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2023 Archives Donors



Currents

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION | SPRING 2024 VOLUME 191

IMMIGRANTS &-CONFEDERATES

In Texas in the 1860s, loyalty to country meant supporting the Confederate States in the Civil War. Gunnar Nerheim's new book tells the stories of Norwegians who settled there and the choices they made.





on the

cover

Early

Norwegians in

Texas included

Carl Quested, a trusted and

relied upon

figure among

his fellow

immigrants in

Bosque County,

including some

who asked his

help with their

affairs while

they were away

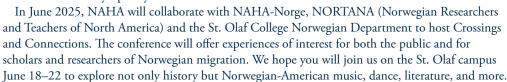
fighting in the Civil War.

)25: MARKING ITENNIAL AND BICENTENNIAL

an you hear it? The clock is ticking down to 2025. In addition to being the centennial year of NAHA, it's the bicentennial of the first organized Norwegian migration to North America. That's no coincidence, of course, since NAHA was founded in the wake of the 1925 Norse-American Centennial celebration nearly a century ago.

Planning for this double commemoration has already been a rewarding endeavor. Organizations across North America and Norway have come together to create Crossings, a grassroots transatlantic bicentennial that will last throughout 2025. If you haven't had a chance to do so, I encourage you to visit the Crossings website at crossings.norwegianamerican.com.

NAHA has a number of events in the works to commemorate the bicentennial. We will offer an overnight tour in April 2025 from the Twin Cities to Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Along the way, we will explore sites important to Norwegian-American and Native American history. The weekend will center on a performance of Giants in the Earth, a 1951 Pulitzer Prize-winning opera by composer Douglas Moore. Inspired by the novel by Ole Edvart Rølvaag, the opera will be staged by the South Dakota Symphony Orchestra.



During the first full week of October 2025, NAHA will partner with Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum for a tour in New York City. A replica of the sloop Restauration will sail from Stavanger, Norway, and is scheduled to arrive in New York on October 9, 2025—the same date the original Restauration arrived 200 years earlier. We will welcome the crew as they complete their journey. The tour also will explore the history and impact of Norwegian immigration in New York.

We plan to round out 2025 with a gathering to celebrate our own centennial. We'll continue to illuminate the collections in the NAHA archives by adding more digital exhibits, resource guides, and digitized collections to our website. In addition, our publications committee is planning a commemorative book to celebrate a century of publishing our journal, Norwegian-American Studies.

Keep an eye on our website and e-newsletters, as well as the Crossings website, for details as they become available. No matter where you live, we hope you will find opportunities to be part of this history in the making.

In anticipation,

Any Boxrex Amy Boxrud, Executive Director



in brief

INTERNSHIP LEADS TO VIRTUAL NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN HISTORY TRAIL

■ or St. Olaf College students, ◀ January is a distinct part of the school year. Known as "Interim," it's a time between semesters when students do a deep dive into just one academic subject, gain experience through internships, or pursue special interests. Ted Hoffman, a Norwegian, Nordic Studies, and Film Studies major, chose an Interim internship in the NAHA archives that let him combine his interests in Norwegian-American history and media.

The result is the virtual Norwegian-American History Trail of the Twin Cities. (View it at theclio.com/ tour/2468.) Working with NAHA staff members Amy Boxrud and Kristina Warner, Hoffman created the self-guided tour using a platform called Clio, a free mobile app and website. Clio uses the satellite-based Global Positioning System to show users the historic and cultural sites that are near them wherever they are in the United States.

Funding for the internship was provided by the St. Olaf College Norwegian Department. Here's what Hoffman says about working on the project.

Q: What interested you about this internship?

A: I have an interest in archives and the information we can find in them. The opportunity to dig through the Norwegian-American archives and show others some of that wealth of information was appealing to me.

Q: What skills did you learn or improve with this project?

A: I honed my skills in working with primary and secondary sources, to adapt them for a new medium and a different audience. It was fun and instructive to learn how to organize various primary sources and figure out how to build narratives using them.

Q: Did you learn anything new or surprising?

A: I knew Minnesota was shaped by Norwegian-American immigrants, but I didn't realize just how much! Much of the art and architecture in the Twin Cities was designed or constructed by Norwegians or people of Norwegian descent, which was fascinating to learn about.



in brief

BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

As we continue our series featuring our dedicated board of directors, we highlight two members of our Executive Committee whose board service will end this fall due to term limits.



