



Department of German, Nordic, and Slavic+

# Scandinavian Studies Newsletter

Spring 2025

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## Greetings from the Program Chair

Happy New Year, greetings, and best wishes for a pleasant spring and summer to our friends, alumni, and donors from faculty, staff, and students.

This year marks the 150th anniversary of Scandinavian Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. We have planned many events for this spring and are in the process of planning even more in the fall to mark this important milestone. This newsletter's theme is "Looking Back" and is dedicated to the past of Scandinavian Studies. (In our fall newsletter, we will focus on the present and our plans for the future in a newsletter themed, "Looking Forward.") In this edition, we give a timeline of major events in Scandinavian Studies here at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and provide biographies of some of the major figures in our program over the years. In addition, we feature interviews with former colleagues (Judy Anderson, Kim Nilsson, Howard Martin, Jim Leary, and Nete Schmidt). Finally, we are delighted to share a touching piece written by Petter Næss, son of Professor Harald Næss, about the family's life in Madison.

We hope that you will enjoy reading our newsletter as much as we enjoyed putting it together. My profuse thanks to all who contributed to the newsletter.

- Program Chair, Kirsten Wolf

Photo credits:

**Cover photo:** Van Hise Hall is seen at the University of Wisconsin-Madison on July 17, 2024. (Photo by Althea Dotzour / UW-Madison)

**Above:** An illustration by Cait Vitale-Sullivan.

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[gns.wisc.edu/gns-newsletters](https://gns.wisc.edu/gns-newsletters)

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**Please enjoy our 2025 Newsletters, which commemorate 150 years of Scandinavian Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.**

**The Spring 2025 Newsletter, "Looking Back," examines our history.**

**The Fall 2025 Newsletter, "Looking Forward," will consider our future.**

If you would like to make a donation to the program or to the Anniversary Year programming, please scan this QR code:



Or follow this link: <https://secure.supportuw.org/give/> and choose Scandinavian Studies Centennial Fund 132731590. Or send a check to:

Scandinavian Studies Anniversary Year  
Kirsten Wolf, Scandinavian Studies chair  
Department of German, Nordic, and Slavic+  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Van Hise Hall  
1440 Linden Drive  
Madison WI 53706 USA

Dear Friend of Scandinavian Studies,

The year 2025 marks the 150th anniversary of the founding of a program in Scandinavian Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In 1875, Rasmus B. Anderson, an ambitious Norwegian American from Albion, Wisconsin, succeeded in establishing a program in Scandinavian Studies at the UW: the first of its kind in the world, the first explicitly interdisciplinary department at the UW, and one of the first departments to truly embrace what eventually became known as the "Wisconsin Idea," the close engagement with community partners in Wisconsin, North America, and the world. Anderson's teaching and research in Norwegian and Old Norse were gradually supplemented by a long line of talented, sometimes quirky, and supremely memorable faculty, offering expertise in Danish, modern and medieval Icelandic, Swedish, Finnish, Sámi languages and linguistics, and a wide array of related topics, including culture, film, folklore, history, literature, material culture, media, medieval studies, migration, music, mythology, politics, society, and sustainability.

In the 150 years since Anderson's bold initiative, tens of thousands of UW students have taken one or more Scandinavian courses, maybe to fill a requirement or satisfy an interest, or deepen a longstanding fascination. Thousands of others have pursued an undergraduate major or certificate, or undertaken a master's or Ph.D. Students have built upon what they learned at UW, conducting research of their own, writing books and articles, founding companies, working in Nordic-related industries, or simply sharing their love of the Nordic region and its cultures with family, friends, children and grandchildren.

YOU are part of this legacy, and we want to celebrate the coming anniversary year with you! Please take the time to fill out [this brief survey](#) if you would like to learn more about the coming year's series of events, or visit our pages at the Department of German, Nordic, and Slavic's website to find out more: <https://gns.wisc.edu/nordic/>. We hope to interview some of our alums for the UW's oral history archives and the enclosed card lets you indicate if you'd be interested in being interviewed. We hope to invite alums to a series of events and lectures we're planning, either in-person or online. We have also enclosed information if you are interested in donating, for which we are always grateful.

Please help us mark this tremendous anniversary and thank you for being part of our long and remarkable institutional history.

Claus Elholm Andersen  
Susan Brantly  
B. Marcus Cederström  
Thomas A. DuBois  
Helen R. Durst  
Ida Moen Johnson  
Dean Krouk  
Scott Mellor  
Benjamin Mier-Cruz  
Liina-Ly Roos  
Kirsten Wolf



# TIMELINE OF SCANDINAVIAN STUDIES AT UW-MADISON



1872

Norwegian violinist (and general sensation) Ole Bull plays a benefit concert in Madison, which pays for 500 books and starts the Scandinavian collection at UW library.



1875

Rasmus B. Anderson is named professor of Scandinavian Studies and The Department of Scandinavian Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison is founded.



1931

Luminary linguist Einar Haugen joins the faculty of Scandinavian Studies. It is at UW Madison that his most important research on Norwegian and Old Norse is published. He leaves the faculty for Harvard three decades later in 1964.



1911

The Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study (SASS) is founded. UW Professor Julius Olson becomes the first SASS president. The annual SASS conference has been hosted in Madison nine times (1916, 1927, 1938, 1966, 1975, 1990, 2000, 2009, 2019).



1910

The American Scandinavian Foundation is established. ASF has generously funded many research projects and visiting professorships for UW-Madison faculty, staff, and students.

1881

Norwegian author Knut Hamsun comes to see Rasmus B. Anderson with a letter of introduction from fellow Norwegian author, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson.



1937

The great Irish studies scholar Myles Dillon joins the Scandinavian Studies department rather than becoming associated with a department of English. He remains part of the faculty until 1945.



1949

The MA program in Scandinavian Studies is established.



1960s

The Scandinavian Department expands to include faculty positions in, not only Norwegian, but Old Norse, Swedish, Danish, and Finnish.



1967

The Scandinavian Studies Department, along with other language programs, moves into Van Hise Hall, where department members continue to have offices and teach many courses.

The PhD program in Scandinavian Studies is established.



2025

Scandinavian Studies celebrates 150 years at UW-Madison!

2016

Scandinavian Studies joins the newly established department of Nordic, German, Slavic + (GNS+). In addition to its named fields, the department also houses Turkish language studies, Yiddish studies, Dutch studies, and Folklore studies.

1987

Susan Brantly is made the department's first female professor.



1983

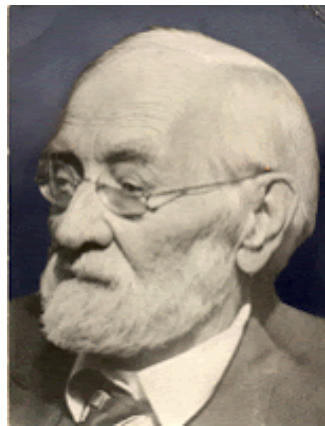
Along with colleagues Jim Bailey from Slavic, Harold Scheub from African Studies, and Narayana Rao from South Asian Studies, Niels Ingwersen helps to establish the Folklore program. Folklore studies is now a part of GNS+.

## Major Figures in the History of Scandinavian Studies at UW-Madison

This section honors major contributors to our department, whose scholarly work, teaching, and leadership have left their mark on countless individuals and on our field.

### Rasmus Bjørn Anderson (1846-1936): The Hub of Norwegian-American Life

by Susan C. Brantly



Rasmus B. Anderson (1846-1936) founded the Scandinavian Studies program at the University of Wisconsin. His path to the UW was slightly checkered, since he was expelled from Luther College in 1865 after leading a protest (“We were required to saw and chop wood for the teachers”) and he

was fired from the Albion Academy when he plotted to take over as president. He was taken on as an instructor at the UW in 1869 and named a professor in 1875, the date from which the Scandinavian Department counts its origin as the oldest such department in the United States.

During his 14 years at the UW, Anderson acted as something of an impresario for Nordic celebrities. In 1881, he arranged a lecture tour in the upper Midwest for Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and he cultivated a friendship with the famous violin virtuoso Ole Bull. Bull gave a benefit concert on May 17, 1872 that raised enough money to purchase 500 books, the beginning of the Scandinavian collection at the library. When Knut Hamsun came seeking Anderson’s assistance with a letter from Bjørnson in hand, he did not find the help he was looking for: “He just cut me off and said that I would have to help myself.”

