

The Borgens' gift for the archives **P. 4**

Bringing *Norgesbrev* to light **P. 10**

Currents

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NORWEGIAN AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION | WINTER 2025 VOLUME 198



At the Turning Points

Past leaders on what brought NAHA
this far and what's ahead

Our Fervent Hopes



Longtime NAHA administrator Lloyd Hustvedt wrote 50 years ago what he thought the organization would be like in 2025. Here's what he said:

"One cannot predict what the next 50 years will bring to the NAHA. We know that along the way a new generation will make up its membership and leadership. New scholars with new approaches will write our books. Our fervent hope . . . is that the association will prosper and that it will accomplish what the older generation only dreamt of in its most daring moments."

Hustvedt wrote those words 10 years before NAHA purchased its first personal computer. That purchase came decades before the first documents and photos were digitized, and nearly 40 years before NAHA hosted electronic presentations via Zoom.

It's impossible to predict 50 or 100 years into the future. Unanticipated technological, demographic, and educational changes will take place during that time. Historians and the public will ask new questions of documents and develop new interests.

However, one thing that will not change is the importance of NAHA's membership. Hustvedt understood that in 1975. He wrote:

"In order to safeguard the future we dream of, more members are needed to share the burden. Contributions over and above dues have increased remarkably over the past few years, but the base needs to be broadened."

NAHA's members and friends have continued to be generous with their donations, as is shown in our Centennial Campaign for the Archives. However, when that campaign is successfully completed, it will only enable us to sustain our current staffing.

How will we be able to offer new programming, such as podcasts featuring materials in our archives? Or keep our staff equipped with the latest technology? Or create apps that enable us to tie every letter, document, photo, and publication in our archives to its original physical location via GPS? Or help students learn about Norwegian American history and culture? Or respond to the ideas and dreams of our members, friends, students, and scholars?

I encourage you to be an active member of NAHA. Attend our events. Share your ideas with staff and board members. Tell friends and acquaintances about our publications, our archives, and our programs. Encourage others to become members. Increase your membership level. Include NAHA in your estate plans.

NAHA's future—whether we look forward five or 50 years—is in our hands.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kyle Jansson".

Kyle Jansson, President

ON THE COVER

The association's current and past presidents gathered for a portrait at NAHA's centennial banquet, October 25, 2025: (from left) John R. Tunheim, Karen Annexstad Humphrey, Kyle Jansson, Brian Rude, Dennis Gimmestad, and Scott G. Knudson.

Crown Prince Visits for Crossings Bicentennial

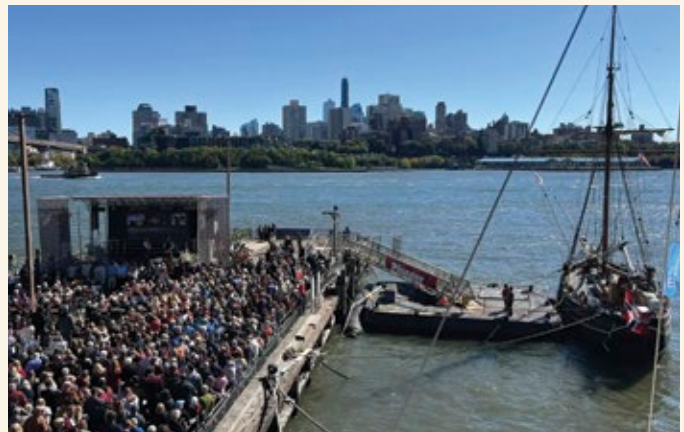
It was a historic week for NAHA and all of Norwegian America when His Royal Highness Crown Prince Haakon made an official visit to the United States October 6-9 to commemorate Crossings, the bicentennial of organized Norwegian migration.

