

UND Library Names Norwegian Book Collection in Honor of Arne G. Brekke

The University of North Dakota Chester Fritz Library has named its internationally recognized collection of Norwegian bygdebøker in honor of Dr. Arne G. Brekke of Grand Forks, North Dakota. The honor recognizes Dr. Brekke's role in establishing the collection and his 30 years of contributions to the growth of the collection.

Arne G. Brekke was born in 1927 in Flåm Parish in the municipality of Aurland, Norway. He completed his mandatory schooling and military service in Norway then came to the United States as a student in 1949, enrolling at Luther College, Decorah, Iowa. Brekke entered graduate studies first at the University of Colorado, receiving an M.A. degree in 1952, then at the University of Chicago, earning a Ph.D. in Comparative Germanic and Indo-European Languages in 1962. To finance his studies, he led summer tours in Europe. While completing his doctoral program, Brekke joined the Languages Department at the University of North Dakota, primarily teaching courses in Norwegian and German. In 1967, Brekke organized a charter flight to Norway for a Sons of Norway Lodge in North Dakota. His success in this venture led to the formation of Brekke Tours & Travel, a full service travel agency specializing in heritage tours to Norway. In recognition of his work to foster connections between people with Norwegian ancestry and their homeland, Brekke was awarded the St. Olav Medal from the Norwegian government in 1977.

In 1980, the Chester Fritz Library Department of Special Collections asked Brekke to assist with obtaining additional Norwegian genealogical research materials. At the time, the Library had only two sets of bygdebøker, compiled histories which often include genealogical, cultural, and geographical information about local areas. Letters written by Brekke were sent to representatives in each of the approximately 450 municipalities in Norway requesting donations of bygdebøker. The project also received publicity from members of various media in Norway, many of whom participated in Brekke-led tours to Grand Forks. In that same year, about 160 books were donated and were delivered to the United States via charter flights organized by Brekke. By the close of 1981, the bygdebok collection numbered about 400 volumes. Another solicitation, again headed by Brekke, took place in 1988, resulting in significant additions to the collection. In 2010, the Arne G. Brekke Bygdebok Collection located in the Library's Department of Special Collections exceeds 1200 volumes. Using his numerous contacts in Norway and his own resources, Brekke continues to add to the Collection, which is one of the largest to be found anywhere in the world.

Chester Fritz Library staff members have created a web site to assist people using the collection. The web site uses maps of Norway to link locations to related bygdebok volumes held in the collection. The site is found at <http://bygdebok.library.und.edu>.

In 2010, Dr. Brekke and his daughter, Dr. Karen Hoelzer of Springfield, Illinois, also established the Arne G. Brekke Endowment to provide ongoing support for the Collection and its activities. Persons interested in supporting the Bygdebok Collection may contribute to the Brekke Endowment through the

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For more information about the Arne G. Brekke Bygdebok Collection see the web site or contact Mr. Curt Hanson, Head of Special Collections at the University of North Dakota Chester Fritz Library.