

2

Seeds of
Heritage

3

New Fellowship
for Archives
Research

5

The Old Folks
on the Farm

6

Polarized
Politics in
the 1890s

10

Digital O. E.
Rølvaag
Collection



Currents

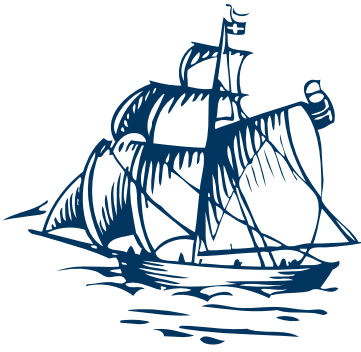
THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION | SPRING 2022 VOLUME 183

INSIDE:
ANNUAL
REPORT

IMMIGRANT, VETERAN, POLITICIAN, TARGET

A death threat against
Knut Nelson





SEEDS FROM HOME

As the days lengthen and the snow shows signs of receding, many of us in the Northern Hemisphere are planning our gardens. Especially as the pandemic lingers on and on and on, I have seen friends find solace in putting their hands into the dirt. Some have already planted starts, nurturing fragile shoots of tomatoes, nasturtiums, and peppers even as the winter wind whips outside their windows.

This practice of gardening—of tending the earth and bringing forth life and beauty with our hands, the elements, and a bit of hope and luck—ties us to the generations before us, many of whom brought seeds to this country as immigrants.

I am reminded of this every time I teach Scandinavian immigration history. In my course, I assign a section from Vilhelm Moberg's 1956 text, *The Settlers*, in which Kristina, a recent immigrant to Minnesota from Sweden, longs for the familiar things of home. Her husband, Karl Oskar, tries to cure her homesickness by planting an Astrakhan apple tree with seeds he received in the mail from his in-laws. This does not quite solve the problem and Kristina takes matters into her own hands, going into town and desperately trying to tell the English-speaking store owner that she needs flower seeds to help turn her primitive house into a home. Of course, miscommunication ensues. Kristina ends up unknowingly tending a patch of fodder grass instead of a vibrant flower garden.

The chapter ends with this lesson: "She should have learned this much by now: It was, and remained forever, difficult to transplant the homeland in foreign soil. A person could not change countries and make a foreign place into home overnight. Perhaps she would not even live long enough to do that."

Little could Kristina have imagined how the descendants of immigrants would hold onto their links to their homelands through seeds. In fact, Seed Savers Exchange, a nonprofit seed-bank organization located outside of Decorah, Iowa, preserves heirloom plant varieties through regeneration, distribution, and seed exchange. Seed Savers began with the founders' desire to protect seeds their great-grandparents had brought to the United States from Bavaria in 1884.

The seeds that immigrants brought with them were not just for eating. As Kristina wished for familiar flowers to beautify the landscape of Minnesota, so did other immigrants. The first two varieties in the Seed Savers collection were the German Pink tomato and Grandpa Ott's morning glory. Survival is not just about feeding the body but also the eyes and the spirit with reminders of home.

With warm wishes to you as you welcome spring in your own way,

Anna M. Peterson, NAHA Editor



on the cover

Photographed as a U.S. senator from Minnesota in 1912, Knute Nelson had survived the Civil War and numerous political battles.

DONOR'S GIFT LAUNCHES NEW RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP

In December, the Norwegian-American Historical Association received a gift earmarked for the creation of an endowed fellowship. This new fellowship is designed to stimulate new scholarship in the study of the Norwegian-American experience using the collections in the NAHA Archives.

The donor, who has chosen to remain anonymous, holds a long, deep, and abiding interest in the broad experience of Norwegians in America, from the earliest days of immigration through contemporary times. Among the research topics the donor encourages are those that examine the second century of immigration—from the end of World War I through the Cold War. Also encouraged is research on the impact of Norwegian immigrants

in a global context, and cross-cultural encounters between Norwegians and other ethnic groups.



"We are grateful for this generous gift, which will allow NAHA to create new research opportunities and, in turn, reach new audiences. This is a new way to share the rich collections housed in our archives," said NAHA Archivist Kristina Warner.

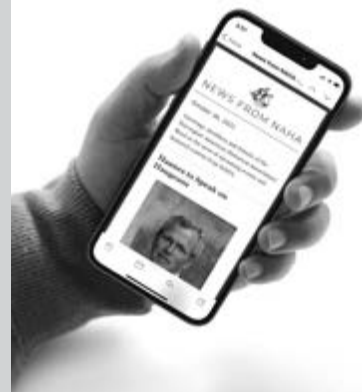
The first fellowship award is planned for 2023. For more information, go to naha/archives/research/.

If you are interested in establishing an endowed fund for the important work of the Norwegian-American Historical Association, please contact Karen Annexstad Humphrey, Senior Advancement Officer, at karenhumphrey.naha@gmail.com.