The crown prince and his delegation began their official visit in the Midwest. In Decorah, Iowa, they visited Vesterheim Museum and Luther College. In the Twin Cities, they met with Minnesota Governor Tim Walz and visited Mindekirken (the Norwegian Lutheran Memorial Church) and Norway House, where they took part in a business conference.

On the morning of October 8, the delegation arrived at St. Olaf College, where their first stop was Rølvaag Memorial Library. NAHA staff shared materials from our WWII digitization project, and NAHA student workers Jean Butler and Otelia Lighthill presented their research. The college then held a special convocation in honor of the crown prince's visit. During his remarks, he congratulated NAHA on its centennial:

"As we celebrate the 200-year anniversary of the *Restoration*, I also want to congratulate the Norwegian American Historical Association on its 100-year anniversary . . . Based here at St. Olaf, NAHA has established one of the richest ethnic archives in the country. For academics as well as the general public, it is a unique source of insight into migration history."

The royal visit continued in New York City, where the crown prince welcomed the *Restoration* replica and its crew after their historic three-month journey from Stavanger, Norway. More than 2,000 Norwegian Americans, visiting Norwegians, and other spectators gathered on Manhattan's Pier 16, including more than 50 participants in the NAHA-Vesterheim Immigration Tour to New York City. The event included remarks from Crown Prince Haakon and NYC Commissioner of International Affairs Aissata Camara, as well as performances from Norwegian artists the Ragnhild Hensing Trio and pop star Astrid S.



LEFT (people left to right) NAHA staff members Kristina Warner and Amy Boxrud describe the WWII digitization project to the Norwegian delegation: Minister of Trade and Industry Cecilie Myrseth; Crown Prince Haakon; Minister of Foreign Affairs Espen Barth Eide; Ambassador to the United States Anniken Huitfeldt. **RIGHT** The *Restoration* replica arrived in New York harbor on October 9, precisely 200 years after the original sloop completed its historic journey. A cheering crowd welcomed the ship and crew.



➤ **WATCH THE CONVOCATION** held during the royal visit, including a performance by the St. Olaf Choir and Orchestra, at stolaf.edu/multimedia/play/?e=5275

Borgen Family Makes Landmark Gift to the Archives



The Borgen family in Haraldsholmen, Norway. Philanthropy and volunteerism are fundamental values that Bjørn and Kathy Borgen have passed on to their children and grandchildren.

Foundation. The family has supported educational, athletic, cultural, health care, and environmental causes. In addition, Bjørn Borgen is a proud inductee of the Scandinavian American Hall of Fame and the Colorado Snowsports Hall of Fame.

The Borgen family gift was announced at NAHA's centennial celebration on October 25, where remarks from Borgen were delivered by Amy Boxrud, NAHA executive director. In them, he emphasized the broader impact of a gift to NAHA, which in turn supports the larger Norwegian American community: "It is through organizations like NAHA that we continue to preserve our stories and remind ourselves of the shared values that bind us together, whether we are here in the United States or across the ocean in Norway."

Boxrud expressed the association's gratitude for the support of the Borgen family, whose gift arrives at a pivotal time for NAHA, as the organization looks forward to its next century of work. Borgen also wrote of the importance of that ongoing mission: "Preserving the history of Norwegian Americans is not just about the past—it's about understanding who we are today and how we contribute to the broader tapestry of this nation."

Looking ahead, Boxrud says, "This transformative gift ensures that NAHA will have the resources we need to employ a permanent, full-time archivist. It guarantees the ongoing caretaking of our collections, making them accessible for research, education, and future generations."

The Norwegian American Historical Association has received a historic gift from Bjørn Borgen and the Borgen Family Foundation. This \$500,000 donation to the Centennial Campaign for the NAHA Archives is the largest in the association's history. In recognition of this generous contribution, the archivist position on the association's staff will be known as the Borgen Family Archivist for the Norwegian American Historical Association.

Foundation President Bjørn Borgen is a lifetime member of NAHA. His own story began in 1937 in Åndalsnes, Norway.