Anderson’s career at the UW ended in 1885 when he was appointed by President Grover Cleveland as the US Minister to Denmark. He held that post until 1889. Anderson was in Copenhagen at the peak of the Modern Breakthrough and rubbed shoulders

with many literary celebrities. When Georg Brandes made some remarks critical of Bismarck at a dinner held by Anderson, he was challenged to a duel by the German consul. Anderson advised Brandes to tell the police, since dueling was illegal in Denmark, and the consul was sentenced to a term in jail. Anderson was offended at the sight of Amalie Skram smoking at a party and worried about the indecency in the writings of Garborg, Jaeger, Krohg and Ibsen. August Strindberg frequented the same café as Anderson: “His talents are everywhere recognized and it is plain that he is a towering genius, but it would be difficult to determine from his strange conversation whether he is sane or not...for he told everything about himself from childhood up. How he hates women! On that subject he certainly is insane.”

When Anderson returned to Wisconsin, his post had been filled successfully by his brother-in-law, Julius Olson, who held that position for 50 years. For a while, Anderson sold cod-liver oil, involved himself in local politics, and in 1898 became the editor of *Amerika*, a Norwegian language journal that he ran for 24 years. From that platform, he remained an influential figure in Scandinavian-American culture in the U.S. For more information about Rasmus B. Anderson, see Lloyd Hustvedt’s book, *Rasmus Bjørn Anderson: Pioneer Scholar* (1966).

### Julius Emil Olson (1858-1944)

By Dean Krouk

In the early 2020s, I received a curious antique book in the mail, *Mr. Punch’s Pocket Ibsen* (1893). I opened the cover and saw that it contained four signatures: Julius E. Olson, Einar Haugen, Carol J. Clover, and Mark Sandberg. The book of British Ibsen parodies had been sent as a tenure gift by Mark, my doctoral advisor, with a note explaining that the *Pocket Ibsen* had been passed down by professors of Scandinavian Studies over the generations and that I should add my name. While I knew Mark and Carol personally from my time at Berkeley, and Einar Haugen’s name was easy to recognize, Professor Olson was less familiar, even though a quick internet search told me that a dormitory house in Sullivan Hall at UW-Madison is still named after him.

This obscurity is partly explained by distance in time: Olson taught Scandinavian languages and literature at UW-Madison from 1884-1931. A further explanation is that he was not nearly as prolific in publishing as either his predecessor, Rasmus B. Anderson, or his successor, Einar Haugen. Despite his relative inconspicuousness in the publication record, he was an inspiring teacher and a sought-after public orator who had major service roles at the university and in our academic field. Imagine being a full-time professor while also leading the University of Wisconsin’s “Committee on Public Functions,” a role that included organizing and often speaking at commencements as well as building and memorial dedications (such as the Lincoln Statue on Bascom Hill in 1909). He also led the university committee on “Loans and Undergraduate Scholarships” for many years. Olson was a founding member and the first president of SASS (the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study). According to a volume of *Scandinavian Studies and Notes* (now just *Scandinavian Studies*) that was dedicated to him in 1925, Olson was also the society’s most frequent toastmaster.

The unnamed author of the Wisconsin Historical Society’s brief biographical essay about Julius Emil Olsen writes, with unabashed shade, “Unlike [Rasmus B.] Anderson, his predecessor, Olson had a warm and extremely popular personality.” Olson was born in Cambridge, Wisconsin on November 9, 1858. His parents, Hans and Karen Fjeld Olson, had settled in Dane County after emigrating from southeastern

Norway in 1852. They had ten children who survived to adulthood, including Olson, his brother, and eight sisters. At the age of twenty-five, Olson graduated from the University of Wisconsin and became an instructor, then assistant professor, in Scandinavian literature and languages (he taught Norwegian, Swedish, and Icelandic). He was promoted to professor in 1892. Despite growing up in a Norwegian home, Olson was only first able to visit Norway in 1903, a few years before the country’s independence from Sweden.

Some of Olson’s academic interests can be glimpsed in the talks he gave as a key member of Madison’s Ygdrasil Literary Society around the turn of the twentieth century, with topics such as “Norway’s Struggles for Political Liberty” and the literary works of Henrik Ibsen, Jonas Lie, and Arne Garborg. Examples of papers he presented at the SASS conference in the 1910s and 1920s include “Subconscious Elements in the Composition of *Peer Gynt*” and “Second Intentions in Ibsen’s *Rosmersholm*.” Both titles suggest an interest in psychoanalysis that is difficult to trace elsewhere in his publication record. Olson’s published books included a *Norwegian Grammar and Reader* from 1898, which was quickly made obsolete by Norway’s orthographic reforms, and a Norwegian-language edition of one of Ibsen’s major dramatic works, Brand, which also contained a lengthy introduction and critical notes in English (published in 1906). In both teaching and scholarship, Olson returned frequently to questions of interpretation and symbolism in Ibsen’s major works, as we see in his article “Gerd, the Hawk, and the Ice-Church in Ibsen’s Brand” (from



Photographs of *Mr. Punch’s Pocket Ibsen* with signatures.



Olson speaking before a microphone in the 1930s.

*Scandinavian Studies and Notes*, 1921), which weaves together observations and ideas from students with his own critical reflections.

In a recollection published in the special volume of *Scandinavian Studies and Notes* in 1925, the novelist and St. Olaf College professor Ole Rølvaag praised Olson's oratorical powers and charisma. Recalling a speech Olson gave in 1913 at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds, Rølvaag wrote, "I had never seen a manlier human face; not beautiful exactly, but so clear-cut, strongly intellectual, and typically classical. His voice, full of the ring of the inner power of the man, was very melodious." Rølvaag praised Olson for being a "preacher of idealism" and a true believer in the power of literature. He also lauded Olson's work on behalf of Norwegian heritage, using the troublesome ethnonationalist language of the time: "*his life* has had one great aim: to elevate his own racial group culturally. This end he has sought to achieve by getting them to visualize the greatness of their racial heritage in order that they might cash in on their inheritance. All his great speeches testify to that fact." In addition to the goal of magnifying Norwegian in-group pride, Rølvaag noted that many people in Olson's audiences were non-Scandinavian Americans, whom he taught to understand Norwegian literature and culture. Rølvaag also credited Olson for defending and teaching the Norwegian realist literature of the late nineteenth

century, including Ibsen and Bjørnson, at a time when such writing was seen as morally poisonous by many Norwegian-American church and community leaders.

On Friday, February 25, 1944, at age 85, thirteen years after retirement, Julius Olson died of pneumonia at his home close to Vilas park in Madison (1909 Adams Street). His papers, including correspondence, speeches, and research and teaching notebooks, are held in twenty-eight boxes at the Wisconsin History Society.

Sources:

Flom, George T. "Julius Emil Olson." *Scandinavian Studies and Notes*. Vol. 8, no 8, 1925, p. 261-264.  
 Rølvaag, O. E. "Professor Julius E. Olson, A Preacher of Idealism." *Scandinavian Studies and Notes*. Vol. 8, no 8, 1925, p. 270-274.  
<https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS11370>

## Einar Haugen (1906-1994)

By Emily Beyer and Kirsten Wolf



Einar Haugen was born in Sioux City, Iowa, to Norwegian immigrants from Norway. When he was very young, the family moved back to Norway for a few years. Haugen attended Morningside College in Sioux City but later transferred to St. Olaf College, where he earned his BA in 1928. He immediately proceeded

to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to study Scandinavian languages under the direction of Professor George T. Flom. Haugen was awarded a Ph.D. from that university in 1931, with a dissertation on nynorsk. In the same year, he joined the faculty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and eventually became full professor in 1938.

The course catalogues suggest that Einar Haugen built and expanded our Scandinavian Studies program almost single-handedly. He appears to have piloted and taught many precursors of the classes offered today, as well as many courses offered in other Scandinavian departments. Haugen is listed as teaching all the Norwegian language classes from first to third year, as well as Survey of Norwegian Literature. In addition, he instituted a year-long Old Norse requirement and eventually taught Modern Icelandic for graduate students. Finally, he developed the linguistics side of the program by designing a History and Structure of Scandinavian Languages course, and, shortly thereafter, a Scandinavian Phonetics course.

These are not all of his accomplishments in terms of teaching, however. He also taught the majority of our literature courses during his time at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Although some courses utilized Norwegian texts, others are listed as Scandinavian literature in translation. Some examples of his course titles are "Scandinavian Mythology and Folklore," "Norwegian Literature from Renaissance to Realism," and "Henrik Ibsen." Occasionally, he is listed as teaching area studies/social science courses such as Scandinavian Life and Civilization.

Haugen likely developed both our graduate program and departmental highlights, such as an Old Norse club, as well as fellowships for both undergraduates and graduate students. While at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Haugen recruited Harald Næss, an expert on Hamsun. By 1960, his name as the instructor of the courses does not appear very often in the course catalogue, which may suggest that by then he was planning to find a professorship elsewhere. Indeed, in 1962, Haugen left to accept a position at Harvard University, where he was made the Victor S. Thomas Professor of Scandinavian and Linguistics and remained on faculty until his retirement in 1975.