Don't Miss Any NAHA News

News from NAHA, our monthly e-newsletter, is the best way for members to stay up to date on events, tours, and online presentations. Each month, it also includes a recipe, highlights from one of the collections in our archives, and content from our journal, *Norwegian-American Studies*.

If you aren't receiving the e-newsletter (and if it's not being caught in your spam filter), we might not have your current email address. Help us update our records by sending your email address to naha@stolaf.edu. Rest assured we won't share your information with other organizations or overfill your inbox.

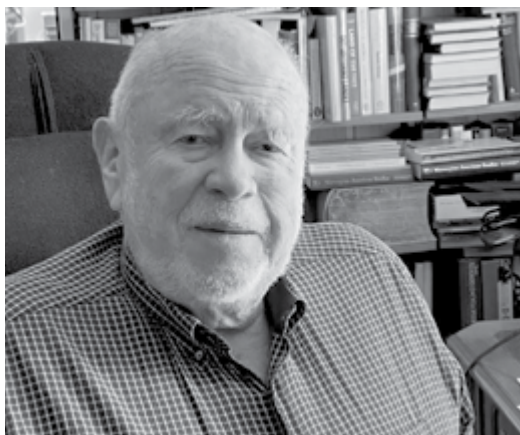


KAHN GIVES GIFTS OF HERITAGE

NAHA member Dr. Ruth Kahn of Rochester, Minnesota, holds the association's new record for the most gift memberships given in one holiday season. Kahn purchased one for each of her 10 grandchildren, ages 33 to 43, who are spread across the United States, from Washington, D.C., to Los Angeles.

"I didn't want them to forget their Norwegian roots!" Kahn said. A NAHA member since 2004, Kahn's maiden name is Hoff, and her Norwegian roots are in the Gudbrandsdal and Telemark regions.

Gift memberships are available throughout the year. In addition to all of the regular benefits of membership, gift recipients enjoy a special welcome gift of the purchaser's choosing. For more information, visit naha.stolaf.edu/membership/.



REMEMBERING ORM ØVERLAND (1935–2021)

The association remembers a scholar, member, and friend, Professor Emeritus Orm Øverland, who died December 1, 2021. He was born in Oslo, May 17, 1935. Øverland spent his early childhood in Canada, while his father served as a pastor at the Norwegian Seamen's Church in Montreal during World War II. The family returned to Norway when Øverland was 10 years old.

In 1962, he graduated with the cand.philol. degree from the University of Oslo, then returned to North America for his graduate studies and received his Ph.D. from Yale University in 1969. From 1970 until his retirement in 2005, he served as a professor of American literature at the University of Bergen.

Øverland's early work focused on American authors such as James Fenimore Cooper, Arthur Miller,

and Upton Sinclair. Later, he turned to immigrant literature and letters, and gained international recognition for his scholarship.

"He was, without a doubt, one of the leading academics within American studies in the Nordic countries," says Øyvind T. Gulliksen, professor emeritus of

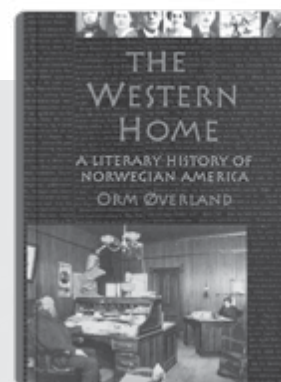
American literature and culture at the University of Southeastern Norway in Bø.

The association is greatly indebted to Professor Øverland, particularly for the curation and translation of his four-volume work, *From America to Norway: Norwegian-American Immigrant Letters, 1838–1914*. It is based on the seven-volume Norwegian edition, which in turn is based on a collection of letters preserved in the Norwegian National Archives.

In a 2015 interview for *Currents*, Øverland described his interest in immigrant letters: "I became fascinated by the stories and experiences these documents could reveal to a reader who took them as seriously as the poems and novels of well-known writers. The letters have taught me much about immigrant history, but even more, these letters have taught me about the faith, emotions, and experiences of the many individual immigrants whose letters I have been privileged to live with over many years."

Øverland's Works Published by NAHA

- "Skandinaven and the Beginnings of Professional Publishing," *Norwegian-American Studies*, Volume 31 (1986)
- *The Western Home: a Literary History of Norwegian America* (1997)



Translations

- *The Rise of Jonas Olsen: A Norwegian Immigrant's Saga*. Published in cooperation with the University of Minnesota Press (2005)



- *From America to Norway: Norwegian-American Immigrant Letters, 1838–1914*, Volumes 1–4 (2013–2018)



Contributions

- "Religion and Church in Early Immigrant Letters: A Preliminary Investigation," in *Crossings: Norwegian-American Lutheranism as a Transatlantic Tradition* (2003)
- "Letters as Links in the Chain of Migration from Hedalen, Norway, to Dane County, Wisconsin, 1857–1890," in *Interpreting the Promise of America: Essays in Honor of Odd Sverre Lovoll* (2002)

THE OLD FOLKS ON THE FARM

BY DALE HOVLAND

As was customary, the farm Løken Nordre in Ål, Buskerud (now part of Viken), Norway, was passed by each generation to the eldest son in the next generation. In one exception, the farm passed to the eldest daughter because there were no sons. In 1897, Guri Ellingsdatter took over the farm from her father, Elling Olsen. The 1900 census record shows Guri and her husband living on the farm with two daughters, two farm employees, and Guri's father, Elling, a widower who is described by the census taker as a *kaarmand*, a male pensioner.