"After the devastation of World War II and the destruction of Åndalsnes, my parents, my sister, and I, like many others, found ourselves leaving Norway in search of new opportunities," Borgen says. In 1948, his family immigrated to Strum, Wisconsin. He earned a mechanical engineering degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1962, followed by an MBA from Harvard in 1966. During his time at Harvard, he met his wife, Kathy. The couple raised three children.

Borgen built a successful career in financial and asset management, and for 20 years, he led Founders Asset Management Company, based in Denver. Today, he and his family manage the Borgen Investment Group and the Borgen Family

We're Almost There! Thanks to the Borgen Family Foundation and so many others, our Centennial Campaign for the NAHA Archives is within reach of its goal.

➤ **MAKE A GIFT BY YEAR'S END AT**
norwegianamericanhistory.org

Lighthill Wins Odd S. Lovoll Award

NAHA is pleased to announce Otelia Lighthill as the fourth recipient of the Odd S. Lovoll Award in Norwegian American Studies. Her winning essay, "New Women in the New World: The Development of a Norwegian American Female Identity," will appear in volume 44 of *Norwegian American Studies*. Lighthill also receives \$500 and a year's membership in NAHA.

The Lovoll Award recognizes originality, excellence, and creativity in undergraduate research and writing on any aspect of Norwegian American studies. It is named for historian and former NAHA Editor Odd S. Lovoll, who gave dedicated service to the association from 1980 to 2001 and mentored scores of scholars in immigration studies.

Lighthill, from Burbank, California, is a junior at St. Olaf College, where she majors in history and

Norwegian. She has been a student employee in the NAHA archives and enjoys combining her interest in archives with her academic projects.

"When I found out I received the award, I texted just about every person I know," Lighthill says. "To receive this recognition validates a topic and research that I had been pursuing for quite some time now and sits near to the heritage of my own heart."



Otelia Lighthill



> **THE NEXT ENTRY DEADLINE** for the Lovoll Award is June 1, 2026. Find details at norwegianamericanhistory.org/fellowships-and-awards

Board Member Spotlight

John Nilson

Regina, Saskatchewan
Board member 2010–2018
and since 2022



Nilson is NAHA's treasurer and serves on the Archives Committee. He was a member of the Saskatchewan Legislature from 1995 to 2016. While earning a B.A. in history and Norwegian from Pacific Lutheran University, he spent his junior year at the University of Oslo, where he received a certification to teach Norwegian and played on the Norwegian National Basketball Team. His law degree is from the University of British Columbia.

WHY I SERVE: "Board participation allows me to help tell the stories about our Norwegian ancestors and the communities that they have built for us in Canada, the USA, and Norway. Our archives are the captured memories of the hopes and dreams of thousands of Norwegian immigrants and their descendants. This is important work for my grandchildren and all our families."

Knit the NAHA Centennial Mitten

Love knitting? Celebrate NAHA's first 100 years by making a pair of commemorative mittens! An anchor motif on the thumb is a nod to the sloop *Restauration* and our earlier logo, while the colors shown here embrace NAHA's new brand identity, used in print and online.

The NAHA mitten design, by Amy Boxrud, was inspired by Aimee Alexander's Snow Ghost Mitten pattern (Polka Dot Sheep Publications, polkadotsheep.com).



> **GET YOUR FREE NAHA PATTERN** on our website: norwegianamericanhistory.org/events/naha-centennial/

Odd S. Lovoll, Ruth Hanold Crane, and John R. Tunheim



NAHA Leaders Remember

Navigating challenges, embracing change—
pivotal moments in NAHA's history.

BY KAREN ANNEXSTAD HUMPHREY

In the closing months of NAHA's 100th year, John Tunheim, Ruth Hanold Crane, and Odd Lovoll shared memories with *Currents* from their combined 109 years of service to the association. Their thread in NAHA's tapestry connects the present to the mid-20th century and to past NAHA leaders such as Lloyd Hustvedt, executive secretary 1959-1999, and Kenneth Bjork, editor of *Norwegian American Studies* 1960-1980.