Einar Haugen served as President of the Linguistic Society of America, the American Dialect Society, and the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Studies. He was also a member of the Board of Editors of the Norwegian-American Historical Association. He was honored with numerous awards and honorary doctoral degrees from several universities, both in the United States and abroad.

Einar Haugen was a prolific scholar, and his publications ranged widely. Among his many books are *Spoken Norwegian* (1950), *The Norwegian Language in America: A Study in Bilingual Behavior* (1953), *A Norwegian-English Dictionary* (1965), *Language Conflict and Planning* (1966), *The Scandinavian Languages: An Introduction to their History* (1976), *Ibsen's Drama: Author to Audience* (1979), and *Scandinavian Language Structures: A Comparative Historical Survey* (1982). Mention should also be made of his books on the Norwegian-American essayists and novelists of prairie life, Ole Rølvaag and Waldemar Ager, and on Norwegian author Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson.

## Harald Næss (1925-2017)

By Susan Brantly



Professor Harald Næss, an eminent Hamsun scholar, was known to colleagues, students, and friends as, simply, Harald. In 1953, Harald's academic career began at King's College, at the University of Durham in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England. During his six years in Newcastle, his colleagues included some of the great names in Scandinavian Studies: James

McFarlane, Niels Lyhne Jensen, and Leif Sjöberg. In 1959, Harald came to Madison on a Fulbright, which happened to be just at the time when Einar Haugen was being lured to Harvard. Haugen went to great lengths to ensure that Harald would take over as the fourth Norwegian professor in the Scandinavian Department's long history. In 1991, on the occasion of Harald's retirement banquet, Haugen said that hiring Harald was one of the smartest things he had ever done.

Harald was in place in the 1960s, when the Scandinavian Department expanded greatly, adding Dick Ringler, Niels Ingwersen and Kim Nilsson to the faculty roster, which already included Dick Vowles. Harald fully embraced the Wisconsin Idea and immersed himself in studies of Norwegian immigrants to Wisconsin, most notably Nobel Laureate Knut Hamsun. This made him a popular speaker for Scandinavian heritage groups across Wisconsin, and a font of fascinating information about Norwegian connections to Wisconsin. For example, a concert in Madison by the famous Norwegian violinist, Ole Bull, raised money for some of the first books for the new Memorial Library. Knut Hamsun was brushed off by Rasmus B. Anderson, the first Norwegian professor in Madison, when he came seeking contacts in the Norwegian-American cultural world, forcing Hamsun to move on to working as a clerk in Elroy, Wisconsin for a time.

Harald was a productive scholar, who wrote on a wide variety of topics and was greatly respected in his field. He was President of the Society for the Advancement

of Scandinavian Study from 1967-69 and edited its journal, *Scandinavian Studies*, from 1973-77. He is the author of *Knut Hamsun og Amerika* (1969), and he produced a second book on Hamsun for the Twayne Series in 1984. Harald edited (and, rumor has it, mostly wrote or re-wrote) *A History of Norwegian Literature* (1993) for the University of Nebraska Press. In his retirement, he collected and edited six volumes of Knut Hamsun's letters, a scholarly landmark that will be a valuable research resource for years to come. For all of his many contributions to Norwegian culture, he was made Knight First Class of the Royal Norwegian Order of St. Olaf in 1986.

In a volume dedicated to Harald on the occasion of his retirement, the poet Rolf Jacobsen describes a poetry reading he gave in Madison in the mid-1970s, assisted by the American poet Robert Bly. Jacobsen recalled, "Never—neither before nor after have I had such an alert and engaged audience. The room was boiling with questions. I got the impression that many of the listeners knew more about modern Norwegian literature than I did. I realized that I was under the palms in an oasis...And the man behind it all was Professor Harald Næss."

Harald was a man of many parts: a musician, a skilled gardener, a master builder, a collector of antiques, a witty storyteller, a gracious host, a beloved teacher, and an occasional lumberjack and shepherd. He and his wife, Ann Mari, lived for several years on a historically Norwegian farm outside of Mt. Horeb, which was the site of many departmental celebrations. They eventually moved back to Norway in the mid-1990s in order to be closer to family, leaving behind an enduring legacy for the Scandinavian Department and the University of Wisconsin.

Professor Harald Næss was born on the 27th of December, 1925, in Kristiansand, Norway, and he passed away there on February 5, 2017 after a brief illness.

## Susan Brantly

By Claus Elholm Andersen

Susan Brantly's future was decided in a split-second. In college, after taking a number of classes with grey-haired men in tweed, she took a class on the Vikings with a young, brilliant, and charismatic professor by the name of Carol Clover. That experience made Brantly want to become a Scandinavian Studies major. But when she met up with Clover to declare her major and was asked what language she wanted to focus on, she did not know what to answer. "What are my options?" she asked, and Clover listed Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, and Icelandic as potential areas of study. "Swedish," Brantly answered after thinking about it for less than a second.

That moment was the start of a remarkable career that eventually led Dr. Brantly to become the first female faculty member of Scandinavian Studies at UW-Madison in 1987. Since then, she has left her mark on the department at UW-Madison, the community, and the field of Scandinavian Studies as such. She has published three monographs, edited three volumes, and written over forty peer-reviewed articles, twenty reference articles, and 72 book reviews.

Her first book, *The Life and Writings of Laura Marholm*, laid the foundation for addressing questions of gender not just in Scandinavian Studies but in literary studies as such. Her second, *Understanding Isak Dinesen*, was the first to bridge the Scandinavian and American scholarship on Dinesen with a thorough and important overview of Danish scholarship on Dinesen to an English-speaking audience. In her third book, *The Historical Novel, Transnationalism, and the Postmodern Era: Presenting the Past* (2017), she challenges central paradigms in the theory of the historical novel by investigating the Swedish historical novel in the latter half of the 20th Century.

It is perhaps especially as a teacher, however, that her legacy will not soon be forgotten. During her time at UW-Madison, Susan Brantly has taught thousands of students. Her course on masterpieces of Scandinavian literature has been taught to enthusiastic students for over three decades, and she is known for her ability to create a comfortable atmosphere that encourages student participation. She has also been a pioneer in online teaching, eager to reach students who might not be able to follow a regular class schedule. More than two decades ago she created a fully online class – "19th Century Scandinavian Fiction" – that since



has been adapted to multiple advances in teaching technology and shifting platforms.

It should be no surprise, then, that she also has won two prestigious teaching awards, the Chancellor's Award for Distinguished Teaching in 2003 and the UW System Alliant Energy Underkofler Excellence in Teaching Award in 2013.

Dr. Brantly's dedication to UW-Madison and her students is also reflected in her impressive 17-year tenure as director of the Bradley Learning Community, a living and learning community for first-year students that promotes a successful transition from high school to college life, encourages collaborative learning between students, faculty, and staff, and prepares students to become integrative scholars and active participants in the university community and beyond.

Outside UW-Madison, Susan Brantly has served as the president of the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Studies and as editor of the journal *Scandinavian Studies*.

Dr. Brantly has announced that she intends to retire at the end of 2025. A trailblazer who has seen Scandinavian Studies at UW-Madison through an almost 40-year tenure and multiple changes, she will be sorely missed. Scandinavian Studies will not be the same without her.

## From UW Librarian to Library of Congress: J. C. M. Hanson

By Todd Michelson-Ambelang

Though not a major figure in the Department of Scandinavian Studies, Norwegian-American librarian J.C. M. Hanson worked at UW-Madison and went on to play an important role at the Library of Congress.



Photograph used from University of Chicago Photographic Archive, [apf1-02452], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

Many of our students know about the history of the study of Scandinavia on campus. The department has been home to locally significant names in the roster of educators, such as Rasmus B. Anderson, who founded the department, and internationally recognized educators, such as Einar Haugen, Harald Næss, Kim Nilsson, Niels

Ingwersen, and Jim Leary. How did these academics conduct research, prepare for classes, and grow the field into what it is today? Their research, like our own, was aided by library collections. University of Wisconsin-Madison has quite a large collection of Scandinavian materials and I count myself very lucky to be able to help these collections continue and grow.

When I started my position in 2013, I was very interested in the history of our collections. I have had little time to devote to researching the history of the librarians who served to collect Scandinavian Studies materials. However, I uncovered a Scandinavian connection during research of J. C. M. Hanson, who was a librarian at the University of Wisconsin-Madison from 1893 to 1897. He was also the creator of the Library of Congress Classification and Subject Heading Systems, which are used throughout the United States and beyond.

