

NAHA's proud publishing history **P. 2**

New for your reading and listening lists **P. 4**

Currents

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NORWEGIAN AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION | FALL 2025 VOLUME 197



A Century of Stories in 10 Objects

Celebrating 100 years of collecting in the NAHA archives

NAHA Publications at 100



From its beginning 100 years ago, NAHA was committed to publishing research on Norwegian American life. During the past century, we have published 73 books and 42 (soon to be 43!) volumes of the journal *Norwegian American Studies*.

The books are too numerous to name in this column (you can see a full list in the centennial exhibit on our website), but I will mention a few that have impacted me professionally and personally: Solveig Zempel's *In Their Own Words*, Odd S. Lovoll's *Norwegians on the Prairie*, and a volume edited by Marion John Nelson, *Material Culture and People's Art Among the Norwegians in America*.

In 2024, we were able to share Bodil Stenseth's *Fru Muus' Klage* with English-language readers, thanks to masterful editing and translation by Kari Lie Dorer and Torild Homstad, who produced *Muus vs. Muus: The Scandal that Shook Norwegian America*. NAHA plans to publish another thought-provoking translation in 2026. Stay tuned.

Our journal, *Norwegian American Studies*, has complemented our book publishing program from the start. While the journal has undergone several changes since its inception, perhaps the most significant one occurred in 2019. Since then, *Studies* has been an annual, published in collaboration with the University of Minnesota Press and available both in print and digitally. The rich diversity of content in the journal is showcased in an anthology that NAHA published this year. *Making History: A Century of Norwegian American Studies* highlights ten articles—one from each decade of the journal. An introduction by Annette Atkins gives context to the collection.

Talented and dedicated editors have shaped NAHA's robust publishing program. It is noteworthy that each of them has served a long term; NAHA has had only five editors over the past 100 years. The first, Theodore Blegen, served from 1925 to 1960. Kenneth Bjork ushered publications through the next 20 years. Odd Lovoll was editor for the following two decades, then Todd Nichol from 2000 to 2017. Most recently, since 2018, I have had the honor of overseeing NAHA publications.

This year offers an opportunity to reflect on NAHA and its remarkable ability to inspire connections to Norwegian American experiences through discovery, scholarship, and stewardship. This story—our story—continues. Thank you for being a part of it.

With Gratitude,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Anna".

Anna M. Peterson, Editor

ON THE COVER

During World War II, women mended clothing for war relief efforts at the Norwegian Sewing Room in New York City. This photo, taken by Campbell Norsgaard, is one of many photos, films, and other objects in the Campbell Norsgaard collection at NAHA.

Crossings and Connections Conference Wrap-Up

Our conference is now history! *To hundre takk* to all who joined us for a stimulating five days that focused on migration history and marked a Norway-to-North America migration bicentennial. Thanks, also, to our co-hosts: NAHA-Norge, NORTANA, and the St. Olaf College Norwegian Department.

If you weren't able to attend the June conference and wish you'd been there, you're in luck: Twelve presentations from the program are available on the NAHA YouTube channel, thanks to a grant from the Sons of Norway Foundation. Enjoy them on your own or with a group.



› WATCH CROSSINGS PRESENTATIONS AT
crossings.norwegianamerican.com/



Conference participants took time out on Saturday morning for a group photo.

“The blend of traditional topics and contemporary perspectives made this an incredibly rich experience.”

—Response from a conference attendee

By the Numbers

Over the five-day conference, there were:

275
participants
in total

111
NAHA members
taking part

91
speakers

51
participants
from countries
other than the
United States

25
U.S. states
represented

5
countries
represented

16
sponsors
giving support

New and Noteworthy Reading and Listening

These new releases each illuminate an aspect of the close ties between Norway and North America over the past two centuries.

A Novel Sight: The Restoration Sails to America

by Knut Djupedal

Djupedal examines the voyage of the sloop *Restauration* in 1825 within the context of a vessel sailing from Europe to America in the 1820s. Based on documentation from the early 1800s, he shares the facts that gave birth to the epic of Norway's first organized migration in the modern era.

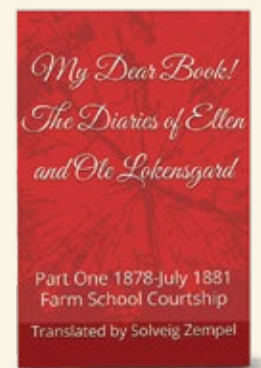


Fønix, 2025 / 196 pages; hardcover, \$47

My Dear Book! The Diaries of Ellen and Ole Løkensgaard

translated by Solveig Zempel

This three-part publication contains an English translation of the diaries kept by Ellen Kravik Løkensgaard and her husband, Pastor Ole Løkensgaard, which are housed in the NAHA archives. The series provides an intimate look into the lives of Norwegian American immigrants and their communities in the decade between 1878 and 1888.