A Time of Uncertainty and Renewal

John Tunheim was a NAHA board member for a quarter-century (before term limits) and the association's president from 2006 to 2010, a tenuous few years. He partnered with his predecessor, Lois Rand, and his successor, Brian Rude, to bring NAHA into a new era.

"Lloyd Hustvedt volunteered his 40 years as executive secretary. We needed to provide a salary for his replacement," Tunheim explains. "But all of a sudden, money started looking less available going forward. Publication costs had risen. We had serious concerns about climate control in the

archives. We wanted to figure out how to bring on new board members, and how to appeal to a younger generation. The 2008 recession was rough on us. We had to consider if we really should continue. Some board members pushed for an entire merger with St. Olaf [College], but that would be inconsistent with our origins."

Tunheim and the board assessed all options. "As we talked with other higher education institutions, there were many ideas, including institutions interested in taking both, or part of, our archives and publications." The board's final analysis was that when fund balances recovered, NAHA would be in solid enough shape going forward. "The board instituted term limits, we moved our meetings to biennial instead of triennial, our fund balances recovered, we had a strong staff, and we were set to go forward."

Crane, staff assistant to Lloyd Hustvedt 1986-1999 and board member 2000-2014, underscores the importance of that final decision by the board. It "energized the organization!" she says. "It led to the fund drive for climate control for the archives."

We would continue on our own doing what we do best. And while electronic publishing was all the rage then, and some thought books would soon be relics of the past, it turns out now that people are buying more books than ever!”

The Scope of Ethnic Studies Expands

Odd Lovoll visited NAHA for the first time 57 years ago to begin conversations with Editor Kenneth Bjork. The two co-wrote a history of the association to commemorate its upcoming 50th anniversary, *The Norwegian American Historical Association 1925-1975*. (Lovoll’s first book with NAHA’s imprint, *A Folk Epic—the Bygdelag in America*, also was published in 1975.)

Dr. Rudolph Vecoli, Lovoll’s mentor, was the keynote speaker for the 50th anniversary. Lovoll explains the significance of Vecoli’s remarks.

“We must remember that in the 1950s, there was hardly any immigration history written because

the consensus historians expressed [was] that the stability and endurance of American society hadn’t changed over the century. *The Uprooted*, the book by Oscar Handlin of Harvard, was the culmination of this thinking, and he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1952. But Vecoli challenged those long-standing assumptions and became the leader of the new approach in immigration studies that promoted cultural heritage over assimilation—writing from the bottom up instead of the top down.”

Lovoll succeeded Bjork as NAHA’s editor in 1980 and held the post until he retired from it in 2001.

Now, in NAHA’s 100th year, Lovoll believes the Crossings and Connections conference in June showed evidence of growth in immigration studies, including new studies of ethnic groups that view them in a broad, social-ethnic context.

“I was quite impressed that the first session of the conference was Native Americans speaking about their relationship with Norwegians. That was

A Momentous 100 Years



1925

NAHA IS FOUNDED
October 6 at St. Olaf
College, Northfield, MN.

1926

**NAHA JOURNAL
BEGINS PUBLICATION.**
*Norwegian American
Studies* is originally titled
*Norwegian American
Studies and Records*.

A 1926 gathering of the NAHA Executive Committee.

1932

**NAHA’S FIRST FIELD
AGENT**, Carlton Qualey,
travels the Midwest for
six weeks collecting
papers from Norwegian
American farms, towns,
and churches. These
items and others
gathered earlier by Ole

Rølvaag and Theodore
Blegen become the
foundation of NAHA’s
archival collections.

1934

**A NEWSLETTER
IS LAUNCHED** in
November, funded
by a donation from
J. A. Holmboe.

1941–45

**WARTIME PAPER
SHORTAGES** result
in only two issues of
Studies and Records
being published.

The first newsletter touted
recent publications and
additions to the archives.



