

# The Norwegian-American Historical Association

Northfield, Minnesota



*From the Secretary's Office to the Association Members*

NUMBER 103

Editor, LLOYD HUSTVEDT

OCTOBER 1998

## TWIN CITIES HISTORY PROJECT

*The long-planned Twin Cities History Project, co-sponsored by the NAHA and the Minnesota Historical Society, is underway. Professor David C. Mauk and two assistants, Robert Mikkelsen and Mette Løvås, began research in early August.*

### Staff

David Mauk, well known to us as the author of *The Colony that Rose from the Sea* (NAHA, 1997), has arranged to be away from his American Studies Department at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology at Trondheim for two years. While the entire range of the research required to complete this study comes under his jurisdiction, he plans to focus on institutions of community life and the migration patterns that characterized the Norwegian immigrants' election of the Twin Cities as their home. For example, some came directly from Norway while others drifted in from surrounding rural communities. Since the study will span the years from 1865 to 1990, the patterns of migration as well as the character of the institutions they founded change over time.

Assistant Professor Robert Mikkelsen has been granted a year's leave from the American Studies Department at Østfold College at Halden, Norway, to work on the History Project, but he will also apply his research to a Ph.D. dissertation. Mikkelsen is interested in the role Norwegian Americans played in Minnesota politics, particularly the Democratic-Farmer-Labor party. Like his mentor, Mikkelsen is American born. He began graduate work in history at the University of Wisconsin. He interrupted this work in order to study under the late Professor Ingrid Semmingsen at the University of Oslo, earning there the equivalent of a master's degree.

Norwegian born Mette Løvås holds a

master's degree in American Studies from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology at Trondheim. She wrote her thesis on Norge, a Norwegian settlement established in the state of Virginia in the late 1890s. Her task will also serve a double purpose: the data she compiles for the project will be used for a doctoral dissertation. Her main interest is in Norwegian-American religious life. Her year in the States is supported by a Fulbright Scholarship. In addition, she wears the mantle of "visiting scholar at Luther Seminary" (St. Paul).

Though not involved in the research process itself, Editor Odd S. Lovoll has been the overarching planner of the project and will for its duration serve as what might be best described as general manager. Professor Todd Nichol, Luther Seminary, (St. Paul), headed the fund raising committee. It exceeded the goal of \$100,000 set by the Board. Lutheran Brotherhood provided a matching grant of \$50,000.

### Sources

The research team has already spent a number of days at the NAHA Archives. Emigrant lists are being examined for passengers who declare St. Paul or Minneapolis as their destination. Mauk says his team will also visit a number of other repositories, such as the Minnesota Historical Society, the Church Archives at Luther Seminary (St. Paul), and the libraries at Luther and Augsburg Colleges. Twin City churches having Norwegian immigrant

origins and the many secular organizations (those that once existed and those that remain) founded by these immigrants are of interest, not to forget novels, stories, biographies and memoirs that have the Twin Cities as their setting. From 100 to 150 in-depth interviews are planned.

### **Can We Help?**

Yes, the research team wishes to hear from anyone who can speak for Norwegians in the Twin Cities, or who knows of persons who can. Persons who represent third or even fourth generation residency in the Twin Cities may have a story to tell. Where did the first generation live and what did they do? Where did the succeeding generations reside and what occupations did they pursue? David Mauk mentioned an interest in contacting Norwegian-American organizations in the Twin Cities, to learn of their society's history, mission and impact on members and on the immigrant urban community down through time. David Mauk works mostly out of an office in the Minnesota Historical Society, 345 Kellogg Blvd. West, St. Paul MN 55201. Telephone: (651) 296-2639. Home: (612) 623-9280. According to plan, a history of the Norwegian settlement in the Twin Cities should see publication in 2001.

### **A Rare Visit**

On September 21, 1998, the NAHA archives enjoyed a visit from Jon Lilletun, Norway's Minister of Education, Research, and Church Affairs, and his wife Anne-Berit Andersen Lilletun. Three ranking officials in the ministry accompanied them: Trond Fevolden, Secretary General; Petter Skarheim, Director General (Adult Education); and Magne Rafoss, Deputy Director of Church Affairs. The party was escorted by Consul General Ulf Christiansen (Minneapolis), and his wife Marianne Moe Christiansen. All members of this party were guests of St. Olaf College and their visit included discussions regarding possible cooperative educational programs.