DEBBIE MILLER St. Paul, Minnesota Board member since 2016

Debbie is a former librarian and researcher for the Minnesota Historical Society. She serves as an at-large member of the Executive Committee, as well as chair of the Archives Committee.

Why I serve: "I joined the NAHA board because I knew and respected people on the board, because I have some expertise in Scandinavian and immigration history that I wanted to share. and because I believe that immigration is central to America's story."



SCOTT KNUDSON St. Paul, Minnesota Board member since 2016

Scott served a two-year term as treasurer before he was elected president of NAHA in 2020. He has continued to serve on the Finance Committee, and his experience as an attorney has been an asset in his work on the Governance Committee.

Why I serve: "Past NAHA president John Tunheim recommended me to serve on NAHA's board. Besides his endorsement, I was very interested in NAHA's mission. having researched my family's Norwegian roots, learned Norwegian in college, and lived in Oslo."

Meet Jenny Wright

NAHA welcomes Jenny Wright as our new member-donor coordinator. A native of Moorhead, Minnesota, Wright recently moved back to her home state from Austin, Texas. She earned a B.S. in business and finance from the University of Minnesota, as well as the CPA certification.

Since joining NAHA part-time in October 2023, Wright has enjoyed putting her skills to use in the nonprofit sector and getting to know our members. She also has begun exploring the NAHA archives and was delighted to find primary sources created by and about her own Norwegian-American family.



BIENNIAL MEETING

Save the date! Join us Saturday, October 26, on the campus of St. Olaf College for a day devoted to history, socializing, and supporting the work of NAHA. Between sessions, we'll hear updates from NAHA leadership and elect new board members. Keep an eye on our website for more details about registration, speakers, and virtual presentations: naha.stolaf.edu/events. All are welcome! We hope you will join us and invite a friend.

A GIFT FOR THE FUTURE

The generosity of Richard and Diane Halom found expression through life insurance.

▼ here are many ways for members to make a lasting impact on NAHA. For people considering a financial contribution, the donation of life insurance is a little known yet powerful option. Reverend Richard and Diane Halom used it to amplify their generosity.

Richard Halom and his friend, the late John Thorson, became lifetime members of NAHA in 1965, while they were still studying at seminary. At the time, they were the only two class members with Norwegian roots at the historically German Wartburg Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa. Raised in a Norwegian-American community, Halom became more curious about his own roots in this new setting, and Thorson suggested they both join NAHA.

That same year, while working as a pastoral intern in the Los Angeles area, Halom met his future wife, Diane, who was the church organist. The couple were married the next year, and they went on to serve Wisconsin congregations in the Greater Milwaukee, East Central, and South-Central Synods. Richard Halom is now a visitation minister for First Lutheran Church in Stoughton, Wisconsin.

From Snertingdal to Rock Prairie

Halom's Norwegian roots go back to Snertingdal in Oppland, where his ancestors left in 1871. In America, they made their home in Rock Prairie, Wisconsin, about seven miles west of Beloit, and they became members of the Rock Prairie Church, also known as Luther Valley Lutheran Church. Luther Valley is remembered as one of the earliest Norwegian pioneer congregations in Wisconsin, established in 1844, after Koshkonong and Jefferson Prairie.

It was Halom's Luther Valley roots that inspired the couple's generous gift of life insurance to NAHA. Luther Valley Cemetery is the final resting place for several generations of family members, and the Haloms also plan to be buried there. As they've made plans for that stage of life, Richard Halom says he has found words in Psalm 79 to express their desire to give to NAHA: "Then we your people, the flock of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise."

"The Haloms have shown remarkable commitment to the mission of NAHA through this forward-thinking gift," says NAHA Executive Director Amy Boxrud. "As we look to our next century, gifts like this ensure that NAHA will continue to thrive in our work of inspiring connections to Norwegian-American experiences."





(Above) The Reverend Richard and Diane Halom at home in Stoughton, Wisconsin. (Left) Inside Luther Valley Lutheran Church near Beloit, Wisconsin, circa 1876.