Terms used to describe pensioners varied geographically in Norway. From 1801 to 1920, older family members might be listed in census records with any of the following words used to describe their *yrke*, or occupation, as "pensioner": *føderaad/føderåd*, *følge*, *kaar/kår*, *livøre*, *vilkaar/vilkår*, or *follaug*. Those words are typically followed by a suffix to indicate gender: *-mand/-mann* (man), *-kone* (woman), *-kvinde/kvinne* (woman), *-enke* (widow). A couple might be referred to using the plural *-folk* (folks or people).

What the words have in common is that they describe an arrangement agreed upon between the old and new owners of a farm. According to Norway's online encyclopedia, the Store Norske Leksikon (*snl.no*), the new owner agreed to provide support to the old owner in ways that were often spelled out in a contract between them. Typical provisions would include housing and specified quantities of firewood and food, such as grain, milk, potatoes, or meat.



When the contract, called a *føderådsbrev*, was registered with the local government, the *føderådsfolk* had legal protection that ensured them comparable rights, even if the farm was sold again to another owner.

Sometimes the old farm owner was guaranteed more than food and shelter, such as the use of a piece of land, assistance with plowing, or a quantity of seed grain. The use of a horse to go to church might be promised. Often the agreement included paying the cost of a proper funeral.

Older family members relied on *føderåd* before there were cash-based retirement programs. But few cotters or tenant farmers had *føderåd*. It existed mostly among landowners.

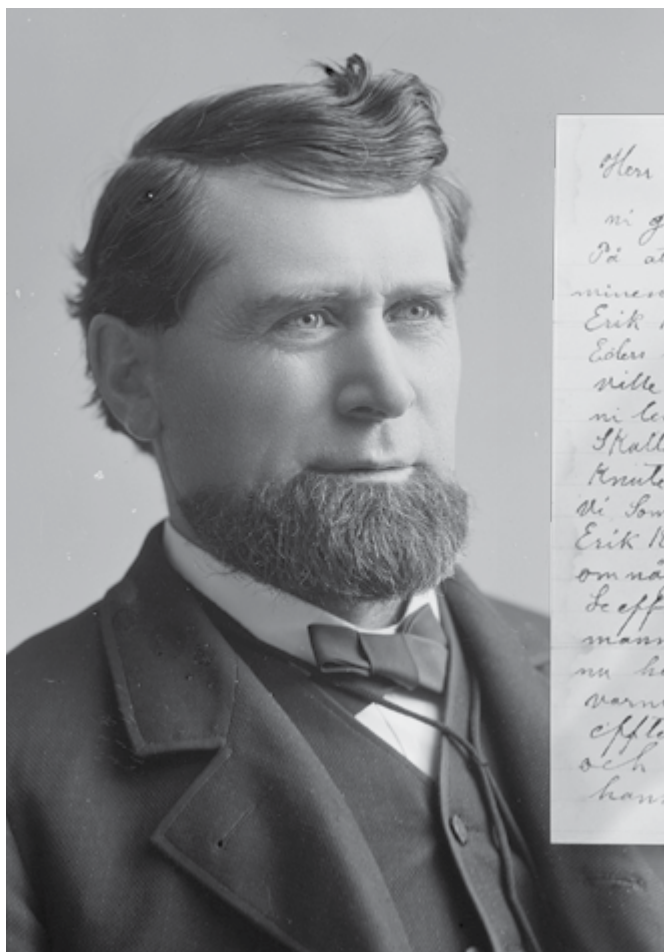
Housing provided to pensioners could be in the main farmhouse or in a separate building. Perhaps an old Norwegian saying comes into play: "Parents-in-law are good to have, but it is an advantage to have to put on outdoor shoes to visit each other."

If one spouse in a pensioner couple died, the survivor would still receive benefits, but half the amount.

An example of a *føderådsbrev*, translated into English, can be seen at hadelandlag.org/resources/resfod.htm. This contract, written and registered in 1859, was signed by Hans Steffensen of the farm Gulsjølien in Gran, in the Hadeland region. It promised certain benefits to his parents, Steffen Hansen and Ragne Eriksdatter, who sold the farm to Hans. He was bound to fulfill the contract, as was "any other who might come into possession of this farm." Among other support, his parents would get to use some of the farmland and barns. Steffen and Ragne would live in part of the main house. If Steffen died first, Ragne would retain rights to half of what was allotted to them.