2024 / Kindle Edition; \$2.99 each or \$8.97 bundled

Mission to Oslo: Dancing with the Queen, Dealmaking with the Russians, Shaping History

by Tom Loftus

Loftus shares his adventures as ambassador to the Kingdom of Norway in the mid-1990s, during the momentous years of the first Clinton administration. A gifted storyteller, Loftus is the grandson of Norwegian immigrants as well as a former speaker of the Wisconsin State Assembly, the lower house of the state's legislature.



Little Creek Press, 2024 / 444 pages; paperback, \$25

200 Norwegians

This podcast series explores the lives of 200 Norwegians who have shaped the United States over the past two centuries. Hosted by journalist and recent immigrant to the U.S. Fredrik Kalstveit, the series is produced in collaboration with Vesterheim Museum and with support from the Norway House Foundation of San Francisco.

200norwegians.com



NAHA Members Recognized for Support of Climate-Controlled Vault



St. Olaf College honored donors to the new Special Collections and Archives vault with a plaque and reception. The new vault is shared by the college and NAHA. Those recognized June 20 at Rølvaag Memorial Library included NAHA lifetime members Ruth Crane (a former board and staff member,

center left in the photo) and Paul Rood (center right). NAHA members also were recognized on the plaque for their collective \$160,000 donation to the project. Other donors recognized were Barbara Rippley (far left) and Ruth and Susanne Olson (far right), representing their father, Duane Olson.

Board Member Spotlight

Kristin Anderson

*St. Paul, Minnesota
Board Member since 2018*

Anderson is professor emerita of art and design at Augsburg University in Minneapolis. As a former archivist for the university, she was a natural choice to serve as chair of the NAHA Archives Committee.