The Greater Impact of Life Insurance

A gift of life insurance creates a lasting impact for the organization that receives it and advantages for the donors as well. Life insurance is a costeffective gift that can be made confidentially. And life insurance is secure: It is not included in probate, and the donor's wishes can't be changed by heirs. In some situations, donating a life insurance policy to a charity also qualifies the donor for a tax deduction.

A nonprofit organization can be named as the beneficiary on an existing policy, or a new policy can be purchased and given, making the nonprofit both the policy owner and the beneficiary.

It's always best to consult your financial planner and insurance agent when you're considering any kind of financial gift. Contact Amy Boxrud at 507-786-3221 or naha@stolaf.edu with any questions you or your advisors may have.



(Above left)

Newspaper

publisher Johan

Reinert Reiersen was the father

of Norwegian

settlements in

Texas. (Above

right) An

unidentified

Norwegian-

homestead in

American

Texas.



THEIR NEW HOME, DIVIDED

Early Norwegian immigrants in Texas found rolling prairies and abundant water—and slavery and a brewing Civil War. Historian Gunnar Nerheim tells their stories.

t's not so surprising that a professor from Stavanger, Norway, would be interested in the history of his country's oil industry, or that his research on the industry would lead him to Texas. But Gunnar Nerheim, now an emeritus professor of modern history from the University of Stavanger, surprised himself by taking a detour into an earlier era: the development of Norwegian settlements in Texas. He hesitated before jumping into it.

"So many Norwegians are fully convinced they already know that story" from accounts of Cleng Peerson and early Norwegian immigration to the United States, Nerheim writes in the introduction to his book *Norsemen Deep in the Heart of Texas: Norwegian*

Immigrants 1845–1900. Published this year by Texas A&M University Press, the book was first published in Norwegian by Fagbokforlaget in 2020.

Norwegian immigration and settlement in the United States is often examined through a Midwestern lens, so Nerheim's Texas focus will be less familiar for many readers. The Norwegian population in Texas was much, much smaller than in the Midwest, with just a little more than 300 people who were born in Norway appearing in the 1860 census in Texas; the number in Wisconsin that year was 21,442, Nerheim writes. Still, the experiences of the Norwegian Texans provide a unique picture of how Norwegian and American cultures met and how people adapted.

Nerheim does not try to give a comprehensive picture of life in the Norwegian communities of Texas. There is little in the book about the lives of women, for example. His focus is on the push and pull forces of migration, the economy and politics of the southern states, slavery, secession, and especially Norwegian immigrants' involvement in the Civil War. But he also looks at the post-war years, telling how Norwegian settlements continued to grow and looking at their place in the state's agricultural economy, its social institutions, and its politics.

In these pages, short excerpts from Nerheim's book form the answers to a few key questions about the Norwegians in Texas.

—Denise Logeland

How did Norwegian settlements form in Texas?

N: "The first Norwegian colony in Texas was established in Brownsboro in Henderson County, East Texas, by Johan Reinert Reiersen in 1845. By 1850, the largest Norwegian settlement was found at Four Mile Prairie, on the border between Kaufman and Van Zandt counties. In the mid-1850s, a new Norwegian settlement was established on the frontier with the Indians, in Bosque County, west of Waco in central Texas.

"The Norwegian settlers in antebellum Texas followed two very distinct migration chains from Norway. The Reiersen chain had two main sources: some small municipalities in Aust-Agder County in southern Norway and a few municipalities in Hedmark County in eastern Norway. Toward the end of his life, [Cleng] Peerson, 'the father of Norwegian immigration,' became an ardent promoter of Norwegian migration to Texas. Several Norwegians originally from western Norway followed him to Texas from

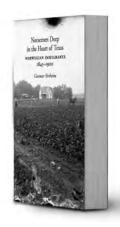
the Norwegian mother colony in LaSalle County, Illinois."

N: "Even though the 1814 Norwegian Constitution propagated freedom of speech, newspapers in Norway around 1840 continued to encounter mild censorship from the authorities. Political and economic liberalism had still not had its breakthrough in Norway. Reiersen was in favor of both. In his newspaper [Reiersen owned and published Christiansandsposten], he was apt to criticize the abuses and arrogance of civil servants and was proud to have become a constant nuisance in the eyes of conservative state officials. Reiersen felt strongly that the freedom lacking in Norway was already in place in America. He began to publish positive articles about America, its political freedom, and the availability of cheap land for all."