Gran Parish records show that Steffen died on February 10, 1864. Ragne lived on, identified as a widowed *føderaadskone* living with her son and his family at Gulsjølien in the 1865 census. Three years later, the family departed via Oslo on the ship *Manila* with Quebec as their destination. In 1880, Ragne ended her days where she is buried, in Winneshiek County, Iowa.

Read more about *føderåd* at: • martinroe.com/blog/the-pension-of-the-past/ and • familysearch.org/wiki/en/Norway_Pension_Contracts



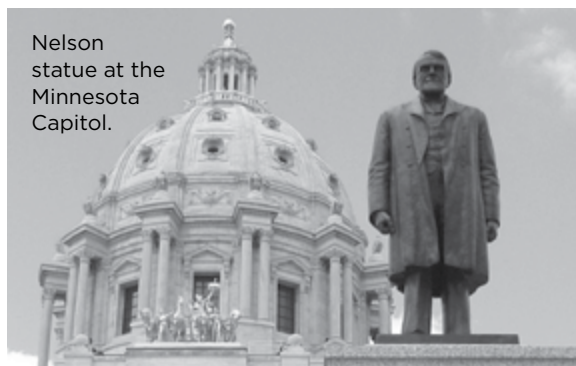
Herr Knute Nelson guvernör
ni göres här med uppmärksamhet
På att här i Columbia Polk's
Minnesota finner en man som heter
Erik Klass som slår offlar
Ederas lif han sade att om någon
ville ge honom res Pengar dit
ni lever och som dollar över så
skulle han taga huvudet af
Knute Nelson guvernören
Ni som var när varande och tjenn
Erik Klass misstänker mannen
om något ont men ni får
se offlar om någon kommer runt
mannen har nog fått Pengar
nu han har fått ett aru
varningen är i god mening
offlar hvad ni tenker
och tror om mannen och
hans eget ut tryck

det här var Sakt i
Henry A Wigströms hus och
ni var fyra personer där
som hördet och Showde
mannen om han icke var rädd
för sitt eget lif men han
sade att han icke var rädd för
att han icke fick undan
Knute Nelson. Så var det gällt
jag vill nämna om ni icke
tror mig hvilka som hördet hans
tal det är under tecknat
A. F. Edman
Columbia Polk's
och H. A. Wigström och hans
hustru och miss Flamma Larson
teknar med öfning
A. F. Edman
Columbia Polk's min
d 17 December 1892

A THREAT AGAINST KNUTE NELSON

A MYSTERIOUS LETTER TO MINNESOTA'S GOVERNOR TELLS A STORY
OF HIS ERA'S ROUGH-AND-TUMBLE POLITICS. BY SCOTT KNUDSON

A statue of Knute Nelson (1843–1923) stands in front of the Minnesota Capitol in Saint Paul. In his day, Nelson was a towering figure in the political life of the state, comparable to former U.S. Vice President Hubert Humphrey in his significance and in the scope of his career. Nelson, who came from Norway as a boy, served as a state senator for one term, a U.S.



Nelson statue at the Minnesota Capitol.

congressional representative for three terms, governor of the state for two two-year terms, and finally as a U.S. senator for five terms.

Nelson plainly enjoyed broad public support for some 50 years, but he also had bitter opponents, small and large. In box 44 of the Nelson Collection at the Minnesota Historical Society is a folder labeled "Plot for Murder

THE ARCHIVED THREAT

A. F. Edman's letter and the envelope in which he mailed it are both tucked away in the Knute Nelson Collection in the Minnesota State Archives. For unknown reasons, only a partial translation of the letter into English was made and archived. NAHA obtained a translation of the entire letter, shown here.

Mr. Knute Nelson, Governor

You are herewith given notice about how here in Columbia, Polk County, Minnesota, there is a man named Erik Klasse, who is after your life. He said that if anyone should wish to give him travel money to where you live and five dollars more, he would then take the head off of Knute Nelson, the governor.

We who were present and who know Erik Klasse suspect the man of something evil, but you must look out to see if anybody comes around. The man has probably gotten the money now. He received an inheritance. This warning is in earnest, based on what we think and believe about the man and his own utterances.

This [threat] was uttered in Henry A. Wigström's house and there were four people there who heard the threat, and who asked the man if he was not afraid for his own life. But he replied that he was not afraid for himself, if only he could get rid of Knute Nelson. That is how it transpired.

I want to mention, in case you don't believe me, who heard his utterances. It was the undersigned, A. F. Edman, Columbia, Polk Co., and H. A. Wigström and his wife, and Miss Hanna Larson.

