the NAHA, lived in Minneapolis.
- Clarence A. Clausen added \$1000 to the Rølvaag Memorial Fund.
- Received from Theresse Lundby, Greenbush, MN 56726, her *Lillehaugen Family Treasures*, typescript reproduction, spiral bound, 49 pages, photos, 1988. Tosten and Sigrid Lillehaugen left Ål, Hallingdal, in 1884 to settle near Michigan, North Dakota.
- Received from Margie Lee her Master of Arts dissertation, Harvard University, 1989, "Inside-Outside: The Force of Religion in the Writings of Peer Strømme and Martha Reishus." Typescript reproduction, spiral bound, 84 pages.
- Received from Nordmanns Forbundet (Oslo) *Utvandrere fra Østfold 1867-1901*, Østfold Historielag, Skriftserie nr. 9.

Random News

- Received from Statsarkivet in Hamar, *Utflyt-ede fra Vang i Valdres 1814-1867*. Unbound typescript, 82 pages. Provides both alphabetical and chronological listing. The first emigrants to America from Vang left in 1846.
- Received from Jostein Molde *Emigranter fra Lesja 1853-1949*. A computer printout of the 2292 persons who emigrated from the region of Lesja, Norway. There are separate alphabetical lists for first names, patronymic names, surnames and farm names. The final list records the emigrants in chronological order of departure.
- Received from David Cross a supplement to the *Marvick Family History*, typescript reproduction, unbound, 32 pages by Katherine Jacobson Munsen. The original history prepared in 1941 with supplements in 1947 and 1951 was written by Margretha Marvick Andersen.
- Received from Torild Homstad *The Selvig Story* by Mina Selvig Johnson. Spiral bound, 72 pages, 1952, photos and illustrations. The Selvig family left Norway in 1868. Bernt Selvig, ship owner and ship builder, met with economic misfortune. As a result he left a large estate near Drammen to settle on an 80 acre homestead in Kandiyohi county, Minnesota.
- Received from Mr. and Mrs. Finn Wisted (through Rolf Erickson), *Amerika Brev 1891-1895*, a collection of letters written by friends and relatives in America to Anders Gudmundsen Nordhagen, Trysil, Norway. Includes original letters and typewritten transcripts.
- Received from Ardis Bakke Folstad *Vi hadde det godt her*, a narrative account of pioneer experiences by a Norwegian family in Dunn county, Wisconsin. Menomonie, Wisconsin, 1987, 137 pages.
- Received from Sheridan Eugene and Dagmar Hellen Vincent their *Hellen Family in America*. Typescript reproduction, spiral bound, 38 pages, photos, charts and index. The Hellen family has its origin in Vik, Sogn.
- Received from Steve Keillor his "Rural Norwegian American Reading Societies in the Late Nineteenth Century," a 39 page typewritten paper prepared for a graduate seminar at the University of Minnesota, 1989.
- Received from Alf Lunder Knudsen his Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, "The Norwegian Male Chorus Movement in America: A Study." Typescript reproduction, 405 pages, 1989.
- Received from Margaret Chrislock Gilseth her *Fjord Magic: Getting Acquainted with Norway*. This soft-bound book of 119 pages, designed for young readers, is divided into nine chapters: geography, history, folklore, famous Norwegians, home and school life, holidays, recreation and finally emigration to America. Available from Askeladd Press, Box 616, St. Charles, MN 55972. \$7.95 + \$2.00 postage.
- The America-Norway Heritage Fund has invited Rolf Erickson (NAHA vice president) to participate in "Norsk i America," a divided exhibit shown at Hamar, Gjøvik and Lillehammer (May 13-August 27) and prepared by Vesterheim. Rolf Erickson has been an ardent supporter of Vesterheim and has researched Norwegian-American art and artists. Similar invitations were extended to Harley Refsal of Luther College and Paul Roseland of Anchorage, Alaska.

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