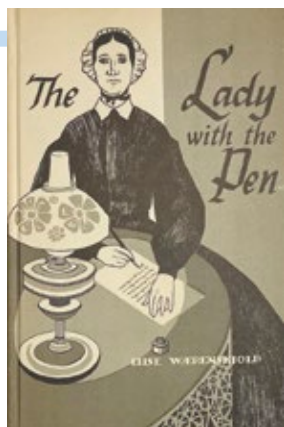
marvelous. You know, Norwegians were not alone, as people have written for years. They interacted with Native Americans, and there you had three Native Americans talking about it!”

Vision for the Next Century

As NAHA begins a new century, Tunheim believes there still is an appetite for stories of the immigrant experience, “but it will be important to document how Norwegian Americans have moved forward,

taking the traditions and Norwegian culture that still exists into stories of people ... in business, education, writing novels,” all kinds of professions. “We should focus on helping people understand how Norwegian values are present in America today,” he adds, “and we should take on both the good and the bad stories of settling this country.”

Crane suggests that communications with other immigrant groups, in particular Somali, Hmong, and Tibetan communities, will be NAHA’s new frontier.



1950s

GROWING INTEREST IN WOMEN’S HISTORY

brings attention to translations of women’s historical diaries and works such as Aagot Raaen’s.

1968

KING OLAV V OF NORWAY VISITS and gives recognition to the importance of NAHA’s extensive collections of historical documents.



1970s

A “NEW ETHNICITY” MOVEMENT

brings a surge in NAHA membership and a shift in scholars’ focus, emphasizing cultural heritage over assimilation.

1975

A 50TH ANNIVERSARY

address by Rudolph J. Vecoli recognizes NAHA as a promoter of cultural pluralism.

1976

NAHA MERGES WITH DET NORSKE SELSKAP,

absorbing the members and records of DNS, which was founded in 1903 to preserve Norwegian culture.

1981

NAHA-NORGE IS FORMED

and goes on to organize (so far) 13 seminars to promote interdisciplinary research in Norwegian American history.



Longtime administrator
Lloyd Hustvedt

1992

THE KING OLAV V CHAIR

is created by St. Olaf College and NAHA as a faculty position to foster the study of Scandinavian American history. The chair holder also serves on NAHA’s board of directors.



2019

NORWEGIAN AMERICAN STUDIES IS REVITALIZED

through a new partnership with the University of Minnesota Press. The journal begins publishing in both print and digital formats.

2020

NEW CLIMATE-CONTROLLED ARCHIVAL STORAGE

space is added in the St. Olaf College library after six years of NAHA fundraising and planning with the college. Along with a state-of-the-art archival vault, the space includes a classroom and enhanced reading room.

In 1968, NAHA Editor Kenneth Bjork delivered remarks to Norway’s King Olav V and his delegation on their visit to the association.

"We need to acknowledge . . . there are so many wonderful groups of people here, and we have a lot to learn from each other. We might be of help as those communities develop their own archives."

Lovoll says, "Norwegian settlements in other places in the world are something we need to consider, and still there are settlements in America that have not been covered. It's interesting to see how these settlements are today, and that can become a focus on a broad

view of American society."

Will NAHA remain relevant in the world for another 100 years? Lovoll says, "NAHA will always be relevant, because NAHA focuses on the experience of our fellow human beings. And that will never go out of date." ●

Karen Annexstad Humphey is a past president of the Minnesota Historical Society, past president of NAHA, and NAHA's senior advancement officer.



Archivists (L to R) Beulah Folkedahl and Charlotte Jacobson, Forrest Brown, and Gary De Krey have cared for NAHA's collections over the years.

2021 THE NEW ODD S. LOVOLL AWARD

incentivizes and recognizes outstanding undergraduate research in Norwegian American studies. It is named to honor historian and former NAHA editor Odd Lovoll.