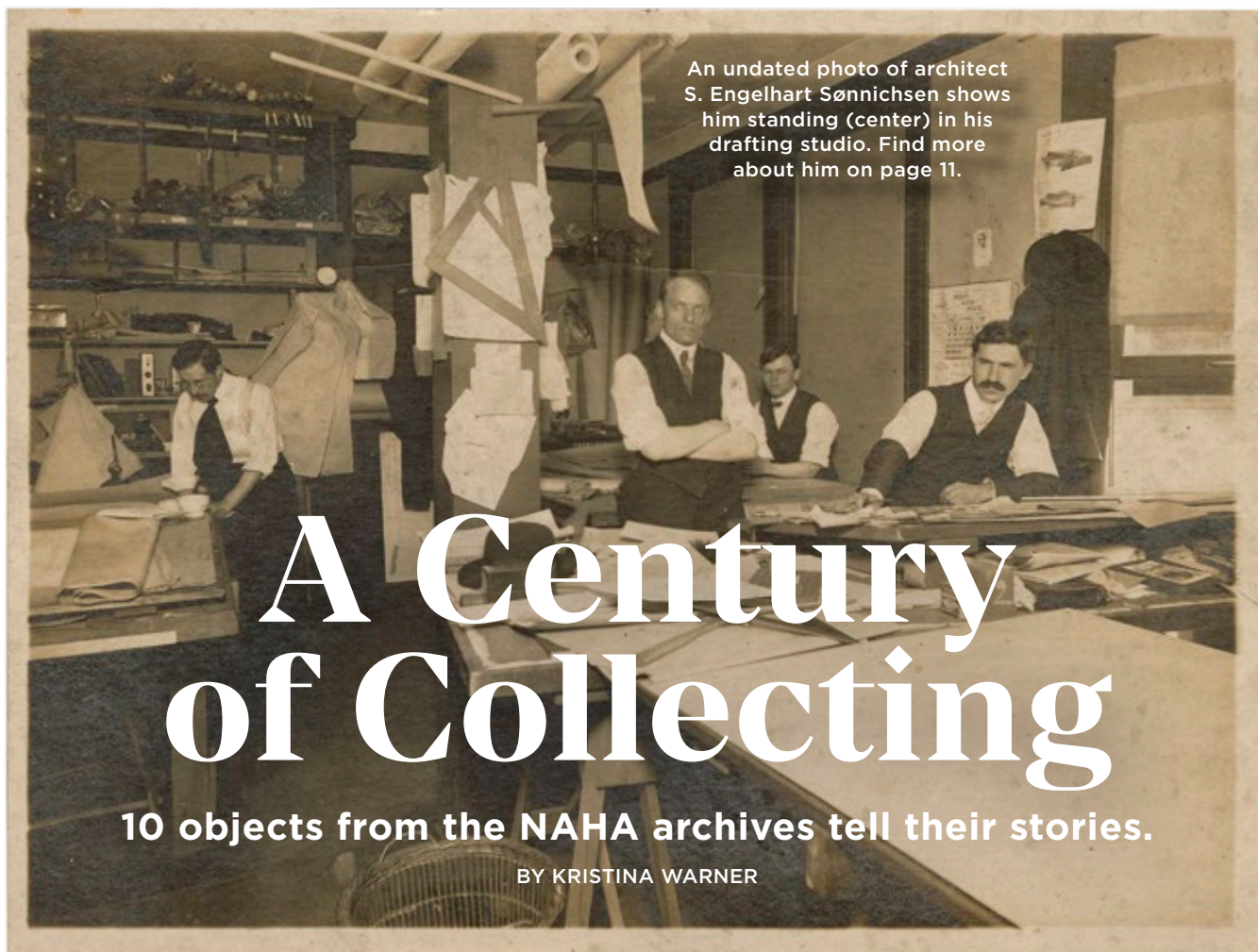


WHY I SERVE: "NAHA board member Dennis Gimmetstad and I served together on another board for many years, and after that concluded, Dennis suggested that I might be interested in the NAHA board. Interested, indeed! NAHA does wonderful things, and I am delighted to serve."

Accepting Board Nominations

The NAHA board benefits from the diverse skills, experience, and contributions of its members. Every two years, NAHA assesses its current needs as it seeks nominations for a new slate of board members. This year, we're beginning to gather names of prospective candidates for our next board election, which is scheduled to take place in October 2026, during our next biennial member meeting.

➤ **IF YOU ARE INTERESTED** in serving or wish to nominate someone, please contact NAHA Executive Director Amy Boxrud: boxrud@norwegianamericanhistory.org or 507-786-3221.



A Century of Collecting

10 objects from the NAHA archives tell their stories.

BY KRISTINA WARNER

The year 2025 marks two significant anniversaries: 200 years since the beginning of organized Norwegian migration to North America and 100 years since the founding of the Norwegian American Historical Association. It's no accident that our association was founded in 1925, the centennial year of Norwegian migration. NAHA was formed to collect and preserve the stories of that migration and its outcomes—both for the migrants themselves, their descendants, the culture that was left behind, and the cultures encountered and created in a new land.

NAHA's unique and invaluable archival collections hold countless stories of migration—of early settlement, return migration to Norway, and unexpected experiences across the globe. Artifacts in our archives trace the journeys of those who left Norway to settle across the United States, Canada, South America, and beyond. The stories these objects tell are both deeply personal and reflective of a larger historical movement.

To celebrate 100 years of collecting and safeguarding these stories, we've chosen 10 objects from our collections to highlight. They

offer a glimpse of the remarkable geographic reach and material diversity within the NAHA archives, yet they represent just a tiny fraction of the breadth and depth of NAHA's holdings.

Our archives hold musical compositions, religious tracts, photographs, glass plate negatives, pamphlets, literary manuscripts, and artworks. There are also films, audio recordings, handwritten letters, travel journals, mid-20th-century knitting patterns, and architectural blueprints.

Each object in the archives speaks in its own unique way about the Norwegian American experience. Together, our collections tell us how Norwegian Americans stayed connected on both sides of the ocean, how they adapted to new environments, how they preserved their heritage, and how they expressed their identities through their work, church life, communities, and creativity.

A century after NAHA began its work, we are still committed to collecting and preserving these material objects and the stories they tell. As we grow our archival collections, we ensure that the voices and visions of generations past will continue to resonate, inform, and inspire well into the future.

1840s

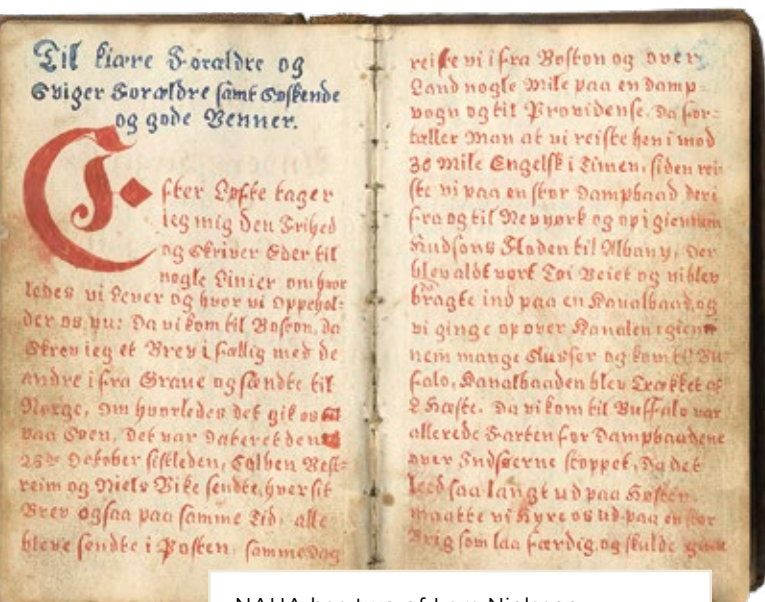
Lars Nesseim Vossing Amerikabrev Books

Lars Nielssen Nesseim (Nesheim) Papers (P0560)