Signed with respect,

A. F. Edman
Columbia, Polk Co. Minn
on December 17, 1892

of Governor Nelson, 1892." The folder contains a handwritten letter addressed to "Herr Knute Nelson governor."

Writing in Swedish, the author of the letter, A. F. Edman, warned Nelson of a threat made against him: a man named Erik Klasse had declared himself willing to cut off Nelson's head if someone paid him five dollars and travel expenses. There were witnesses, Edman wrote. Klasse had made these threats in the presence of H. A. Wigström, Wigström's wife, and Hanna Larson.

A typewritten partial English translation of the letter is in the archive folder, as well as the envelope, which shows that it was posted in Crookston, Minnesota, on December 21, 1892. Nelson was

governor-elect at the time, taking office on January 4, 1893. Postage was two cents.

Klasse's threat was not an isolated event. A few months later, on May 3, 1893, the *Douglas County News* published a bromide signed "No. 13." It accuses Nelson of corruption during the recently concluded legislative session and with being in the services of the wealthy, not the "common people." It concludes:

Now, Knute Nelson, we are compelled by the rules of our order to give a man ample time to prepare his worldly affairs and to make peace with his Maker. You are a marked man—do not expect any mercy—we are neither Mafia nor Clan na Gael, but a greater power and one you cannot escape from. Nothing will save you.

(Clan na Gael was a 19th-century Irish-American organization that supported Irish freedom from British rule; it still exists.)

Today such threats would almost certainly be investigated. But as Nelson's private secretary said in the *Douglas County News* that May, this "breezy letter"

was a sample of "many others which float in the room of the chief executive, and from thence to the wastebasket."

Neighbors on the Prairie

Who were Klasse, Edman, and Wigström, and why would Klasse offer to assassinate Nelson? There are scant facts to be found about them in publicly available records.

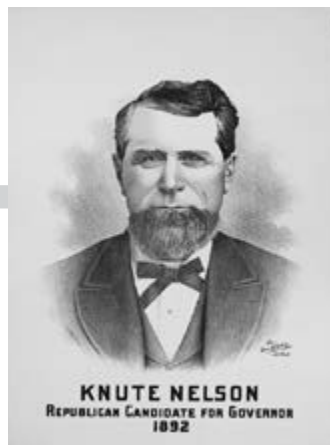
Edman closed his letter with the location from which he was writing, "Columbia, Polk Co., Minn." Polk County is in northwestern Minnesota on lands opened up to settlement by the 1863 Treaty of Old Crossing. Crookston is the county seat. Columbia township is in the southeast corner of the county.

Federal and state census and death records tell us that all three men emigrated from Sweden. Klasse arrived in the United States in 1884 with his wife, Kristina, and daughter, Ellen. The Klasses had four more children after reaching Minnesota. August Edman, his wife, Alevia, and two children emigrated in 1887. The Edmans added one more child in Minnesota. Wigström and his wife, Marie, were the first to come to America, in 1882, and they apparently had no children.

All three of the couples homesteaded. Records from the U.S. Bureau of Land Management show that on October 13, 1898, Klasse received a patent to 160 acres in the southwest quarter of section 25 of Columbia Township, and on that same day Edman received a patent to 160 acres in parts of sections 23 and 24. Wigström received his patent to 160 acres in Section 24 a few years earlier, in 1893.

They all obtained their land under the Homestead Act of May 20, 1862, which required them to prove up their claims by living and working on the land for five years and making improvements to it, as well as paying a nominal registration fee. However, after six months' residence, a homesteader could purchase the parcel for \$1.25 an acre.

Edman's land was one-quarter mile from Wigström's, and both were one-half mile from Klasse. So the families were neighbors in the rural landscape and most likely knew each other well. Perhaps they all attended services at the Fridhem Lutheran Church in Lengby, Minnesota, roughly two miles from where they lived. At any rate, when Erik and Kristina Klasse died within weeks of each other in 1919 (were they victims of the so-called Spanish Flu epidemic?),



NELSON
WALKED A FINE LINE,
needing votes from xenophobic
Yankees and from populist-
leaning Scandinavian
immigrants, writes historian
Robert Zeidel.



(Top) Knute Nelson 1892 campaign ephemera.

(Center Left) Nelson in Civil War uniform, circa 1862. (Center Middle and Right) Nelson, age 12, and his mother, Ingebjørg Haldorsdatter Kvilekvål, circa 1855. (Bottom) Nelson visiting his birthplace near Voss, Norway, in 1899.

they were buried in the Fridhem Lutheran Church cemetery. Edman and Wigström seem to have been buried elsewhere.

From here, the public records and Internet trail go cold. Hence, we need to look at Nelson's public life to understand more about Klasse's threat.

Wars, Actual and Political

Today, we experience sharply partisan politics. Even so, what we see now is rather tepid compared to Minnesota politics in the latter part of the 1800s.