Hanson was born in 1864 in Oppland, Norway and moved to Decorah, Iowa, as his uncle lived there and offered to pay for the education for one of the siblings in the family. He graduated with a BA from Luther College, and then continued his education at Concordia Seminary, in St. Louis. Hanson then moved to Cornell University, where he enrolled as a graduate student in history. Due to lack of funds, he dropped

out of the program, but soon found a job back in Chicago as a librarian at the newly founded Newberry Library. In 1893, Hanson was hired as the head cataloger at the University of Wisconsin Library. During his time in Madison, he was a founding member of the local organization, Ygdrasil.

From Madison, Hanson and his family moved to Washington, D.C., where he was hired as the head cataloger of the Library of Congress. During his time there, he was charged with creating a classification system for the library's books, as well as creating a new roster for listing the books. Following the Scandinavian belief in *samarbeid* (cooperation), Hanson rightly credits Charles Martel, his apprentice, with being the architect of the classification system. Both had a significant impact on the classification system, and the variations in the principle for the Library of Congress Subject Headings list were uniquely Hanson's.

In 1928, Hanson was appointed the Commander of the Order of St. Olav, and in 1931 he was given a Doctor of Laws honorary degree from Luther College. He retired in 1934 and settled at his summer home in Sister Bay, WI. He passed away in 1943.

## Interviews with UW-Madison Scandinavian Studies Emeriti

Please enjoy these richly recounted histories of the department through the perspectives of our esteemed emeriti. All interviews were conducted by Kirsten Wolf in 2024.

### Judy Anderson

**Thank you so much, Judy, for your willingness to be interviewed.**

**Kirsten:** *You and I have known each other for a long time. You were the department administrator when I came to UW-Madison in 1986 to serve as a Danish lecturer for one year. You were enormously kind and helpful to me – this was my first time in the US. What brought you to the Department of Scandinavian Studies and when?*

**Judy:** I began December 1976 and retired in December 2012. I had been working in the English department when Barb Hornick, HR, told me about the position, possibly the best one in Letters and Sciences. How couldn't I jump at that?

**Kirsten:** *What are some of your favorite memories from serving as a department administrator in Scandinavian Studies?*

**Judy:** It was so much fun to meet and get to know both undergraduate and graduate students, some of whom I've kept in touch with over the years. And of course being on the 13th floor of Van Hise with a great view of the capitol and both Lakes Mendota and Monona was a bonus. Then, of course, there were the fall departmental retreats at Lost Lake in Florence County, the annual December glögg parties in 1312 with the smell of hot spiced wine and tables full of holiday food, the annual spring picnic at the Næss farm, Ringler's fall party, and the family atmosphere of the department. A big highlight of my time with the department was the gift of a trip to Scandinavia in 1983 where a good friend and I spent three weeks visiting and staying with people I had met through the department in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

**Kirsten:** *Being a department administrator is a huge and busy job. There must have been times when you felt overwhelmed by all the demands on your time. Were there things that you didn't like about the position?*

**Judy:** Making sure employee health insurance applications were processed prior to deadlines and scheduling class courses were a bit challenging. Even now I have anticipatory dreams of the course timetable being published.

**Kirsten:** *We were so sad when you decided to retire knowing that there would never be another Judy. Why did you decide to retire?*

**Judy:** It was a very difficult decision to retire and leave all the great faculty, staff, and students, but I knew we would still connect. It was time to enjoy our country home and volunteer activities. With talk of department mergers on the horizon, wanting to leave while I still felt capable of doing a good job, was the impetus of my decision to retire.

**Kirsten:** *How are you spending your retirement?*

**Judy:** I'm volunteering a couple mornings a week at Badger Prairie Needs Network, an organization of all volunteers. Meeting pantry shoppers and other volunteers is such a joy and has led to new friendships. I've met some wonderful people at the Verona Senior Center and visit a woman at her home each Sunday. John and I have lived in the country for 45 years and feeding the birds and seeing the deer and other wildlife is so enjoyable. I regularly get together with friends for coffee, lunch, and walks.

## Jim Leary

**Kirsten:** *I know that you were born and raised in Wisconsin, but can you tell me a little more about your background and education?*

**Jim:** I was born in 1950 in Rice Lake, a community strongly connected to its origins in late nineteenth century logging and hardscrabble farming. Growing up, I knew neighbors of many backgrounds: Ojibwe, French Canadian, Irish, Welsh, German, Swiss, Czech, Polish, Lithuanian, Italian, Swedish, and Norwegian. My parents were journalists who fostered curiosity about the varied names, dialects, stories, foods, music, and customs evident all around us. Like my Dad and older brother, I went to Notre Dame. I earned a B.A. in English Literature but was uninspired by the era's narrow academic canon. Happily, a graduate student who knew my interest in folk/roots, populist/pluralist artistic expressions alerted me about the field of folklore studies. I began reading and observing on my own, and applied to graduate programs. University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill offered me a fellowship. I earned a folklore M.A. there (1973) before continuing at Indiana University for a PhD in Folklore and American Studies (1977). Discovering that folklorists had largely neglected my home region and its peoples, I commenced fieldwork with musicians, raconteurs, and handworkers; networked with like-minded researchers in the region; and hustled limited-term grant-funded gigs.

**Kirsten:** *What brought you to UW-Madison? And what attracted you to the Department of Scandinavian Studies?*

**Jim:** UW-Madison's Folklore Program formed in 1983, thanks to Niels Ingwersen of Scandinavian Studies and an interdisciplinary coalition of fellow faculty. They asked me to offer a course on Wisconsin Folklore in summer 1984, which led to successive summer courses and an occasional course during the academic year. In 1985, Janet Gilmore, my wife and a fellow folklorist, launched a research project regarding local museums in North America with Scandinavian collections. She received an honorary fellowship from Scandinavian Studies, enabling her to use UW libraries, and we were welcomed to the Department's gatherings, notably the fall picnic hosted by Harald and Ann Mari Næss at their rural home near Mount Horeb. Janet and I made our livings as independent folklorists from 1985-1998. We each had periodic part-time work with UW-Madison's Folklore Program, along with many

research and production contracts for museum exhibits, folklife festivals, documentary sound recordings, public radio programs, and films related to the folk cultural traditions of the Upper Midwest's Indigenous, immigrant/ethnic, and occupational groups. For my part, that included lots of field research with the region's Finnish and Norwegian communities, and some with Danes, Icelanders, and Swedes. In 1998, although I was an academic staff member, the L&S dean appointed me as director of UW's Folklore Program. Soon after, I realized I was doing faculty work without adequate compensation or opportunities for internal research funding. Since Folklore was a program, and since faculty had to belong to a department, Scandinavian Studies offered to accept me at .25 in the Department, with .75 in Folklore. Thanks to Susan Brantly, chair at the time, and Niels Ingwersen, I vaulted to full professor and became a proud and grateful faculty member of Scandinavian Studies in fall 1999.

**Kirsten:** *Can you tell me about your career at UW-Madison and your teaching and research?*

**Jim:** As director of the Folklore Program from 1998-2009, I created and/or taught numerous courses at all levels, while establishing an undergraduate certificate program and working with PhD minors from more than a dozen departments. Although some "regular" folklore courses had Scandinavian components, I was fortunate to join Tom DuBois in launching a folklore PhD track in Scandinavian Studies, and to offer related courses concerning Scandinavian American Folklore, Scandinavian American Folksong, and Nordic Perspectives on Folklore. Through courses, I sought to instill awareness of expressive cultural traditions historically evident in students' various communities and often persisting in their everyday lives. Students were regularly required to do field and archival research—and I was consistently thrilled by, and learned from, many excellent final projects. Field schools and practicums were especially rewarding, as they gave students opportunities to work directly with local organizations and communities on mutually beneficial projects. In that regard, I was lucky to collaborate with the linguist Joe Salmons to create the [Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures](#)—a UW-Madison unit aligned with the "Wisconsin Idea"—enabling students and staff to engage our region's peoples regarding their diverse languages and cultures.

Meanwhile, I continued research on Upper Midwestern folk music and song, jokes and legends, and workers' cultural traditions, resulting in essays, edited volumes, books, exhibits, and media productions. My best effort, [Folksongs of Another America](#), published a few months prior to retirement, combined a book with four CDs and a DVD. It won a Grammy nomination for Best Album Notes and the award for Best Historical Research in Recorded Folk or World Music from the Association for Recorded Sound Collections. This production provided readers and listeners with a rich sense of the remarkable musical traditions of Upper Midwesterners, including Danes, Finns, Icelanders, Norwegians, and Swedes.

**Kirsten:** *What are some of your fondest memories of the department?*

**Jim:** I loved the inclusive social democratic spirit of the department, the many ways in which faculty and staff worked together with creative purpose, the seasonal get-togethers, and the deep unwavering commitment to students. There were so many fantastic students. Working with them was and is a delight, as many have become friends and colleagues.