Minister Lilletun, born in 1945 at Voss, Norway, studied commerce and for a time ran his own trading company. After 1975 he entered public service, holding mainly

offices related to children, youth, culture and education. He became a member of Parliament in 1989, where he from the outset served on the standing committee on Education, Research and Church Affairs. He chaired that committee from 1993 until 1997 when he was appointed to the position he now holds.

Lilletun is a lively, spirited man, deeply human. He embodies somehow the very title he holds. At a dinner at the home of St. Olaf College President Mark Edwards and Linda Johnson Edwards, the minister not only gave a warm and witty thank you speech, but he also sang without accompaniment in the Vossing dialect a song about "Vossastrondi," his birthplace, a remote valley in the larger region of Voss. He has a good voice. Moreover, it is always nice when guests make their hosts feel entirely at home.

### **Ever Heard of Tora Thurston?**

Erlend D. Petersen, a member of our board and Dean of Admissions and Records at Brigham Young University, donated to our archives a fascinating biography (421 pages) of a person named Tora Thurston. At first glance one would conclude Tora to be a feminine name, and Thurston to be English. No, he was originally Tore Torstensen Arvalta from Numedal. He came to the Fox River settlement in Illinois in 1839 and some time later became a Mormon, joining the Mormon trek to Salt Lake in 1850.

Thurston pioneered in three Utah communities: Ephraim, Circleville, and Annabella. The last was an isolated region in the Sevier Valley. At the time it had no industry and no railroad, only small farms that raised in an arid climate some hay, oats, wheat and potatoes. Unlike the free lance patterns of homesteading in the Midwest, early Mormon settlements were planned at the top by church elders. If you were a good Mormon you went where you were told to go; Thurston was a good Mormon.

Tora held many responsible positions in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day

Saints. He fought in the Black Hawk Indian War and was a close friend of Brigham Young. He built an enviable reputation for himself but never wealth. He had three wives who survived him when he died 74 years old in 1895. His first wife was of Yankee stock, his second was born in Denmark, and the third in Sweden. With these wives he had 19 children and a total of 82 descendants when he died. He has an estimated 5,000 today.

Morris Ashcroft Thurston, a great-great-grandson, is the author of this well written account published by the Shumway Family History Services in 1996 (no precise address given). The book is well equipped with photos, maps and charts.

Kenneth O. Bjork devotes a chapter, "From Babylon to Zion," in his *West of the Great Divide*, to the broader features of Mormonism that attracted many Norwegians. This is the first study the NAHA has received that examines from within the life and experiences of a convert who never looked back once the decision was made.

## EDITORIAL

It may be presumptuous of us to base an editorial on a book the members of the NAHA have already received – perhaps even read from cover to cover. Nonetheless, we risk what may prove to be a superfluous statement.

In *The Promise Fulfilled: A Portrait of Norwegian Americans Today*, Odd S. Lovoll explores the character of ethnicity and its many forms of expression, ranging from the shallow and the silly to serious matters of the soul. In the main, the author examines and interprets. He does not judge. Yet, when the last sentence has been read, the reader can hardly escape some self-examination and critical assessment of the Norwegian American community. Be this as it may, *The Promise Fulfilled* is an eloquent "State of the Union Address" regarding Norwegian America.

Questions abound in this analysis and most are answered. What is the origin of ethnicity? What are its processes of evolution? How do recent immigrants get along with the descendants of those who came

generations ago? Is ethnicity an adornment that is taken out of a closet on holidays, something we can voluntarily don one day and with equal ease shed the next? Is ethnicity, in one form or another, inescapable? Is it a vehicle for self-esteem and the route to take for a more meaningful life? Why do some traditions survive and others vanish? Language, for example, the cornerstone of any culture, seems to be among the first to go. We now add a question of our own. Will this study make an impact? Will it give new dimensions or new purposes to future ethnic behavior among Norwegian Americans? Despite Aristotle's observation that the unexamined life is not worth living, we suspect that this book will be read mainly by those who need it the least.

The thought that public display of ethnicity is un-American seems now to be history. In fact, it has become as American as apple pie. One can find old country values mixed with Chamber of Commerce boosterism, rivalry, sloganism, competition and the fanfare of a Barnum and Bailey circus.