Nelson's path to the governorship is a classic immigrant's success tale. Born near Voss, Norway, in 1843, he came to America in 1849 with his mother, landing in New York and eventually reaching Chicago. For a time, Nelson hawked newspapers on Chicago streets. In 1850, his mother, who was not married when she had Knute, married Nils Olson Grotland, from whom Knute acquired his patronymic surname (son of Nils, Nelson). The family moved to Norwegian settlements in Wisconsin, where he began his formal education.

In 1861, Nelson enlisted in the United States Army and served with the Fourth Wisconsin Infantry, one of just a few Norwegian immigrants in the regiment. Wounded in the Battle of Port Hudson, Louisiana, he was captured and remained a prisoner until the Confederate forces surrendered after a 48-day siege. Nelson was mustered out in 1864 as a corporal and returned to Wisconsin, where he earned a college degree from Albion Academy in Dane County. He moved to nearby Madison, read the law, and was admitted to the Wisconsin bar in 1867. That same year, he married Nicholina Jacobsen.

Nelson's political career began in Wisconsin and continued after he moved his family to Minnesota, settling in Alexandria to build his legal practice. From 1874 to 1878, he served in the Minnesota Senate. After the 1880 census, Minnesota received two additional congressional districts. Redistricting shaped the new Fifth District, which covered essentially the northern third of the state. Nelson and Charles Kindred emerged as the leading contenders for the Republican nomination to serve as the district's representative in the U.S. House.

At the nominating convention in Detroit Lakes in July 1882, the Kindred faction took control of the convention hall, but Nelson's supporters were prepared and moved nearby to a large circus-style tent that had been set up for just that possibility. After a boisterous, even riotous, convention, both Nelson and Kindred were nominated, and each campaigned as a Republican. Newspapers of the day were staunchly and baldly partisan. They published stories accusing each candidate of corruption, drunkenness, and other misdeeds.

When Nelson spoke in Brainerd, a Kindred stronghold, 20 armed men sat with him on the platform. In the end, Nelson won the election, with 47.8 percent of the vote to Kindred's 34.5 percent and the Democratic candidate's 17.6. Nelson served in the House until 1889, and did not stay long out of Minnesota politics after that. In 1892, he began a campaign for governor.

Populism on the Left

In the larger context of U.S. history, the 1890s were a time of struggle between the working class and industrialists. As Nelson was campaigning in Minnesota in the

summer of 1892, Andrew Carnegie was hiring a private army—and ultimately relied on the state militia—to violently break a strike by workers at his steel mill in Homestead, Pennsylvania.

For farmers in Minnesota and North Dakota, the issues were high freight rates and elevator fees, as well as arbitrary grain inspection practices, all of which hurt their income. In Minnesota, the farm interests formed the Farmers' Alliance Party, which, interestingly, had made overtures in 1890 to Nelson to be their gubernatorial candidate. By 1892, however, members of the Alliance joined the left-wing People's or Populist Party and nominated Ignatius Donnelly as their candidate for governor.

While it was tamer than the 1882 campaign, the 1892 race was also bare knuckled. Candidates and their supporters made slanderous, ad hominem attacks on their opponents. Donnelly's principal advisor, Everett Fish, demanded ideological purity and assailed even fellow Populists "with fury and stridency" when he deemed them too centrist. Nelson defeated both Populist Donnelly and Democrat Daniel Lawler.

But in Polk County, where Klasse was said to have made his threat, Donnelly outpolled Nelson. Was Klasse among Donnelly's voters? Could economic grievances, populist leanings, and hostility toward establishment Republicans such as Nelson explain Klasse's threat?

Without records of Klasse's political beliefs, we can only speculate whether the populist-establishment divide was a factor. Anti-Norwegian sentiment seems unlikely, even though Klasse was Swedish. Nelson

was careful throughout his career to present himself more as a Scandinavian American than a Norwegian American—and above all as an assimilated, mainstream American.

The death threat came to nothing. Nelson served four years as governor, then entered the U.S. Senate in 1897, serving in that body for nearly 26 years. In February 1923, the Senate feted his 80th birthday. Well-wishes came in from U.S. President Warren Harding, Minnesota Governor Jacob Preus, and even from King Haakon VII of Norway.

Two months later, Nelson died of an apparent heart attack, in Maryland in April 1923. Four of his five children predeceased him, as did his wife, Nicholina. Preus accompanied Nelson's remains back to Minnesota, where, after lying in state at the Capitol in St. Paul, Nelson was buried in Alexandria.

Scott Knudson is president of NAHA. He lives in St. Paul and is a partner in the law firm Taft, Stettinius & Hollister LLP.

SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

⇒ *Minnesota History*, the journal of the Minnesota Historical Society, has published a number of articles about Nelson. They are available online at mnhs.org/market/mhspress/minnesotahistory/ in the archives of the magazine, and they include:

- "The Nelson-Kindred Campaign of 1882," Elmer E. Adams (May 1923)
- "Knut Nelson," Jacob A. O. Preus (February 1924)
- "A Cycle in the History of Minnesota Republicanism," Carl H. Christlock (Fall 1964)
- "Knut Nelson and the Immigration Question," Robert E. Zeidel (Summer 1999)

⇒ NAHA has published a biography of Knute Nelson, *Norwegian Yankee: Knute Nelson and the Failure of American Politics, 1860-1923*, by Millard Gieske and Stephen Keillor (1995).

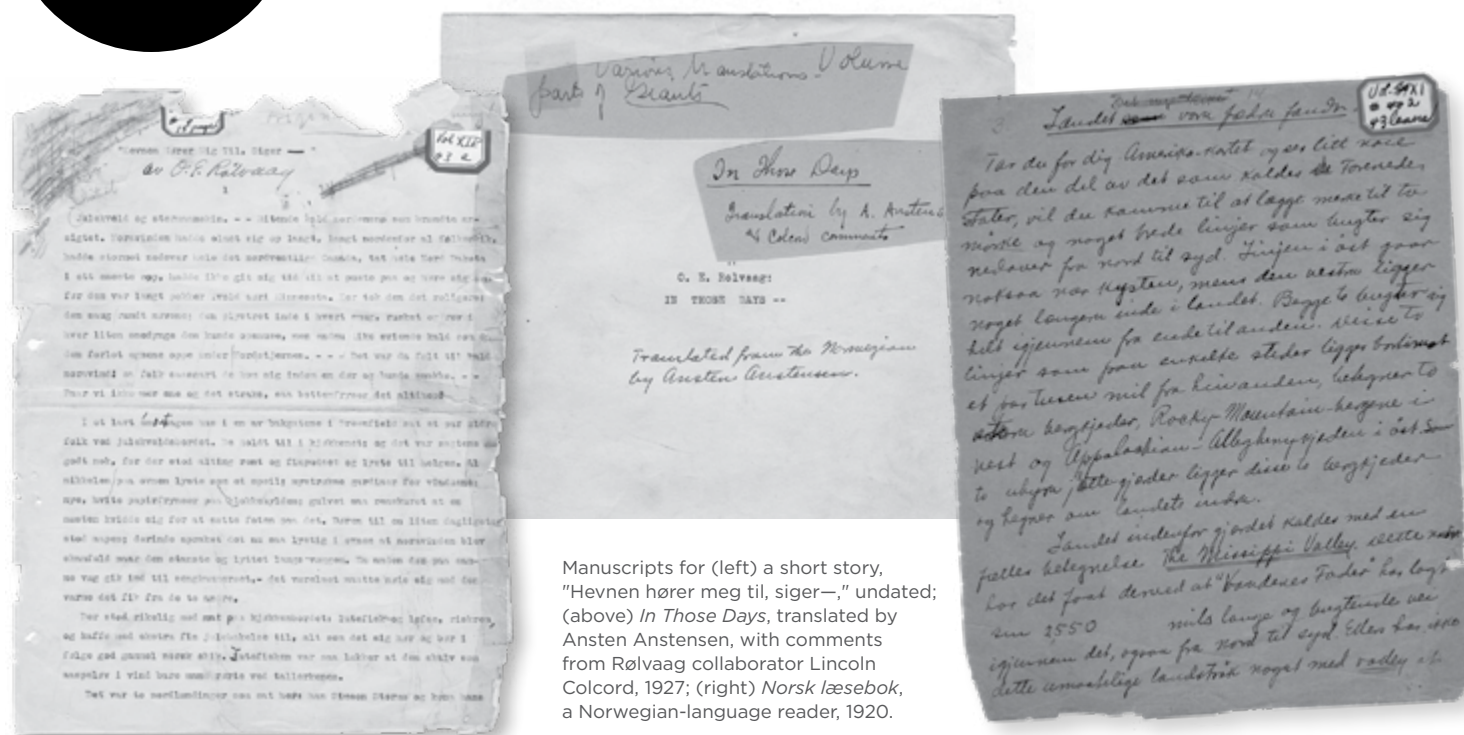
EXPLORE THE O. E. RØLVAAG DIGITAL COLLECTION

KRISTINA WARNER, ARCHIVIST

Thousands of newly digitized materials from the O. E. Rølvaag papers can now be explored online through the NAHA website. Digitization was possible thanks to grant funding from the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, supported with tax dollars from the people of Minnesota and administered through the Minnesota Historical Society.

Rølvaag's Novels and Other Writing

Rølvaag's artistic vision was shaped by the harshness of his early life in northern Norway, and by events including the tragic deaths of two of his children. His novels often depict life's severity, seen in people's struggles with the land, and with displacement and loss as immigrants in America. Many of his manuscripts are based partly on personal experiences, and on the experiences of his wife's family, who were immigrant homesteaders in South Dakota.