"America letters were a dynamic factor, perhaps the most effective single factor" in promoting emigration from Norway, historian Carleton Qualey wrote. Written by emigrants to their family and friends back in Norway, the letters described sea and land journeys, the American landscape, work experiences, and day-to-day challenges. The letters weren't all rosy. Writers expressed both hopes and harsh realities.

One remarkable figure in preserving these letters was Lars Nielssen Nesseim (born circa 1792), a farmer from Voss, Norway. Nesseim took it upon himself to copy emigrant letters by hand, using ornate Gothic script and homemade ink. The leather-bound volumes he made circulated from farm to farm, gaining a broader readership than newspapers would reach.

Ivar Davidson Hustvedt, who donated one of the volumes to NAHA, described Nesseim as a self-taught and eccentric "original" with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves. He noted that Nesseim traveled extensively to borrow letters from their recipients, painstakingly copying each one with all its vivid details.



NAHA has two of Lars Nielssen Nesseim's Amerikabrev books. The Voss Folkemuseum and the Chicago History Museum also have volumes.



Reiersen's Texas travel journal includes his account of meeting with General Sam Houston. NAHA also has issues of Reiersen's pro-emigration publication *Norge og Amerika*.

1843

Johan Reiersen's Travel Journal

Johan Reiersen Papers (P0325)

Emigration sparked intense debate in Norway. Some viewed America as a land of opportunity, others warned of danger and disappointment there, or of Norway's loss of farmers and laborers. Newspapers often carried somber letters and grim accounts from settlers abroad.

Amid the debate, editor Johan R. Reiersen (1810-1864) emerged as a strong advocate for emigration. Writing in *Christianssandsposten*, a newspaper he founded, he critiqued Norway, arguing that the economic and social conditions there drove people to America.

In 1843, Reiersen traveled to investigate life in the United States firsthand. He eventually reached Texas, where he met Cleng Peerson, himself a pathfinder for Norwegian emigrants, and Sam Houston, then president of the Republic of Texas. Houston's interest in establishing a Norwegian colony in Texas strengthened Reiersen's belief in the promise of America for Norwegian emigrants.

1892

The Black Book

Svarteboka Collection (P0374)

Svartebøger, or black books, typically blended Christian prayers with pagan and folk beliefs. The “magical” knowledge in their pages—spells, rituals, incantations, occult formulas, and home remedies—was used for everything from healing and protection to summoning love, controlling the weather, and cursing enemies. The books had a dangerous reputation. The 18th-century Danish scholar Rasmus Nyerup described one black book, called *Cyprianus*, as “horrifying” and capable of summoning the devil. Out of fear or religious condemnation, many of the books were destroyed, but some survived.

One such book in NAHA’s collection was published in Chicago, likely in 1892, called *Den sorte bog, eller at opnaa hvad man vil* (*The Black Book, or To Accomplish What One Wants*). Despite its somewhat ominous and cryptic title, several of its formulas are aimed at helping the reader assimilate into the middle class, with guidance on personal hygiene, clothing, and social matters.

Two more black books held by NAHA are thought to have come to America with immigrants. One is the dreaded *Cyprianus*. Published in Copenhagen, it claims to be based on a manuscript from 1607. Another, called simply *Svarteboka*, was published in Fredrikstad, Norway. It contains formulas said to have been found in the Vesterålen Church in the 1830s.

1871

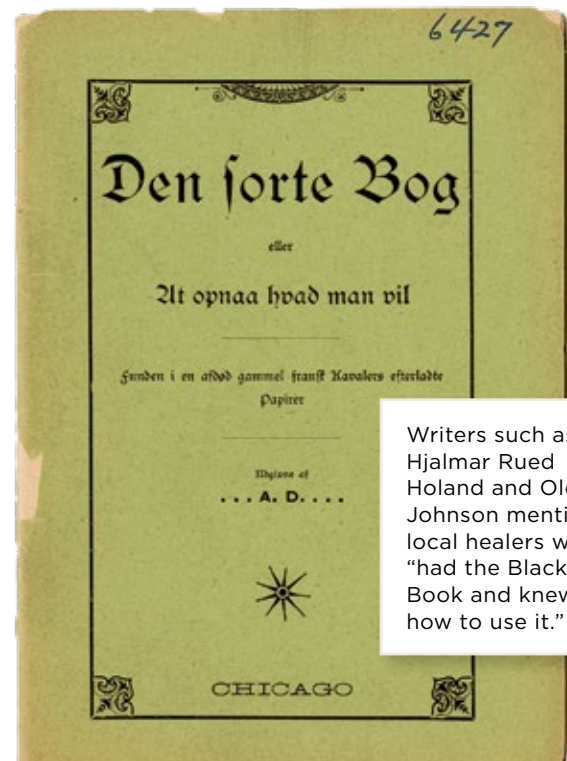
Chicago Anchor Line Pathfinder

Pamphlet Collection (P0436)