As older forms of ethnicity erode and new ones do or do not take their place, we register the hope that Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum in Decorah, Iowa, and the Norwegian-American Historical Association with its archives in Northfield and its commitment to publish will win broader recognition and increased support from the Norwegian-American community. By their very nature and function they were meant to last. In fact, time only heightens their right to exist.

L.H.

## Random News

• Jon Gjerde, University of California, received the Theodore Saloutos award for the outstanding book of the year in American immigration history for his *The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West, 1830-1917* (University of North Carolina Press, 1997). The award was made at the annual dinner of the Immigration History Society, April 11, 1998.

Gjerde's book addresses the competing images of the middle west held by native-born white Americans and immigrant settlers (pri

marily German and Scandinavian) as well as the region's complex impact on these immigrant communities.

- Our board member, Dean Erlend Petersen of Brigham Young University, was awarded "Knight of the Royal Order of St. Olav" for his efforts to strengthen ties between Norway and the United States.

- Kathleen Stokker, Luther College, is preparing a ten-chapter book entitled *The Folklore of a Norwegian-American Christmas: Norwegian Yuletide Traditions on Both Sides of the Atlantic*. The study traces Christmas traditions back to Roman and Viking solstice celebrations and tracks their continuity and change down through time.

- Received from Per Øverland his *The Halset Family Tree: The Descendants of Anne and Iver I. Halset of the Halset Farm, Bergsøya, Gjemnes, Møre og Romsdal*. Soft cover, 42 pages. Except for a five-page introduction, the history consists of genealogical tables. Signe Halset, born in 1900, emigrated and founded a family line in the state of Washington.

- Eyvind Ager, 97, Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, died suddenly August 11, 1998. Waldemar Ager had this son in mind when he wrote *Fortællinger for Eyvind* (Stories for Eyvind). As a youth he worked with his father in publishing *Reform* in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. He had been a patron member of the NAHA for 34 years.

- Received from the Danish-American Heritage Society *Oregon Danish Colony: Ethnic Assimilation in Junction City, Oregon, 1902-1952*, by Gerald Rasmussen and Otto N. Larsen. Paper, 200 pages, \$15 postpaid. 29681 Dane Lane, Junction City, OR 97448.

- Received from Patricia Young an article based on the letters of Andreas Stromøe to his parents in Levanger, Norway, 1892-1906. He came to the United States with a degree in pharmacology, 23 years old, in 1892. His revealing letters describe his family and his life as a druggist in North Dakota, Minnesota, and

Brooklyn, New York. He died in 1917, 48 years old.

- Received from Clarice Anderson her English translation of Arnold Bakken's *Farvel da, slekt og venner: om utvandringa til Amerika, spesielt frå Skaun*. This book lists the emigrants from that area (including Buvik and Børso) and examines a selection of later experiences in America. The translation does not replicate the photos, graphs, illustrations and name lists found in the original.

- Received from Dave Plette his *The Pettersen Family*. Carl Wilhelm Pettersen (1840-1886), a mason by trade, left Christiania (Oslo) for Madelia, Minnesota, in 1866. Thrice married, he fathered 12 children.

- Received from Lew Linde, his *Tante Inga and Dr. Linde*, an appreciative account of Dr. and Mrs. Herman Linde who lived in Cyrus, Minnesota. Paper cover, photos, 84 pages. Herman Linde (1872-1956) emigrated in 1891, attended Concordia College (Moorhead, Minnesota), and later Hamline Medical School.

- Received from Enevold F. Schrøder *Schrøderslekten: undertoldbetient Johannes Jakobsen Schrøder og Anne Marie Pedersdatter Brodrups etterkommere*. Hard cover, photos, maps, tables and charts. The founders of this prominent family came to Norway from Denmark in 1797. The Malmins constitute an American branch of the family, among them professors Marie Malmin Meyer and Gunnar Malmin. *Schrøderslekten* is an exquisite piece of bookmaking.

- Received from Elizabeth Drøyer her *Norwegian Americans in Chicago, 1945-1995: From Ethnic Community Towards Privatized Ethnicity*, Department of History, University of Oslo, 1998, 154 pages. This study can be viewed as a valuable supplement to Odd Lovoll's *A Century of Urban Life*, which treated Norwegians in Chicago from 1830 to 1930.

- *Lack of space made it necessary to delete some Random News items. These will be carried in the next newsletter.*

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