**Kirsten:** *What have you been up to since you retired at the end of 2015?*

**Jim:** I stopped setting my alarm clock and have traveled frequently to Oregon where Janet and I visit our kids in Corvallis and Portland, and enjoy the woods, meadows, and views at her hillside home place in Eugene.

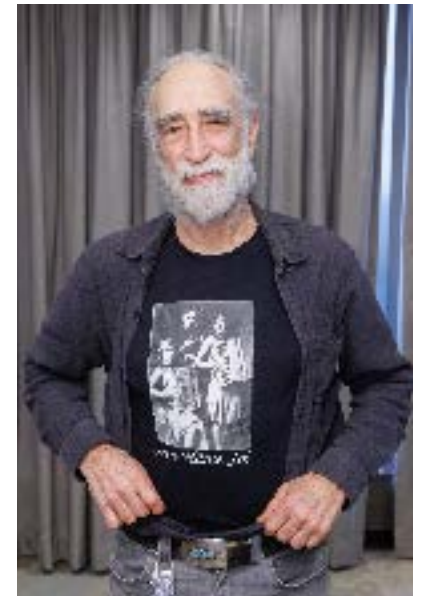
I continue to do research, write, work on projects, consult, and serve on boards. Immediately after retirement, I wrote successful major grants to the National Endowment for the Humanities and to Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies that were not only crucial to hiring three great folklorists/Scandinavianists at UW (Anna Rue, Marcus Cederström, Nate Gibson), but also launched two ongoing initiatives: [Sustaining Scandinavian Folk Arts in the Upper Midwest](#) and [Local Centers/Global Sounds](#). Rue, Cederström, and Gibson have done an extraordinary job carrying out the former's many public folklore partnerships with regional artists and organizations. The latter—a collaboration of Mills Music Library and the Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures—is a portal focused on the diverse folk/roots/ethnic musical traditions of Upper Midwesterners that offers searchable free online access to sound files, photographs, and manuscripts. The

sixteen collections currently available, with more to come, are especially strong regarding our region's Norwegian and Finnish performers.

Music Library collections also figured in two double-CD/booklet releases I co-produced with Archeophone Records, both focused on labels founded in the 1920s by immigrants. [Alpine Dreaming](#) (2018), awarded a Grammy nomination for Best Album Notes, features Swiss music issued on Helvetia Records of Monroe, Wisconsin. [Swede Home Chicago](#) (2021), done with co-author Marcus Cederström, illuminates Chicago-based Wallin's Svenska Records.

Meantime I served as vice president of [FinnFest USA](#) from 2019-2023, helping sustain programming online during the pandemic, and organizing panels, film screenings, concerts, and dances for FinnFest 2023 in Duluth. As the American Folklore Society's representative to the National Recording Registry, I've helped advise the Librarian of Congress on which aesthetically, historically, and culturally significant recordings should be entered annually in the National Recording Registry. The [2024 additions](#) were a breakthrough for Scandinavian musicians, including: "Kauhavan Polkka" by Finnish Americans Viola Turpeinen and John Rosendahl (1928); many Nordic immigrant performers figuring in the Wisconsin Folksong Collection (1937-1948); the Jefferson Airplane's *Surrealistic Pillow* (1967), with guitarist Jorma Kaukonen; and *Arrival* by Swedish popstars ABBA (1976). Finally, I'm enjoying serving on the Wisconsin Historical Society's [Scholarly Advisory Committee](#) regarding exhibit plans for the new Wisconsin History Center.

You can learn more about Jim and his work in [this interview](#), which is part of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Oral History Program.



## Howard Martin

**Thank you so much, Howard, for your willingness to be interviewed.**

**Kirsten:** I know that you were born and raised in England, and that you got your BA from Durham University, but can you tell me a little more about your background?

**Howard:** While at Durham University, I took a year off and went on scholarship to DePaul University in Indiana as an exchange student. I also worked at a summer camp in Vermont with several other European students, and that is where I first met Cathie, my wife. We dated long-distance for the school year, and before returning to Durham University I worked for Western Electric as a telephone repair person. Cathie and I married in September 1964 and then we both went back to England so I could finish my BA. After returning to England, I began searching for a graduate student position, and I returned to America in 1965 to attend UW-Madison. I planned to do an M.A. but was encouraged to stay on to complete a PhD. We started a family and I stayed on.

**Kirsten:** What brought you to UW-Madison and how was your experience here as a graduate student here?

**Howard:** I came to UW-Madison because I got a teaching assistantship here. I enjoyed the curriculum with concentration on Germanic languages. As part of the graduate assistantship, I became exposed to Scandinavian studies, Old Norse, Old English, Gothic, and Old High German. I was captivated by Germanic languages in total.

**Kirsten:** Can you tell me about your career at the University of Wisconsin-Madison after you got your Ph.D.?

**Howard:** I was employed as a “specialist” by UW Extension from 1968 to 1971 when I was promoted to assistant professor of German. I moved up the ranks culminating with being appointed as Dean of University Outreach in 1987. After several years as a department chair, I was elevated to the deanship in 1987 and then to associate provost in 1994. I remained in that position until my retirement in 2008.



**Kirsten:** Although you were not employed in the Department of Scandinavian Studies, you were closely connected to the Department and served on the Department’s Executive Committee for many years. What are some of your fondest memories of the Department?

**Howard:** My fondest memories of the department were the friendliness and camaraderie of the EC members. Particularly, the visits to branch campuses for “Scandinavian days,” where several of us would present a day’s worth of lectures on different aspects of Scandinavia and its languages. These days were usually accompanied by dining out in various locations around the state. Rice Lake, Steven’s Point, Janesville were all some of the places we went. Dick Ringler, Harald Næss, Niels Ingwersen, were all the people I remember as good colleagues.

**Kirsten:** What have you been up to since you retired in 2008?

**Howard:** Since I retired in 2008, I have enjoyed long visits back home to our house in Tickhill, Yorkshire, England. We have made many trips to Europe to places like Malta, Prague, Florence, Berlin, Regensburg, Tallinn, Holland, and Krakow. We also have visited my sister in South Africa several times. For a while after retiring, I helped provide some child care to my grandkids until they grew up. I have been in poor health the last few years but hope to travel to my home in England later this year to see friends and family.



## Kim Nilsson

**Thank you, Kim, for your willingness to be interviewed.** **Kirsten:** What brought you to the United States?

**Kirsten:** You were born in Finland in 1939. Can you tell me a little about your background and upbringing?

**Kim:** I grew up in a Swedish family, though my mother was half-Russian, and my maternal grandmother was fully Russian. When I was three years old, both my mother and I got tuberculosis and were sent to a sanatorium, where we had no contact, and I never met her again. I was also separated from my father and sister. About a year later, I was taken out of the sanatorium and sent to Skåne (Scania) in southern Sweden as a so-called war-child and lived with a Swedish family there. I was returned to Finland after about a year, and on the way back I met my sister in Göteborg (Gothenburg). I didn’t even know that I had a sister. Prior to that, I had been informed by phone that my mother had passed away. I grew up speaking Swedish, but in the sanatorium I spoke Finnish, and in Scania I soon learned to speak Scanian (skånska). I could not speak Finnish at all when I returned to Finland, and no one could understand my Scanian. Linguistically, I was very confused. At that time I was about five years old.

**Kim:** A professor from Indiana University came to Finland on a Fulbright. He was a historian writing about Finland in World War II. He became a regular customer at my folks’ antiquarian bookstore, and the family befriended him. As a return favor, he arranged for me to come to Indiana University to study photography, which was my passion at the time. So there I came with poor English and started as a freshman in 1958. I took courses as I was supposed to do. I had a wonderful and famous photographer as one of my teachers. His name was Henry Holmes Smith. I worked in his lab, and one day he said to me: ‘Sorry, Kim you’re not going to become a photographer. You just don’t have it in you.’ I have always appreciated him for saying that. So I then turned to Russian and got a BA in 1962. About that time, I met an Indian woman, Usha, whom I married. After that, I started graduate school at Indiana University in linguistics. However, Usha got a job offer from UW-Madison, so we packed up and drove to Wisconsin. I tagged along. I then transferred to UW-Madison in linguistics and did most of my graduate work there. I worked hard and had a part-time job in the library. When I was almost done with course work and had started to think about a dissertation topic,