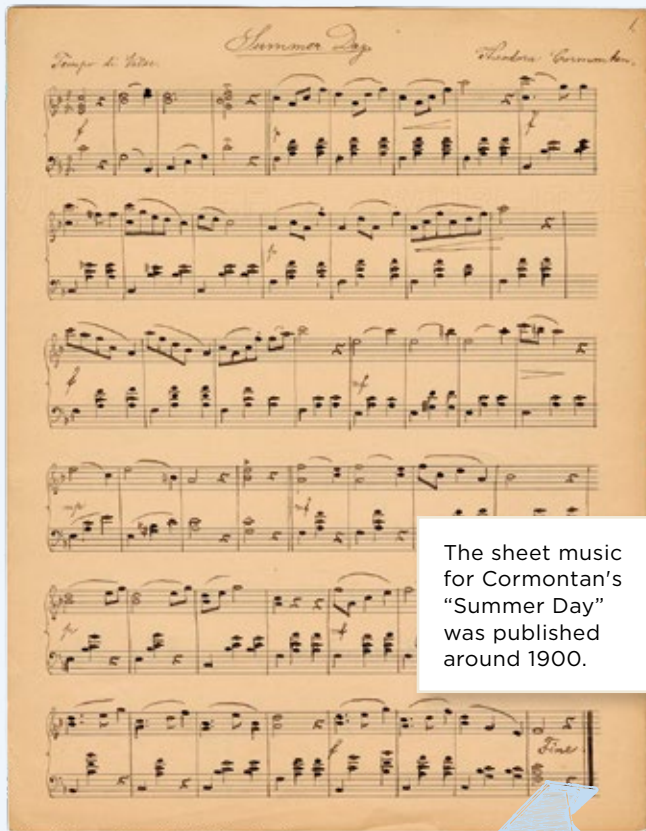
Pamphlets were essential tools for guiding emigrants during the era of westward expansion in the United States. States and territories produced promotional material that emphasized opportunities in their regions. Railroad companies had a particular stake in promoting settlement along their routes. Doing so increased freight and passenger traffic. The companies also profited by selling their government-granted land.

One pamphlet, published in Dano-Norwegian and donated to NAHA by Orm Øverland, has a title that translates as “*Reasons Why Jens Jensen and His Family Emigrated to America*.” Published in 1871 by the Chicago office of the Anchor Line steamship company, it offers practical advice on preparing to emigrate, while also promoting the Anchor Line, the Union Pacific Railroad, and the Nebraska Land Commission.

Anchor Line presented Jens Jensen’s story as a true account of emigration, but the narrative in the pamphlet was fabricated.



Writers such as Hjalmar Rued Holand and Ole S. Johnson mention local healers who “had the Black Book and knew how to use it.”



The sheet music for Cormontan's "Summer Day" was published around 1900.

EARLY 1900s

Theodora Cormontan Sheet Music

Theodora Cormontan Papers (P1726)

Theodora Cormontan (1840–1922) was a vocalist, pianist, and composer who grew up in Nord-Trøndelag and Agder, Norway. In addition to being a successful performer, she was one of the country's first female music publishers, and she focused her business on women composers. Her family came to Renville County, Minnesota, in 1887, where Cormontan continued composing and performing as well as teaching music. Her work was published in hymnals and periodicals.

Cormontan faced challenges due to declines in her health and in her family's income. She spent her final years in a Decorah, Iowa, nursing home, and her music largely disappeared from the public eye after her death. For some 90 years, her personal papers, including compositions, were stored with the family of the nursing home superintendent, until eventually being gifted to a pair of Minnesota musicians.

NAHA has a few Cormontan items, but many of her papers and compositions were returned to Norway and are held by the National Library there.

1910s

Madagascar Glass Plate Negative

Stolee Family Collection (P1702)

Photographs are an invaluable complement to written records. They show evidence of technological and cultural developments, and they help researchers reconstruct contexts that might otherwise be lost. Photos also personalize history, putting faces to names and placing events in a physical setting.

Glass plate negatives, widely used in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, are especially significant, because they can capture details with a clarity unmatched by later photographic formats. One such negative from the Stolee Family Collection at NAHA shows Ole Michael Stolee (1871–1946) and four other men wearing traditional Scandinavian clerical garb but surrounded by tropical vegetation.

