

Twenty-five years ago, in 1980, Arne Brekke, then Professor of Norwegian languages, and Colleen Oihus, Assistant Archivist in Special Collections at that time, had a vision. They recognized that out of the millions of people in this country that claim Norwegian ancestry to one degree or another, a good majority of those people live in this Upper Midwest region, especially in North Dakota and Minnesota. They also recognized that after the advent of Alex Haley's book Roots in 1976, people were very excited about tracing their own ancestry and roots.

So, in order to help family historians trace their Norwegian ancestry, Arne and Colleen joined together and solicited gifts of bygdeboks from the people of Norway for the Family History Room in Special Collections. These special local history books published by the various communities in Norway, offer a wealth of information, often back to the 1500s, about the families and individuals who lived in these farm communities. Bygdeboks are extremely valuable genealogical resources.

The Library's Bygdebok Collection has grown to well over 1000 volumes in the last twenty-five years. Individuals and organizations in Norway have been very generous in their gifts to the Collection, as have people in this county, as well as our local Sons of Norway. And, the Library has been especially committed to making its bygdebok collection one of the largest in the country, a premiere collection.

To celebrate this milestone and 25th anniversary, the Chester Fritz Library is publishing a guide to its bygdebok holdings, and with the support of the University's Nordic Initiative is sponsoring a conference, "Norwegian Heritage in the United States: Resources and Research Experiences," on October 10th and 11th at the Ramada Inn. The conference will provide an opportunity to listen to experts from Norway and this country examine Norwegian ancestry and heritage and speak about a variety of historical and genealogical materials available both in Norway and the United States.

If you would like to attend this conference, I have placed Conference brochures on the cabinet in the back of the room. If you are interested in researching Norwegian heritage and your Norwegian ancestors, join us and celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Bygdebok Collection and participate in a very interesting and unique Conference.