I decided to take a bus to New York for the annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of America. On the last night of the meeting, there was a banquet. I looked around the tables and saw famous linguists there, such as Winfred P. Lehmann and Ilse Lehiste. I joined their table, we chatted, and I told them about my training and research interests. A day or two after I had returned to Madison, I got a phone call from Lehmann, who offered me a job in Russian at University of Texas at Austin. It was a good offer. But the following morning, Nils Hasselmo, who had replaced Einar Haugen in the Department of Scandinavian Studies at UW-Madison, called me. He told me that he had just been offered a deanship at the University of Minnesota and asked me if I could take his job. I said yes. He then then asked if I could teach Old Norse. Again, I said yes, even though I knew no Old Norse. I expected to get a letter of appointment from Harald Næss, who was department chair at the time. It was an urgent matter, because Lehmann had called me to ask if I was coming. Eventually, Harald replied and said: 'You're hired. We don't write letters of appointment.' I was hired to teach Old Norse, a bit of Finnish, and a few other courses. I asked Dick Ringler, who was about to spend a year-long sabbatical in Iceland, for tips about Old Norse – in those days Dick was an all-American crewcut boy. He told me the basics and suggested a good textbook. I realized that I had to do something quick and went to the Linguistic Society of America's summer school, which that year was held in Bloomington, Indiana, and took a course in Old Norse with Foster Blaisdell and a course in Scandinavian linguistics with Einar Haugen. I started preparing my classes, the first day came, and I was very nervous – so nervous that my bones were aching for a week afterwards. I worked like a dog – teaching and working on my dissertation. At that time, I was a lecturer or instructor, but I was told that I would become a tenure-track professor if I finished my dissertation that year. My dissertation was on the subcategorization of Swedish verbs. I managed. I got my PhD and a tenure-track position. In that same year, the Department of Scandinavian Studies was accepted into the Graduate School program. Until then, only undergraduate / graduate courses had been taught. This meant that students in the Department could now get graduate degrees. From there it just went. Dick returned with his hair uncut and a long beard. He had undergone a metamorphosis. He was a proto-typical Viking. In any case, I didn't have to teach Old Norse any more.

**Kirsten:** *So, that was the end of teaching Old Norse. How about Finnish?*

**Kim:** I was strongly requested to teach Finnish. It was a joy. The students were excellent, multitalented, and hard working. Some even went to Finland and remained there. All students were highly motivated – some because of ancestry, some because of romantic involvements, and some because they considered learning Finnish the ultimate challenge. The ones who just wanted the challenge were the best students.

**Kirsten:** *Who were your colleagues in the Department of Scandinavian Studies back then?*

**Kim:** My colleagues were Harald Næss, Dick Vowels, Dick Ringler, Peter Crosby (he taught history), and Niels Ingwersen. Niels started at the same time as I did. There was also Ingrid Camerini, who at that time had a year-to-year appointment.

**Kirsten:** *I know that your research is primarily in linguistics and on Swedish syntax in particular. Are there publications of which you are particularly proud?*

**Kim:** I think my first published article was on Swedish syntax ("Noun and Article in Swedish"). It came out in *Studia Linguistica*. But the one I think is the best is "Semantic Devices in Gunnar Björling's Poetry," which was published in *Michigan Germanic Studies*. I've written a number of essays on literature – reinterpreting old writings with some success.

**Kirsten:** *A couple of times, you served as chair of the Department. Are there things you initiated as an administrator that you would like us to know of?*

**Kim:** Well, rolling horizon may already have been introduced by then, but I instituted it in the Department. It greatly helped the lecturers in the Department, who subsequently got job security after three years. Also, I invented the so-called dissertator's course – a 5-credit course designed and offered by dissertators under the supervision of the advisor.

**Kirsten:** *You've always split your time between the United States and Finland. I know that you don't care for the hot and humid summers in Wisconsin and prefer to spend them in Finland. What did you do during those summer months?*

**Kim:** I got into my boat – a sloop – and sailed in the

Baltic. The moment I set sail and saw the horizon from the sea, I felt blessed. I would stay on board for two to three weeks. When on land, I spent time on an island owned by my family. On two occasions, I spent a full year in Finland. One was on a Fulbright. The other was to teach at the University of Helsinki.

**Kirsten:** *What are your fondest memories of your time in the Department?*

**Kim:** I have very many wonderful memories. Many of them are from outside the classroom. The things that Dick and Karin Ringler arranged on Washington Island, later the seminars at Lost Lake in northern Wisconsin. On Christmas Eve for many years the Næss family and I and an assorted group people would convene on Picnic Point. AnnMari Næss brought the fish boil and we had fish soup. We made a bonfire and drank aquavit, of course. There was a lot of comradeship. The department was very well connected, and we had lots of good parties. The deans were always invited to the department's Christmas parties, and it was well known among the deans that if they had to go to a Christmas party, the Scandinavian Studies Christmas party was the place to go. Another fond memory is from when I got a call from the dean with complaints about low enrollments in Scandinavian Studies. I was department chair at that time. So, the next time the Hans Christian Andersen course was offered, we removed the cap on the course. The result was that 874 students signed up for the course. There was pandemonium in South Hall. The dean never complained again.

**Kirsten:** *Do you have any concluding remarks?*

**Kim:** I consider myself very lucky to have worked at UW-Madison. The climate is wonderful and the benefits are great. The political atmosphere is pleasant. I'm grateful to the University and the State of Wisconsin.

**Kim Nilsson passed away on May 9, 2024, at UW-Hospital after a long battle with metastatic prostate cancer. He has been laid to rest in Finland.**

## Nete Schmidt



**Kirsten:** Nete, you and I have worked together for a long time. I remember that when I was hired here at UW-Madison in 2001, you were the one who helped me out with urgent practical issues, such as finding a good real estate agent. I remain deeply grateful. When did you come to UW-Madison, and what brought you here?

**Nete:** In 1998, after 18 years at Bjerringbro Gymnasium (Junior College), Aarhus University, and Grundfos, I was excited to start a new job as a so-called Sendelevktor, a representative of the Danish Ministry of Education. In collaboration with the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I was hired for a 3-year period to teach Danish language and whatever other classes might be needed with the official title of Visiting Assistant Professor. The position was renewed for an additional three years, and because of Prof. Ingwersen's retirement in 2004, it was extended for another two years until a new professor could be found. Finally, in 2006, I was hired as a Lecturer on a permanent basis by the University.

I was very happy with my jobs in Denmark, but I

needed a new academic challenge as well as a change of environment. I wanted to explore new and inspiring paths to keep developing intellectually, culturally, and socially. The job as Visiting Assistant Professor seemed a perfect fit, and it was made even more exciting by the Mid-Western Initiative that I would be managing. Funded by The Nordic Council with a million dollars for a three-year period, the purpose was to expand the knowledge of Scandinavian languages and cultures in the Midwest. We developed new ways to promote our universities and expertise, and we created a lot of materials and merch to be distributed all over the region.

**Kirsten:** Can you tell me about your background and your education? For example, why did you decide to move from Denmark to the US?

**Nete:** My native town is Aarhus, Denmark. My mother was a teacher, my dad a businessman. Tennis was a huge part of my life since the age of 9 with the best achievements being two Danish Championships in doubles. At 17, I graduated from Aarhus Katedralskole and spent the following year as an AFS exchange student in Vancouver, WA. After returning, I got a teaching degree from The School of Education in Aarhus with specializations in English and French. This enabled me to work as a teacher during my years at Copenhagen University where I got my degrees in English Language & Literature and Danish Language & Literature. I taught and lived with drug addicts for a period of eight years, obtained a Certificate in Special Education and a Certificate in Student Counseling, coached tennis, and had five kids. From 1980 to 1998 I lived in Bjerringbro, a small town in the middle of Jutland, with a Fulbright scholarship at San Francisco State University from 1986-87 and a Fulbright Scholarship at Berkshire Community College in 1993-94.

In 1988, I married Larry Jorgenson (from Portland, OR). In 1997, we decided to take a year off to explore the US, but then the job in Madison was posted, and I was happy to be chosen for the position. Every summer, I spent seven weeks in my sister's house in Denmark, re-immersing myself in Danish culture and attending the week-long summer conference for Danish teachers around the world.

**Kirsten:** You taught and developed many courses in Scandinavian Studies. Can you share some information about those courses?

**Nete:** At first, I taught primarily Danish at all six levels, but very soon I was given the opportunity to teach classes such as Scandinavian Poetry, Kierkegaard, Contemporary Scandinavian Literature, Scandinavian Life and Civilization, The Tales of Hans Christian Andersen, and 6th semester languages. I developed a popular class called Criminal Utopias that covered science fiction and crime stories, a class called Humor and Noir, and a class called The Woman in Scandinavian Literature / Sexual Politics. Furthermore, I developed add-ons for a number of courses so students could make the classes count towards their major.

**Kirsten:** What are some of your happiest memories from Scandinavian Studies?

**Nete:** Several things come to mind:

The wonderful sense of community that I often felt in the department – with many of my colleagues also being friends. The fun times at retreats, conferences, Gløgg parties, SASS, fairs, and other festive events (e.g. retirement parties).