Stolee and his wife, Martha, were missionaries to Madagascar from 1900 to 1911. The Stavanger-based Norwegian Mission Society began its work in Madagascar in 1867. By the late 1880s, Norwegian American missionaries like the Stolees also were serving on the island. The mission focused on spreading Lutheranism and building a self-governing Malagasy church by training local leaders. In 1950, the Malagasy Lutheran Church became a unified and autonomous body.

Ole Michael Stolee is second from left in this photo from Madagascar.



1927

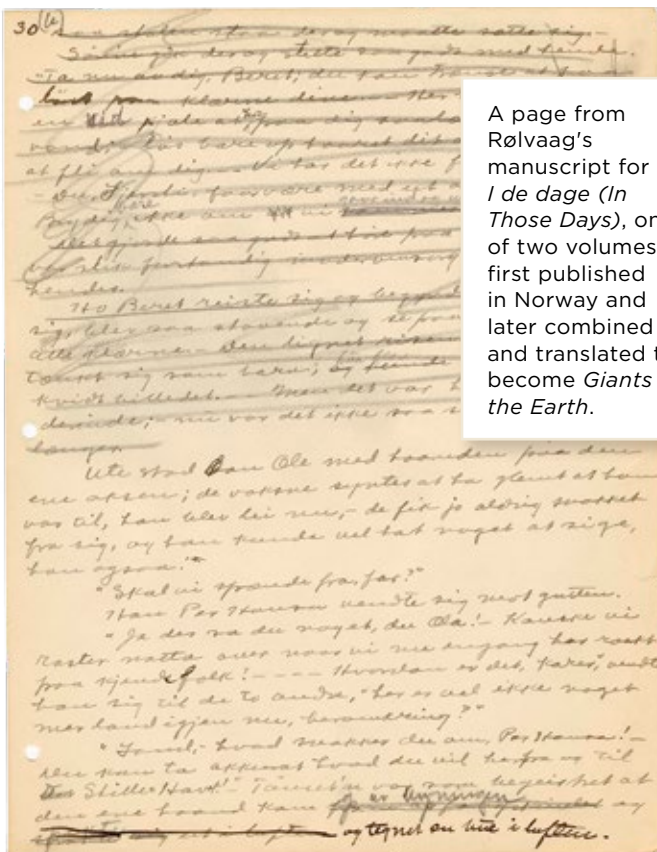
Ole Rølvaag Giants in the Earth manuscript

O. E. Rølvaag Papers (P0584)

Ole Edvart Rølvaag (1876–1931) stands out among the Norwegian American authors who have documented the immigrant experience. Exploring themes of identity, assimilation, and cultural preservation, he contributed a lasting literary legacy to America.

Rølvaag's best-known work, *Giants in the Earth*, is a powerful portrayal of Norwegian immigrants confronting the abundance and harshness of life on the Dakota prairie. He delves deeply into the psychological and emotional toll of migration, exploring the loneliness and cultural dislocation felt by migrants. The novel captures a constant tension between the desire to cling to one's roots and the pressure to fit into American society.

In his own life, Rølvaag favored holding onto roots, especially holding onto the Norwegian language in America. A founder of NAHA, he believed that "when a people becomes interested in its past life—seeks to acquire knowledge in order better to understand itself—it always experiences an awakening of new life."



A page from Rølvaag's manuscript for *I de dage* (*In Those Days*), one of two volumes first published in Norway and later combined and translated to become *Giants in the Earth*.

ROYAL NORWEGIAN ARMY SHOOTING MITTEN WITH TRIGGER FINGER

Mitten:
4 Needles No. 4. Knit tight.
Cast on 56 stitches on 3 needles - 28 on first, 14 on both second and third needles.
Knit 2, purl 2, five inches.
Knit 2 rows plain.
To widen for thumb: At the beginning of the first needle of the third row: †Widen out by knitting 2 stitches in 1. Knit 2 stitches. Widen again in the same way. Finish row. Knit plain 2 more rows.
Repeat from †, but knitting each time two more stitches between the widenings until there are 14 stitches between widenings.
Take off last 7 thumb stitches on a safety pin.
Cast on six stitches before next row - 3 on last, 3 on first needle.
Knit around plain 2 inches.
Take off last 7 stitches from last needle and first 7 stitches from first needle [14 in all] for trigger finger. Finish row.

Cast on 4 stitches before next row - 2 on last, 2 on first needle.
Knit plain 3 inches.
§First needle: Knit 1, knit 2 together. Knit until there are 3 stitches left, knit 2 together, knit one. This narrows 1 stitch at each end.
Second needle: Narrow as beginning of first.
Third needle: Narrow as end of first.
Repeat from § until 8 stitches are left. Break thread. Pull through each stitch.
Sew up.