Manuscripts for (left) a short story, "Hevnen hører meg til, siger—," undated; (above) *In Those Days*, translated by Ansten Anstensen, with comments from Rølvaag collaborator Lincoln Colcord, 1927; (right) *Norsk læsebok*, a Norwegian-language reader, 1920.

NAHA IS GRATEFUL to have received another grant from the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund recently. This one will help us digitize a portion of the Norse-American Centennial papers. Work is expected to be completed in early 2023.



Snapshots of Ole, his wife, Jennie, and their children Ella and Karl, circa 1929.



Per Andreassen (left, Ole Rølvaag's nephew), Per's wife, Gudrun, and other family members, in Dønna, Norway, 1933.

Photos of Rølvaag's Life

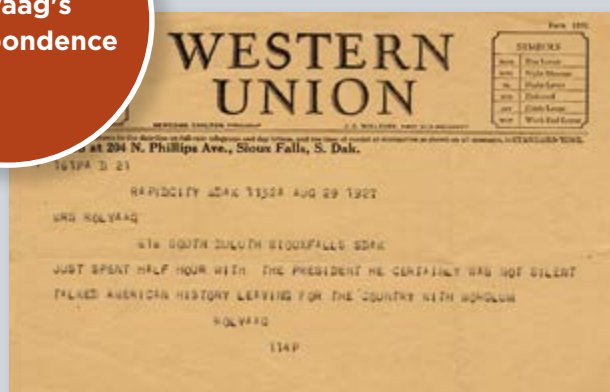


Ole Rølvaag on board the S.S. Bergensfjord in Norway, April 8, 1928. The ship was an ocean liner that sailed for the Norwegian America Line to the United States.

Hundreds of photographs provide another window into the life of O. E. Rølvaag—his youth as a student at Augustana Academy, his years as a faculty member at St. Olaf College, his marriage to Jennie Berdahl, and life in the Rølvaag family.

Rølvaag's Correspondence

Rølvaag was one of America's greatest immigrant writers. He worked to preserve and enrich Norwegian-American culture during his lifetime, which is evident in his voluminous correspondence in both English and Norwegian. His letters touch on subjects such as the place of Norwegian culture in American life, his defense of realism in his novels, the arts of writing and translating, church affairs, immigration history, the problems of publication and distribution, state and national politics, as well as personal experiences and family matters.



In a telegram to Jennie, on August 29, 1927, Rølvaag tells of meeting President Calvin Coolidge in South Dakota and going out to the country with Gutzon Borglum, the sculptor known for his work on Mount Rushmore.

Rølvaag spent time in the southern United States in his later years. A January 1931 postcard to his wife, Jennie, is signed "with a lot of love" and says that he is sending home a package that "contains old letters and dirty underclothes."





NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

1510 St. Olaf Avenue
Northfield, MN 55057
naha.stolaf.edu
email: naha@stolaf.edu
507-786-3221

Change Service Requested

Is your membership current?
Check the expiration date above
your address. Join or renew
online at naha.stolaf.edu.

Currents

The newsletter of the
Norwegian-American
Historical Association

Volume 183, Spring 2022

Currents Editor

Denise Logeland

Currents Designer

Jill Adler Design

**Norwegian-American Historical
Association Board of Directors**

Scott Knudson, President
Kim Kittilsby, Vice President
Ronald Johnson, Secretary
Kyle Jansson, Treasurer
Kristin Anderson
Annette Atkins
Marit Barkve
Kari Lie Dorer
Dan Dressen
Essam Elkorghli
Gracia Grindal
Arnstein Hjelde
Jim Honsvall
Ann Marie Legreid
Terje Leiren
Debbie Miller
Karen Lillehaugen Nasby
Daron Olson
Scott Richardson
Paul Rolvaag
Marci Sortor
Ingrid Urberg
Kristen Walseth

Staff

Amy Boxrud, Executive Director
Anna M. Peterson, Editor
Kristina Warner, Archivist
Marisa Campanaro,
Project Imaging Archivist
Karen Annexstad Humphrey,
Senior Advancement Officer

Norwegian-American
Historical Association
1510 St. Olaf Avenue
Northfield, MN 55057

**NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
FARIBAUT, MN
PERMIT NO. 21**



When you make a planned gift to NAHA, you become a vital partner in our mission to collect, preserve, and interpret the Norwegian-American experience. Your gift benefits both our association and the greater Norwegian-American and scholarly communities. Have you already included the association in your estate plans? Thank you! We want to recognize your generosity by including you in our Legacy Circle.



For more information, please contact NAHA Executive Director Amy Boxrud at

naha@stolaf.edu or 507-786-3221.