2022 NORWAY'S QUEEN SONJA VISITS

and cuts
Norway's Queen Sonja, left, was hosted by NAHA staff including Borgen Family Archivist Kristina Warner, who highlighted items from the collections.



the ribbon for the new NAHA-St. Olaf College archival vault.

2023 NAHA CREATES NEW FELLOWSHIPS

awarding grants to scholars annually: the Archives Fellowship encourages research in the NAHA archives; the Publications Fellowship is for work publishable in the NAHA journal.

A 2025 NAHA archives exhibit featured literary figures and many other aspects of Norwegian American life.



2024 NEW VISUAL BRANDING

online and in print materials modernizes the visual appeal of NAHA's enduring mission.

2025 THE MIGRATION BICENTENNIAL AND NAHA CENTENNIAL

are marked with a

conference and exhibit in Northfield, MN, a published anthology, a tour to New York City, and a Minneapolis banquet.

**NAHA'S ARCHIVING
NORWEGIAN
AMERICA CAMPAIGN,** now in a public phase, aims to raise \$2M for an archives endowment.



➤ **MORE OF NAHA'S HISTORY** is at norwegianamericanhistory.org/celebrating-100-years-of-naha/

From Paper to Pixels: The *Norgesbrev* Project

BY KRISTINA WARNER, BORGEN FAMILY ARCHIVIST FOR THE NORWEGIAN AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

In 2023, NAHA and the Norwegian Institute of Local History, a division of the National Library of Norway, launched a project to commemorate the bicentennial of Norwegian migration to North America. The goal: to digitize and translate more than 1,000 letters sent from Norway to Norwegian emigrants in America—so-called *Norgesbrev*. While the project is still underway, it already represents a major accomplishment in the preservation of Norwegian American history.

The origins of the *Norgesbrev* project date back as far as 1993, when the Norwegian Institute of Local History began collecting this type of letter. At the time, *Norgesbrev* had received little attention in contrast to *Amerikabrev*. Those letters, sent from America back to family and friends in Norway, had long been recognized as a key resource in migration history.

The institute's staff reached out to numerous organizations, museums, and universities across the United States. By the year 2000, they had amassed more than 3,000 letters, though most were photocopies rather than high-quality scans. Some of those letters from the early phase of the project were transcribed and published in the book *Brev hjemmefra: Brev fra Norge til utvandrere 1840–1960* (*Letters from Home: Letters from Norway to Emigrants 1840–1960*), edited by Else Braut and Randi Holden Hoff (1997).

More recently, NAHA has become a particularly fruitful collaboration partner for the institute by digitizing many of the letters to modern archival standards. NAHA's digitizing effort was followed by transcription of the letters in Norway, which was done with the assistance of volunteers and artificial intelligence technology. To date, NAHA has digitized nearly 4,000 pages of letters as part of this ongoing effort. In addition, items from more than 40 NAHA archival collections are included in the project.

The aim of the *Norgesbrev* project is to provide access to the letters and present them as original local history documents. The letters offer distinct perspectives on local events and circumstances in Norway. They also give insight into the development of writing skills among local populations in Norway from the mid-19th to the

mid-20th century. And the letters show evidence of how American culture and public opinions were absorbed into Norwegian society.

NAHA's participation in the *Norgesbrev* project was made possible through the work of Kristina Warner, Borgen Family Archivist for the Norwegian American Historical Association; Dale Hovland, volunteer; and Otelia Lighthill, student employee. Project participants from the staff of the National Library of Norway include Chris Nyborg, Ola Alsvik, Marthe Hommerstad, Marianne Wiig, Martin Fredriksen, and Aslak Kittelsen.



➤ **SEE MORE** of the *Norgesbrev* at norwegianamericanhistory.org/digital-collections/exhibits/show/norgesbrev-project. Letters are only available in Norwegian for now.

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