N: "On a hot and humid day in early August 1843, Reiersen arrived in New Orleans. During his stay, he met the consul of the Republic of Texas, who told him that Texas was very eager to attract European settlers as well as a Norwegian colony. Reiersen listened







closely to the arguments in favor of Texas but stayed with his original plan to visit some of the Norwegian settlements in the northern states first."

What was Texas like in the 1840s and 1850s, when the earliest Norwegians arrived?

N: "The terms 'Upper South' and 'Lower South' are often used to characterize two different social and economic regions in antebellum Texas. The Lower South included almost all of the Gulf Coastal Plain. This was the land of cotton and slavery, a land dominated by the

MORE ON NORWEGIANS IN THE CONFEDERATE ARMY

Gunnar Nerheim cites these as valuable sources in his book. For more on Norwegian Texans generally, view the NAHA digital exhibit "Norwegians In Texas" at https://scalar.usc.edu/works/norwegians-in-texas/index .

- → Genealogical work done by Derwood Johnson, published in Norge i Texas.
- → The county history Bosque County: Land and People.
- → The Civil War Database at Vesterheim, the National Norwegian-American Museum and Heritage Center in Decorah, Iowa.
- The web page borgerkrigen.info.
- → "A number of letters written by Norwegians who served in the Confederate Army have survived and been published," including by NAHA, Nerheim writes. "Some of the young men from Bosque County who had established a close and warm relationship with the much older Norwegian pioneer Carl Questad wrote to him after they left for the war.... Large parts of Questad's private archive were given to the Norwegian-American Historical Association.... C. A. Clausen and Derwood Johnson edited and translated the letters from Norwegian to English and published them under the title 'Norwegian Soldiers in the Confederate Forces' in Norwegian-American Studies." See volume 25, 1972, pages 105-141.

plantation type of agriculture. Many of the settlers of this region had grown up in the Chesapeake Bay colonies of Maryland and Virginia and in the tidal swamps of South Carolina and Georgia.... [The Upper South] is sometimes described as the 'Yeoman South' in contrast to the 'Plantation South'.... The main ethnicities represented among the early settlers in the Upper South were English, Scots-Irish, Scots, and Germans. The agricultural economy of the Upper South was dominated by yeoman farmers, independent freeholders, with few slaves. Cotton was not the major cash crop."

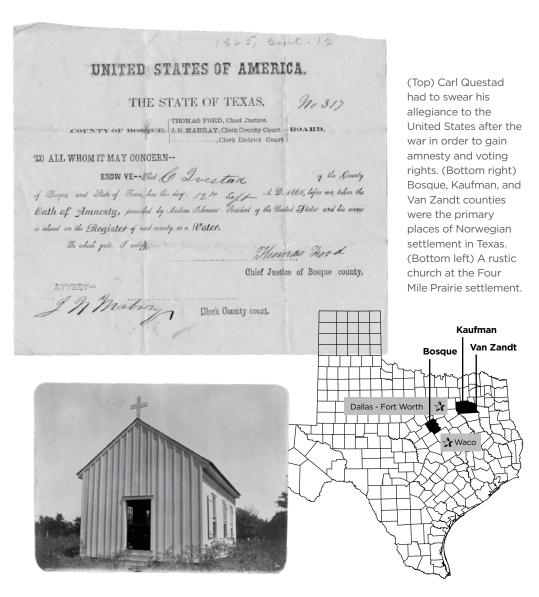
N: "Texas was still a part of Mexico when Anglo-American colonization began in the 1820s.... After the Texas Revolution in 1836, Texans 'were quick to give slavery all the guarantees that it had never been afforded by Mexican governments,' Randolph B. Campbell observed. During the next decades, people from states of the Lower South began largescale migration to Texas, settling in the eastern timberlands and south central plains.... The majority of the population in the prairie counties in north and central Texas west of Dallas came from the Upper South."

N: "Most of the neighbors of the Norwegian immigrants in Bosque County [northwest of Waco] were born in and migrated from the Upper South."

N: "Norwegians in East Texas lived in a region totally dominated by the social practices and institutions of the Lower South."

What did Norwegian immigrants think about slavery?