Thumb:
Pick up 16 stitches from safety pin and six stitches from mitten. Divide on 3 needles.
Knit plain 2 3/8 inches.
Narrow and finish off as above for mitten.

Trigger finger:
Pick up 14 stitches from safety pin and 4 stitches from mitten. Divide on 3 needles.
Knit as thumb for 2 3/8 inches. Narrow and finish off as thumb.

This knitting pattern for a mitten with a trigger finger is among the WWII artifacts at NAHA.

1940s

World War II Knitting Pattern

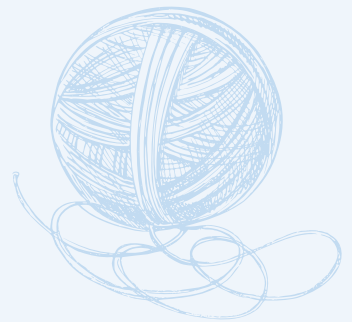
Hermana Rye Haugan Papers (P0908)

Norwegian American women

played a crucial role in supporting occupied Norway during World War II. The Camp Little Norway Club of Chicago (CLNCC), founded in November 1941, aided Camp Little Norway in Toronto by raising money and collecting supplies for Norway's

armed forces. The Chicago Norske Klub also led fundraising efforts, hosted charity events, and organized sewing and knitting drives.

One of the important contributions women made was knitting woolen garments for Norwegian soldiers. Some of the money raised by the CLNCC was used to purchase yarn, which was distributed to groups of knitters at Daughters of Norway lodges, Ladies' Aid societies, and other local clubs. These groups produced and sent a remarkable volume of handmade items to Norwegian forces until the CLNCC disbanded in 1946.



1945

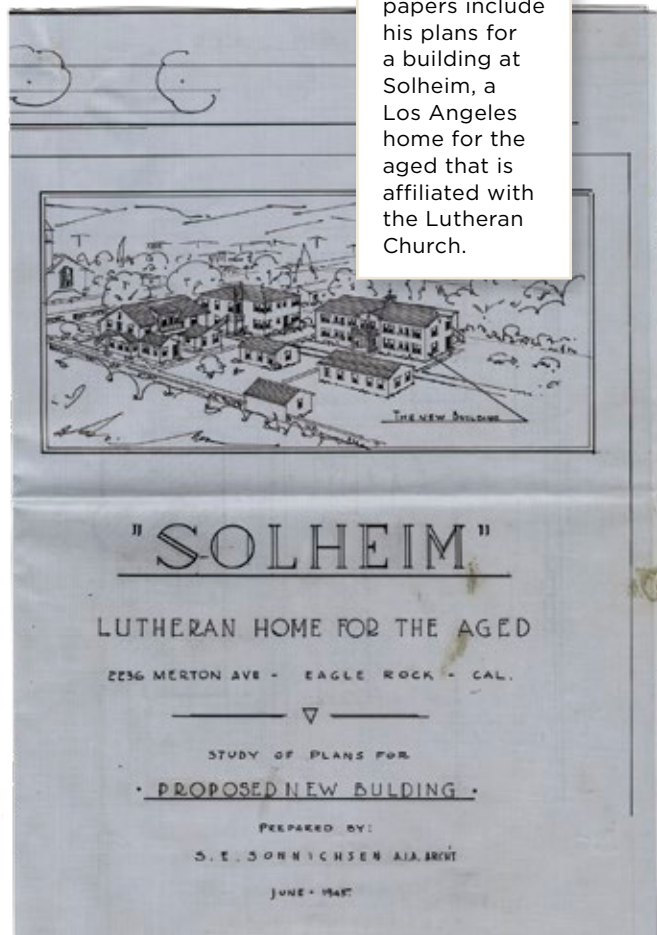
S. Engelhart Sønnichsen "Solheim" Blueprint

