

15 September 1980

To the Bygdebok committee

Dear friends in Norway:

Here at the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks we're currently planning a large center for family history, a 'Genealogical Center' or 'Family History Center,' as it is more commonly called. It will be located in a modern addition to the university library, which is now under construction.

Since most of the population here in the Upper Midwest is of Norwegian descent (some counties have over 80% 'Norwegians'), we would naturally like to acquire as many Norwegian *bygdebøker* as we can, especially those books having do with family history, and that contain names and dates for those who have emigrated to America.

In the period from 1825 to the First World War, around 900,000 Norwegians emigrated to America, the majority to the Midwest. The descendants of these people, who now perhaps equal the entire population of Norway, are showing a greater interest in their family history than ever before.

A great many Americans took their names from Norwegian farms or know what farm they are descended from in Norway. When there are many farms with the same name, we can usually steer people back to the ancestral farms by looking them up in Ulvestad's *Nordmændene i Amerika*, Rygh's *Norske Gaardnavne* or other sources. The significant family history work that has been done in most Norwegian municipalities would enable us to help the majority of people to follow their ancestral threads back hundreds of years, and—perhaps even more important—help them to find their way to their relatives in Norway today!

Our University Library does not currently have the means to buy the roughly 500 books that have come out so far out on Norwegian family history. We must therefore ask the individual municipalities—and the banks that have supported the publishing of the ancestry books—for help. We know from experience that most people who start researching their own family will buy bygdebøker and travel to Norway. (I have, for example, sold six copies of the ancestry book for Aurland, the community where I grew up, just in the last three weeks!)

We would be very grateful if your bygdebok committee, municipality, or a bank can send us one or several bygdebøker—especially family-history volumes—as a gift to our collection. If so, the books can be sent to:

[. . .]

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If the books cannot be sent as gifts, we would still very much like to know what books are available and what they cost. In many cases we can get Norwegian-Americans to donate money to acquire books from their hometowns.

I travel to Norway generally two-three times a year and in many cases can pick up the books. We have also important contact people around Norway who'll help collect them.

To avoid getting more than one copy of individual books, I'll name the books we have received so far: From Sogn we have *Ættebok for Aurland, II*, 1964 by Anders Ohnstad and *Leikanger Bygdebok, II: Ættesoge*, 1979 by Roald Lyngvær. The latter was a gift from the Leikanger Savings Bank. For inner Sogn, the newspaperman Gerhard Haugland at Sogningen Avis, [. . .] tel. [. . .] is helping out with the collection of the bygdebøker.

For Hordaland County we have received Henrik Meyer Kvalem's *Ættebok for Granvin*, published by Granvin District in 1975. Parliament member Håkon Randal, vice chairman of the Conservative party, has [arranged] a gift of Johannes Hjellands bygdebøker from Bømlo. Håkon was visiting in America this summer with a wonderful theater group from Bømlo. They made an excellent impression here!

For Buskerud we have been fortunate to acquire Lars and Sigurd Reiton's *Folk og Fortid i Gol [Hol]*, 8 [7] volumes, 1954-1979. Hallingdal and Sigdal are extremely well-represented here [i.e., in the Grand Forks area], and we need all the bygdebøker from there.

Finally, we have received a good start with bygdebøker from the Agder counties this summer. Adjunct Tallak Frøysnes [. . .] has acquired the following books for us: Vest-Agder: *Jan Åsens Hægeland[-]boka, I: Gard og Ætt*, 1951 and Tarjei Liestøl's *Åseral: Gard og Ætt, I*, 1976. Aust-Agder: R. Bolling's *Gards- og Ættesoge for Bygland* and O. O. Uleberg's *Hornnes, I: Gards- og Ættesoge*, 1969. In August this year I had the great pleasure of visiting the Frøysnes family in Kristiansand and get these books personally! Their daughter Bjørg Tone has just spent a year studying at the University of North Dakota.

For Telemark, we have not even received any bygdebøker, but Ragnhild Hagen in Bø [. . .] has a lively interest in helping us there. In Trøndelag, Steinar Robertsen in Forretningsbanken A/S in Trondheim has been a great help with cultural exchanges between Norway and America.

As for myself, I should mention that I come from Flåm in Aurland municipality, Sogn, and that I teach Germanic languages here at the University of North Dakota. My address is: Languages, P. O. Box 8198, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, North Dakota, 58202 U.S.A. I have been active in most of the Norwegian-American organizations, especially with Sons of Norway's charter arrangements to Norway. Since 1974 I have also worked a lot with cultural arrangements for Norwegian groups that have visited America: Folk-dancers, choirs, brass bands, sports teams, theater groups etc. In 1977 I was awarded the Saint Olav's Medal for my work strengthening the cultural and ethnic connections between Norway and Norwegians who have emigrated.

We hope to hear from you (by mail) about the bygdebøker.

Regards,

Arne Brekke
Associate Professor
Languages