N: "Norwegian immigrants in East Texas, but also in Bosque County, were very much aware that they had settled in a slave state.... The Norwegians felt uncomfortable about slavery. The topic was seldom if ever mentioned in letters to family and friends in Norway."



N: "The slavery question proved to be complicated ... for Norwegian immigrants living in Texas, but also for immigrants in the Midwest. Before the Civil War, the orthodox Norwegian-American Lutheran Church in the Midwest [which was called the Norwegian Synod and adhered to the ideas of the state church in Norway] defended slavery on theological grounds, and for more than a decade after the Civil War ... held the view that slavery was not a sin."

N: "Since slavery was the law of the land and part of the Constitution, Lutherans followed the classic pattern formulated by Martin Luther during the Knights' Revolt and the Peasants' War in Germany in the 1520s. Luther had preached absolute allegiance to the temporal governing authorities."

N: "The Eielsen Synod [followers of Pastor Elling Eielsen, who was a pietist and admirer of Hans Nielsen Hauge] had taken a clear stand on the question of slavery

in its constitution as early as 1846; it 'condemned slavery in scathing terms,' wrote [Theodore] Blegen."

N: "None of the Norwegians in Bosque County owned slaves. Some of the Norwegians in East Texas, however, were slave owners. The brother of Johan R. Reiersen, George Reiersen, owned nine slaves. In the slave schedule for Kaufman County in 1860, the Norwegian Erick Bache was listed as the owner of a female slave, 33 years old. Thomas Fasting Grøgaard also owned slaves....The Norwegian immigrants mentioned above lived in East Texas and were much better assimilated to the dominant slave culture than were the Norwegians in Bosque County."

What did the Texas Norwegians do when war broke out, and they had to decide whether they would fight to defend slavery and secession?

N: "As long as enlistment in the Confederate Army was voluntary, many Norwegians abstained from joining. When it became apparent that the Confederates would not 'whip' the Union forces within a year, the Norwegians faced strong community pressure to enlist and show their patriotism. Right or wrong, the Norwegians went to war for Texas."

N: "The conscription law of April 1862 can be used as a watershed in the discussion of Norwegians in the Confederate Army.... [From] countless primary sources,

it can be concluded that a remarkable number of young Norwegians in East Texas enlisted voluntarily in 1861. The majority of Norwegians in Bosque County, however, enlisted in spring 1862 or later."

N: "By spring 1862, the most eager Confederate patriots in Bosque County had lost patience with the lack of patriotism shown by their fellow citizens, not least the Norwegians.... [A Bosque County "safety" committee resolved that] 'should any man now living in our midst ... be guilty of using language derogatory of the Southern Confederacy or its cause, or by any act giving evidence that he is unfriendly to the Confederate government, that the committee test him by requiring him to show his fidelity ... by enlisting in the army of the Southern Confederacy, and if he refuses, give him a free pass to leave for the Lincoln government, and if he refuses to do either, he shall be regarded and treated as an alien enemy and as a spy, for which he shall be executed by the committee."

N: "Knud Salve Knudson joined Company E in the Second Texas Infantry in Van Zandt County on August 29, 1862.... According to their colonel, the unit consisted of second-hand recruits. Many should have been exempted

because of health. But the largest problem, the colonel maintained, was their lack of faith in the Confederacy. About 20 of the most able-bodied soldiers had deserted.... It is still unknown whether Knudson was a deserter or signed up with a different Confederate unit."

N: "The most outspoken and strong supporter of the 'Southern cause' among Norwegians in East Texas was Johan R. Reiersen. His views are well documented in two letters he wrote to his oldest son, Oscar.... If the Confederates lost ... he would emigrate to Mexico, [Reiersen wrote to his son], 'far from the bristle of the accursed Yankee race, and ... make us a happy home under the genial climate in one of the most favored countries of the globe. I wish you had studied Spanish instead of German for such an event."

Too Close to Slavery?

"In spring 1867, while the Norwegian community in Texas was in uproar over Ole Nystøl's capture by the Indians, the Norwegian Texans Poul Poulson, his son Casper, and Ole Ween sailed from New Orleans to Norway. Their main aim was to recruit and sign indenture contracts with young Norwegians in the communities in Hedmark they had emigrated from. Poul Poulson had gone into a joint venture with the lawyer William McKerral in Waco. Laborers hired through Poulson and McKerral, it was announced, would cost farmers 65 dollars for one year. The money would cover travel expenses from Norway to Texas, as well as the fee of the agent. Every laborer would sign a 12-month contract. On arrival, the farmer would be responsible for the laborer's shelter. clothing, and provisions. At the end of one year, the employer would pay the laborer 30 dollars.