The wonderful students that gave me joy every day. They challenged me, made me think, engaged in lively discussions, opened new horizons, created numerous funny and entertaining situations, and always had ready smiles and positive words.

My almost twenty years as Undergraduate Majors Advisor were a tremendous opportunity to engage with and influence students, and I truly enjoyed the Majors and graduation parties celebrating these special members of the Scandinavian community.

The opportunity to invite and host numerous famous people and experts in their field, especially authors (like Kim Leine and Jussi Adler-Olsen), added excitement, knowledge, and spice to my classes and my job.

In 2011, I was awarded The Chancellor's Hilldale Award for Excellence in Teaching, and this was a decided highlight in my career.

I am forever grateful for the support, encouragement, and initiatives of my colleagues, leading to a permanent

position, several awards, and several promotions.

Coming into my office every morning always made me smile. Saying hello and chatting to whomever was at the 13th floor of Van Hise with an open door through my 23 years of work added meaning, challenge, relevance, and happiness to my life.

**Kirsten:** You decided to retire in 2021. We were so sorry to see you go. You did a lot for Scandinavian Studies. Among other things, you served as our undergraduate advisor for many years and served on numerous departmental committees. Why did you retire?

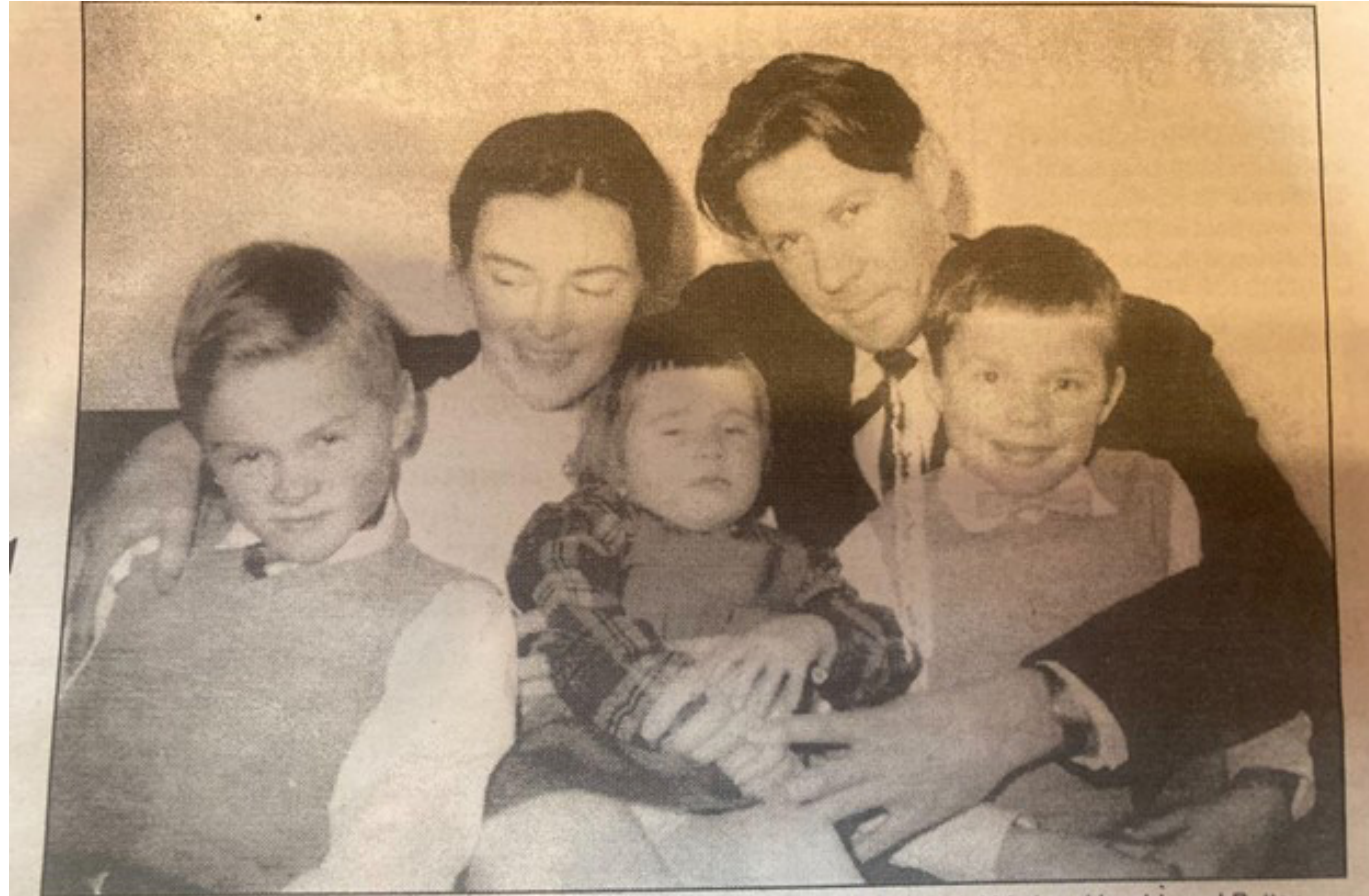
**Nete:** Retiring was an incredibly difficult decision to make. I dearly wanted to keep growing, developing new courses, nurturing new students and research, feeling relevant, staying in the loop, and working with / relating to my colleagues; however, Larry had retired several years earlier and wanted to buy a house in Denmark where we could spend long summers, and we had also postponed long trips abroad until we had more time on our hands.

**Kirsten:** How are you spending your retirement?

**Nete:** There is so much to do in retirement! We did buy a house in Denmark, and we are spending three months there in the summer. We travel to various places in the world during the semesters and see our children and grandchildren as much as possible. I audit classes at the University and love learning about new topics. I participate in five book clubs, read, knit, sew, garden, exercise, talk to and see family and friends. The Scandinavian Department will always have a special place in my heart. Happy Anniversary.

## Reflections from Petter Næss on Family Life at UW

In the following piece, Petter Næss, son of Harald Næss, shares memories from his family's time in Wisconsin.



The Naess family shortly after arrival in America. L to R: Morten, Ann Mari, Kristine, Harald, and Petter Naess, in Madison, Wisconsin in the fall of 1959.

Men- | literature to Modern Languages. | tiques market, where he quickly | rehearsal time we performed scenes from Holberg's come-



My father came to the UW on a Fulbright as temporary replacement for Einar Haugen in 1959: he had flown to the US after attending a conference, I believe in Portugal. Flights were expensive however, and my father's brother, who was an executive at a shipyard in Kristiansand, had arranged for my young mother and her three small children (2, 6 and 8) to travel to the US on a couple of freighters!!! This memorable adventure lasted several weeks, taking us first to Trinidad on MS Sunningner, where we transferred to MS Sunland, before sailing up to the St. Lawrence and down to Montreal before bussing the final legs to Madison, where we reunited with my father and spent some days at a hotel on the square before moving into University Houses (5 years later Sunland raun aground in the St. Lawrence, sustaining heavy damage, thanks to a drunken pilot!)



My brother recalls that as we took a walk one day and visited the capitol building, my father got talking to a guard, and no doubt mentioned that we were fresh off the boat from Norway. The guard asked if we'd like to say hi to the governor, and we were taken upstairs for a pleasant chat with Gaylord Nelson in his office - an auspicious beginning to our US sojourn! I don't recall this myself - I was only 4 - but it's entirely plausible. Nelson - then governor, but subsequently a US senator - was of Norwegian heritage (middle name was Anton), and Richard Vowles adds wood to the fire by writing in the festschrift that Einar Haugen, when his move to Harvard appeared to be imminent, had enlisted the aid of Wisconsin's two senators to have my father's visa status changed so that he could remain in the country.

Growing up in the Næss household on Chamberlain avenue in the 60s and 70s was a bit like growing up in a tiny Norwegian bubble and/or time warp; my parents spoke only Norwegian at home, they persisted - doggedly I sometimes felt - in their Norwegian ways, remained oblivious of US popular culture (my father never had a clue who Bart Starr was), they didn't have a TV, their closest friends were largely expats, and the dinner guests at our home were usually Scandinavians passing through. 30 years later, when they moved back to Norway, they were struck by how Norway had changed, and when the 1994 olympics put a final end

to the Norwegian jantelov - a law we all thoroughly respected - the transformation was complete. Norway had become just like the U.S. - and they bought their first television.