S. Engelhart Sønnichsen Papers (P0659)

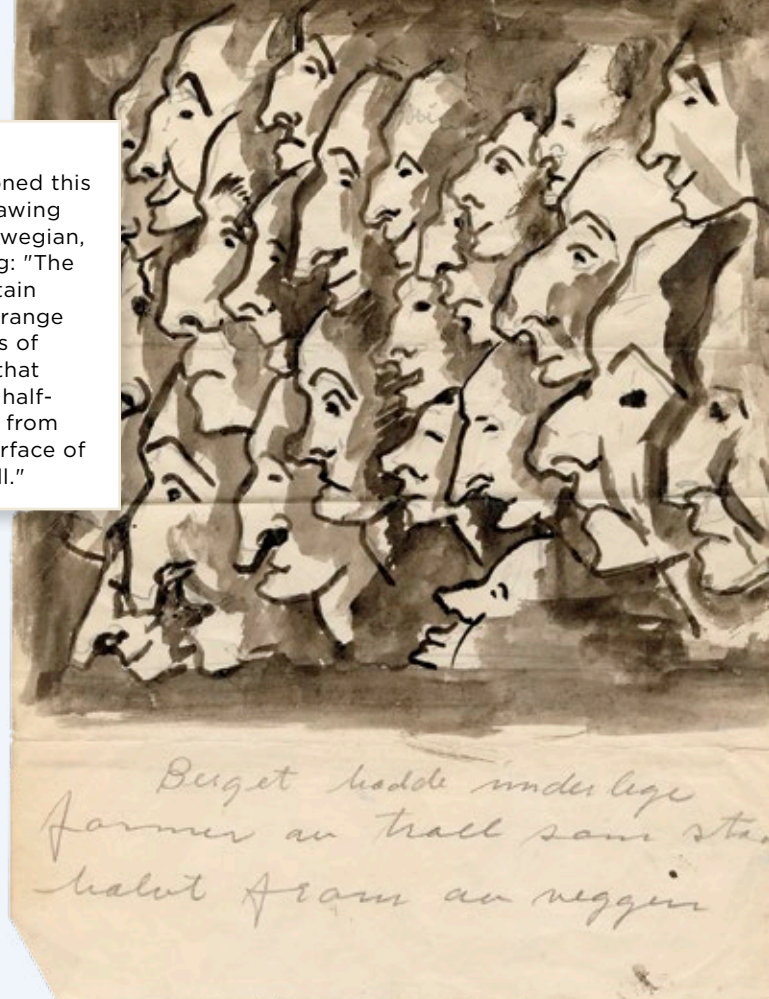
Norwegian American engineers and architects made significant contributions to infrastructure and technological development in the United States, particularly during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Many were immigrants with strong backgrounds in mathematics, mechanics, and applied engineering. Kenneth O. Bjork's *Saga in Steel and Concrete* (1947) highlights the role they played in major projects such as the Chicago drainage canal, railroads, dams, and skyscrapers.

Sønke Engelhart Sønnichsen (1878-1961) was a Norwegian-born architect whose work shaped the buildings of the American West. Sønnichsen was active as an architect during a period of rapid urban expansion, and he designed buildings that combined Scandinavian elements with American styles. By 1916, he had established his own practice in Seattle. He later partnered with theater architect B. Marcus Priteca in Los Angeles. During World War II, he worked with engineering and transportation firms.

Sønnichsen's papers include his plans for a building at Solheim, a Los Angeles home for the aged that is affiliated with the Lutheran Church.



Fletre captioned this ink drawing in Norwegian, writing: "The mountain had strange shapes of trolls that stood half-raised from the surface of its wall."



1960s

Lars Fletre Ink Study Drawing

Lars Fletre Papers (P1108)

Artists have fostered a strong sense of identity, community, and historical continuity among Norwegian Americans, while also introducing Norwegian history and cultural themes to the wider American public. Immigrant artist Lars Fletre (1904-1977) studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, afterward making his debut at the institute's prestigious 43rd Annual Exhibition of American Paintings and Sculpture in 1931.

Fletre went on to exhibit at galleries in Chicago and Brooklyn before returning to Norway in 1933. When the Fletre family moved back to Chicago in 1954, Lars and his wife, Helen, became deeply involved in cultural organizations such as DeLiSa (short for Det Litterære Samfund, The Literary Society), the Chicago Norske Klub, and the American Scandinavian Foundation. In 1962, Lars Fletre established his Vossing Art Studio near their home, continuing his lifelong dedication to art and Norwegian American heritage. ●



AN EVENING ON **SNOOSE** BOULEVARD



Saturday, October 25, 5 pm
McNamara Alumni Center, Minneapolis

Connect with fellow members to toast to NAHA's first century and the years to come! Enjoy dinner plus entertainment from award-winning storyteller **Kevin Kling** and **Ole Olsson's Old Time Orkestra**.



➤ **TICKETS** are on sale now through October 15. Early bird pricing until September 30.
norwegianamericanhistory.org.

THE NORWEGIAN **DISCOVERY** OF AMERICA

AND THE CREATION OF
A NORWAY IN AMERICA



Thursday, October 23, 4 pm CDT
Tomson Hall 280, St. Olaf College

Presenter **Dr. Henrik Olav Mathiesen**.
Co-sponsored with the St. Olaf College Norwegian department.



➤ **STREAMED** on the St. Olaf website at
stolaf.edu/multimedia/

NAHA Norwegian American Historical Association

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Denise Logeland, Currents Editor
Jill Adler Design, Currents Designer

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