"The scheme was announced just two years after Appomattox and caught the interest of several newspapers. The New Orleans paper the Picayune reported that Poulson, 'a Norwegian gentleman

of good standing in northern Texas,' was ready to leave New Orleans for his native land to recruit the 'services of a larger number of his countrymen as farm laborers in Texas.' The plan to recruit Norwegian laborers reeked of indentured slave labor, some argued. Poulson's partner McKerral in Waco defended the scheme in the Louisiana paper The Planter's Banner, and his letter was later printed in the Picayune, as well as in the Evening Post in New York on March 13, 1867, under the heading 'Norwegian Laborers in Texas.' According to McKerral, Norwegian laborers were 'strong, large boned, men and women, honest, sober, and industrious. They have no disposition to run about, they are always at home, humble, and tractable. It is true they do not speak English, but we do not hire men and women to talk, but to work'.... Norwegians were raised in humble circumstances, according to McKerral. They knew nothing but work and obeyed orders promptly. 'They work in Norway 16 hours in a day, but I do not suppose we should require that much from them."



2023 ARCHIVAL **ONATIONS**

BY KRISTINA WARNER, ARCHIVIST

¶ he collections in the NAHA archives grow yearly thanks to donations. We want to extend our heartfelt gratitude to those who have donated and continue to donate these important primary source materials. A few of the recently donated collections are noted here.

Reverend Thorstein Moen Diaries, 1875-1888

Born in Lysefjord, near Stavanger, Norway, Moen attended Strand Seminary for three years and then taught school for eight years. He emigrated in 1874, going to the United States. On November 8, 1874, he was ordained from Augsburg Seminary in Minneapolis. He served congregations in the Osakis, Henning, Battle Lake, Clitherall, and Leaf Mountain areas of Minnesota.

Eidsvold Family Papers, circa 1880–1996

The Eidsvolds were entrepreneurs and prominent members of the community, both in Minneapolis and Alexandria, Minnesota. In Minneapolis, the family's grocery and creamery business occupied a Riverside Avenue building known as the Eidsvold Block in the early 1900s. Henry Eidsvold, part of the family's second generation in America, began a company wholesaling tobacco and confectionary products, which eventually became Henry's Foods, a major distributor of groceries, food service, paper, and hardware products throughout the Midwest that is still in existence today. The Eidsvold collection also contains material from the Pryts family, to whom they were related through marriage. Hans Pryts also was a successful Norwegian immigrant grocer in Minneapolis. His brother Peter Pryts became an alderman in Minneapolis's 11th ward.

Nidaros Lodge #1-001, Sons of Norway, 1904-2022

Though it was named for the city now known as Trondheim, Norway, the Nidaros Lodge was formed in Minneapolis. It is the original Sons of Norway lodge and has been in existence for 125 years. The collection contains meeting minutes, songbooks, records of rituals and orders of business, anniversary books, and more.

Synneve Brugjeld Skrenes Papers, 1881-1956

Synneve Brugjeld of Balestrand, Norway, arrived in the United States with her family in 1848. In 1865, after the end of the Civil War, the family moved to Emmet County, Iowa. The collection contains family photographs, books, and personal letters of Synneva Brugjeld Skrenes.

ARCHIVAL DONORS IN 2023

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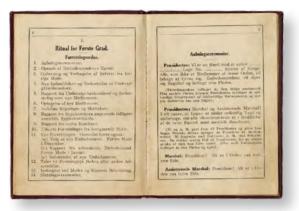


Skrenes family photos include this tractor, possibly a Hart and Parr from the early 1900s.



Hans Pryts's trip to Norway, circa 1900.

A 1923 Sons of Norway handbook of lodge rituals includes ceremonies for the institution of new officers.



The Minnesota Creamery was an Eidsvold family business in the early 1900s.





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

Currents

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WHEN YOU MAKE A PLANNED GIFT

it benefits NAHA, the greater Norwegian-American community, and generations of researchers to come.

Have you already included NAHA 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.