Being professor of Norwegian in a major midwestern university town entailed significant representational responsibilities toward visiting Norwegians, especially writers and cultural personalities. My siblings and I always looked forward to having Norwegian "company" at dinner, some of them celebrities back in Norway: people like Erik Bye, Jan Erik Vold, Rolf Jacobsen, Hans Brimi, Jon Faukstad, Arne Bendiksen, and Robert Bly, to name a few. Other guests were newly arrived visiting faculty, innocents abroad adjusting to America, and in need of some onboarding. I remember an internationally renowned Swedish literary theorist who came to dinner; his English was not great but he was, according to my mother, not only a fine scholar but an uncommonly sweet and gentle man. He had brought with him a beautiful bouquet of flowers for her, and a card that read, "With deepest sympathies." A favorite dinner guest was another Swede, the literary historian Sven Gunnar Linnér, who was a guest professor in 1963-64. When my mother put the dishes of food on the table he would invariably rub his hands together as if ready to dig in, but then pause abruptly and look at me (age 9) and apologetically ask "Men vad ska ni andra äta?"

A highlight was the annual Christmas party to which all students from Norway then studying at the University of Wisconsin, many of them business and engineering students, would be cordially invited, along with colleagues and students from the Department.. My parents would stock up on hard to find Norwegian delicacies like fenalår, Ski Queen brown cheese, Start biscuits, and not least many bottles of Ringnes beer, and Linje akevitt, all from Ullsvik's grocery store on E. Washington (though thankfully not lutefisk, which grocer Ullsvik, according to the Wisconsin State Historical society, sold nearly 20 tons of each year!)

All three floors of the house were populated with young Norwegians students, nursing their Christmas homesickness with great quantities of beer and akevitt and (mis)behaving in typical "norsk julebord" fashion - a source of great entertainment and wonderment for us kids.

At these parties there was always a big wooden trough on the piano filled with figs, dates, nuts and all manner of fruits, and an avocado or two. One year an

inebriated student took a big bite out of an avocado, mistaking it for a pear, and put it immediately back. Kim Nilsson's wife Usha seized this opportunity to establish a new Christmas tradition, and would each year ceremoniously take a big bite out of the avocado and put it back on the tray.

The "Norwegian bubble" insularity of our household I attribute in large measure to the extremely congenial atmosphere of the Scandinavian department, at least that's how we kids remember it; my father's colleagues and students were among my parent's best friends, and friends to us also. When expats bunch together, there's always that risk of parallel societies! Kim and Usha Nilsson, Niels and Faith Ingwersen, Karen and Dick Ringler, Mary Kay Norseng, Larry Berge, Ingrid Camerini, all of them figure prominently in our memories of a happy youth and childhood on Chamberlain avenue. Some of that positive vibe shines through in the photo of the happy campers in the Scandinavian Department in the photo below, published on the occasion of the Department's 100th anniversary in 1975.

Especially memorable gatherings which contributed to the Scandinavian Department's strong spirit of community were the summer courses offered by the department and UW extension at Washington Island and Rock Island in Door county. In addition to giving and attending courses about Ibsen's early plays, Viking culture, and Scandinavian film, the Scandinavianists frolicked on the beaches and in the beautiful natural surroundings of the islands. The Ringlers, who owned a cottage on Washington island, were our local hosts, and Karin Ringler served her unforgettable lasagna.

My parents were great lovers of music, my father an avid pianist, and the Rabelaisian songs of Carl Michael Bellman were for many years a weekly, or at least monthly, reason to gather at Chamberlain avenue and celebrate the Swedish bard, my father at the piano surrounded by colleagues, students and friends in various stages of tipsiness singing their hearts out.

When the "singing veterinarian" Dr. Lennart Backstrom arrived at the UW's vet school in the early 80s and



joined the Madison Scandinavian expat community, these Bellman bacchanals were elevated to a more refined level; Backstrom was not only a veterinary scientist, but an accomplished opera singer and graduate of the Royal Academy of Music in Stockholm and the National Drama and Opera School. In what was surely my father's finest moment as an amateur pianist, he was privileged to accompany Backstrom in a recital of Scandinavian songs at the Union theater.

When my father retired in 1991 he had just embarked on a major project for the Norwegian publisher Gyldendal of compiling, annotating and publishing the letters of Knut Hamsun. Hamsun's letters had been a special interest of his ever since the 1950s, when as a young student he had come across a collection of 70 letters from Hamsun to his good friend Knut Frydenlund. The letters were owned by Frydenlund's daughter, Signe, whom my father met through my mother, whose paternal grandfather's sister was married to Frydenlund. With Signe's permission my father was able to publish a selection of the letters in Edda in 1959, the same year he arrived at the UW. So began his lifelong work with Hamsun and Hamsun's letters, which culminated with the publication of a seventh and final volume of letters by Gyldendal in 2001. My father published an account of this work ("Arbeidet med Knut Hamsuns brev") in 2003 in a festschrift to Nils Magne Knutsen.

Following my father's retirement my parents moved back to Norway and bought a house in Vågsbygd outside of Kristiansand, not far from where my father was born. In addition to work on the letters, which would occupy both of them over the next 10 years (my mother contributed as proofreader and adviser), they rowed their "Osolver" rowboat in the skerries off the southern coast, and enjoyed walking and berry picking - nearly every day, duly noting down the day's excursion in their diary - in the wonderful forests and woodlands surrounding Kristiansand, which my father knew intimately from his childhood. They spent time with their grandchildren Sophy, Willy and Mari, and spent long summers on my sister Kristine's farm in Baie Comeau, Canada, on the St. Lawrence, where we had sailed by in 1959. There they could get a booster dose of the "country living" they had so enjoyed on their farm "Maridale" outside Verona, and in springtime my mother would come and revive her sheepfarming skills by helping us with the lambing here on our small farm in Lier (my wife and I had a small flock of sheep here for about 10 years)

My parents' health began to gradually deteriorate in the 2010s, my mother succumbing to dementia - but retaining her sweet nature and good spirits to the very end, and my father too showing signs of memory loss and frailty as he neared 90. They lived comfortably in their home in Vågsbygd, continuing their long walks each day but with an increasingly hazardous disregard for automobiles and traffic, and receiving attention once or twice a day from the public health service. During these years I would drive down to see them once a month or so, and Morten and Kristine would visit from the U.S. and Quebec just about every year.

A topic that often came up during these years which was a thorn in their side, and piqued my interest, was "the lost Hamsun letters." My father mentions in his piece about "Arbeidet med Hamsuns brev" that in the 60s a student of his had discovered nine interesting Hamsun letters in Elroy Wisconsin. The student was Larry Berge, a wry and friendly favorite of us kids, and a local Blue Mounds farm boy who had also been a Fulbright student at the University of Copenhagen. Larry was a patient and indefatigable microfilm peruser at the University library, and is even today an inexhaustible fount of local history (and wit) on Facebook. His painstaking research led him somehow to the letters Hamsun wrote to Svein Tveraas when Hamsun was living in Elroy in 1882 and 83 (included in volume 1 of my father's collection), and which my father was subsequently able to purchase from its owner. My parents recalled having shown the letters to some visiting journalists who had visited the house in connection with the publication of Ingar Sletten Kolloen's two volume Hamsun biography in 2004, but had since been unable to locate them. They had finally resigned themselves to assuming - but not knowing! - that the letters had been left on top of a pile of newspapers, and then simply thrown out with the garbage. Uff! I could not resist, each time I visited, doing yet another search of the house and the attic to find the treasure, but to no avail. But a few years ago, after both my parents were gone, my cousin's daughter contacted me: they had emptied a safe that had belonged to my father's brother Raymond, and found a thick envelope labeled "Harald's Hamsun brev," and asked if I was interested. All's well that ends well. The letters are today quite valuable, but my siblings and I plan on donating them, on my father's behalf, to the Hamsun museum or the National Library - I'm sure he would have approved.

## From the mixed-up photo archives of the Scandinavian Department...

*Enjoy this collage of images from the Department over the years.  
Can you find the people named below?*

Faith Ingwersen

Niels Ingwersen

Tura Patterson

Susan Brantly

Scott Mellor

Dick Ringler

Judy Anderson

Tom Dubois

Peggy Hager

Karin Ringler

Dick Vowels

Marit Barkve



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Marit Barkve  
Senior Development Program Manager  
University of Wisconsin Foundation  
1848 University Avenue  
Madison, WI 53726  
Phone: 608.308.5320  
Fax: 608.263.0781  
[marit.barkve@supportuw.org](mailto:marit.barkve@supportuw.org)



### Scandinavian Studies Newsletter Committee

Ida Moen Johnson  
Ailie Westbrook  
Svea Larson  
Cait Vitale-Sullivan

Layout/design by Jenna Sorensen

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University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Department of German, Nordic, and Slavic+  
814 Van Hise Hall  
1220 Linden Drive  
Madison, WI 53706  
Email: [info@gns.wisc.edu](mailto:info@gns.wisc.edu)  
Phone: 608-262-2192



Department of  
German, Nordic, and Slavic+  
COLLEGE OF LETTERS & SCIENCE  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON