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Searchable newspapers: discover more about your family and the world they lived in

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side path commission to clarify the growing clash between walkers and cyclists. One of my father's cousins was on the commission.⁷

Newspapers are rich repositories of information waiting to be discovered – from confirming or adding to what we know to uncovering the new or unexpected. The historical context that they provide can enrich family stories, photographs, and artifacts.

Closing gaps

Each of us likely has gaps in family records that don't get adequate attention. One example concerns my maternal grandmother. Anna Larson was born in Wylie Township, MN, to parents who emigrated from Sweden in 1880. After studying at Gustavus Adolphus College (GAC) in St. Peter, MN, she returned home in 1907. Her parents moved to Crookston, Polk Co., MN, around 1910. Anna married Pastor Carl Zaar in 1915; they moved to Vancouver, B.C., where he led the First Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church before and after World War I.

With help from the GAC Library Archive, I have excerpts from yearbooks and campus newspapers, including my grandmother's *Independent Blessings* sorority picture. Photographs show Anna and her family prior to her marriage. What did she do after college and before marriage (1907 to 1915)? What am I missing?

Gathering clues from community newspapers is on the critical path to answering these questions. My grandmother taught school and was an accomplished seamstress. A search using her name and the word 'dressmaking' revealed a good prospect: *Miss Ida Dahlman accompanied by Anna Larson departed for Warren, Saturday, where they will serve an apprenticeship at dressmaking with Mrs. E. Tornell.*⁸ Another search using her name and word 'teach' revealed another: *Miss Anna Larson, who has been working in Dakota all spring and summer, is home for a few days' visit but will leave again the last part of this week.*⁹ Next steps will be digging deeper into the above references while casting a wider net to uncover more information. And of course I will verify that I have the *right* Anna Larson.

I found Anna Larson in an article describing the Gustavus Adolphus College

reunion, held at North Star College in November 1913. It provides details on the evening, from room décor and speeches to the banquet and plans for next year's event. Professor O. E. Abrahamson acted as toastmaster; a Florence Abrahamson was present. "Notable out-of-town guests were ... Miss Anna Larson, Crookston."¹⁰

Then another *North Star College Notes* column caught my eye: *Miss Abrahamson will attend a wedding at Crookston on Wednesday evening. She will act as bridesmaid at the marriage of Rev. C. G. Zaar and Miss Anna Larson.*¹¹ This information correlates with the marriage record. And I'm still hopeful that I'll learn how my grandparents met. Perhaps they crossed paths at GAC or in Crookston. Whatever answers rise to the top, I'm sure the matchmakers were busy!

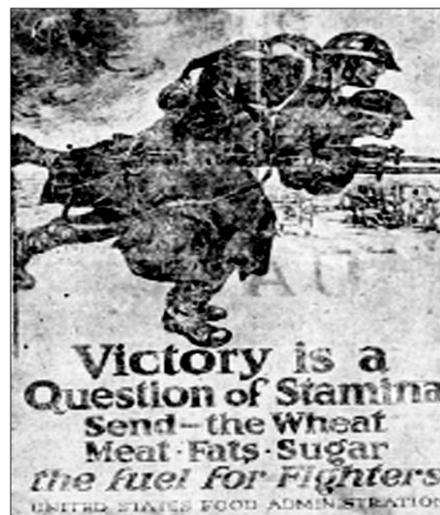
While more work is needed to close my "1907 to 1913 gap," digitized newspapers made it easier to identify possibilities, explore options, and ultimately discover new things. Note that if your family is Minnesota-based and the newspaper you need is not yet on *Chronicling America*, the *Minnesota Digital Newspaper Hub* is a wonderful resource.

WWI and influenza

The World War I era (1914–18) was a difficult time for citizens and immigrants alike. Drawings determined who went into the service. Communities implemented *wheat-less days and meals* to save food for the military. Red Cross picnics drove Liberty Bond subscriptions. Local projects were put on hold, as capital, labor, materials, and transportation were essential for the war work.

The country's changing demographics were debated in many newspapers. Sweden and Norway's love for the German Kaiser was mentioned, suggesting that their national pride made neutrality a difficult position to adopt.¹² Scandinavian officials' expectation that the U.S. would take a stand in support of neutral countries never materialized.

Many families lost sons in the war; some didn't survive the influenza pandemic of 1918-1919, a global disaster that killed more people than the War. Yet as early as the turn of the century in cities like Chicago, ethnic slurs and threats were not unusual: *Germans and Scandinavians who*



*met a policeman late at night were in big trouble. The Blue Tarrrier Gun Club will spare no one of these nationalities found on the streets after dark by its active coppers.*¹³

Scandinavians were generally patriotic; many chose to hide their ethnicity and become as American as possible.

Family loss and resilience

My paternal grandparents' families emigrated from Norway in 1850-1870, settling in Minnesota, Iowa, and South Dakota. My great-uncle Albert and grandfather Theodore Mork homesteaded in North Dakota; their Losby cousins settled in Wisconsin and North Dakota in the 1870s. We've followed these families on multiple fronts – what's left to discover?

I began with the 17th of May celebration held on Theo and Mary Mork's farm near Des Lacs, ND. An article tells us the event will be at Mork Lake, the Rose Valley Church is in charge, speakers and school children will participate, and the Ladies' Aid will furnish refreshments. Planning team members were J. A. Borud, Theodore Mork, and Torkel Taxdahl.¹⁴

On the next page is our family photograph of the event.

Taken early in the day, the picture shows people, horses and carriages, and flags from a distance. The newspaper article¹⁵ describes *the immense crowd* and the *carefully developed agenda*, with speeches by dignitaries and school children spoken in Norwegian and English, including a review of Norwegian history. The afternoon program opened with singing *America*.



17th of May Norwegian Independence Day at Mork Lake (1914).

Dinner was a grand affair, and there was just enough (of a) breeze to float the Stars and Stripes and the Norwegian flag. The article confirms the celebration was in honor of the 100th anniversary of Norwegian Independence. The logistics of hosting an event like this tell us a lot about the planning team's capabilities.

In 1904, the Laurits Losby family had moved to Vang Township, ND; Laurits was my grandfather's cousin. In 1916, Martin Engen and his family from Braham, MN, moved onto their farm in Vang Township; he invested in a Ford and is now busier than a turkey in a straw pile keeping Tin Lizzy on the road.¹⁶ Also in 1916, John Engen from Braham, MN, arrived and will take possession of the C. M. Engen (his father's) farm.¹⁷ Martin and John were my grandmother's brothers.

John Engen enlisted on September 16, 1917; he died on November 17, 1917, of pneumonia in the military training camp in Camp Dodge, Iowa, becoming the first Ward County casualty in WWI. The *Ward County Independent* printed the Braham, Isanti County, MN newspaper's moving account of the funeral, including this:

*The body was placed near the altar, with two soldiers standing guard. After a short sermon and patriotic address, public school children marched into the church and were allowed to view the remains of the soldier, dressed in army uniform and wrapped in Old Glory.*¹⁸

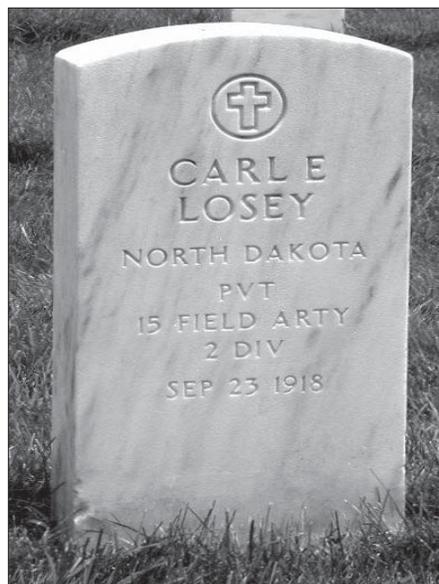
Carl E. Losby, Laurits Losby's son, was among the first to be drafted in 1917. On September 25, 1918, he died from bronchial pneumonia at Vrigne-Meuse, Champagne-Ardenne, France. Edwin Losby enlisted a judge's help to learn more about his brother's death. Private Carl E. Losby

was buried in Arlington National Cemetery, VA.¹⁹

Later that same year, Martin Engen died at age 34, after a short bout with influenza; he was survived by his wife and young child. Five of his sisters were at the funeral in the Rose Valley Lutheran Church. *Martin Engen was one of the pioneers of Vang Township and was considered one of the very best citizens of that community.*²⁰

In June 1919, Memorial Day was observed at the Rose Valley church with a program directed by teachers Miss Mork and Miss Underdahl. Children marched to the cemetery and placed flags and wreaths for soldiers who lost their lives. *Quite a crowd turned out to honor the fallen heroes who so gallantly gave their lives for their country.*²¹

Through these stories, we *feel* our families' sense of loss and admire their



Carl E. Losby(!)'s headstone at Arlington, Arlington Co., VA, Plot: Section 18, Site 4388

resilience, while appreciating the respect and admiration that the community felt for these men.

After the war, farming, agriculture, and the value of American crops continued to make headlines. Ole A. Oen, a more distant relative, was well-known for farming approaches that consistently produced top results. The death of his father, Anders Oen, was widely communicated in the paper, where we learn more about him. *Mr. Oen came to Ward County in the days of the pioneer and was one of the early settlers who eked out a living by picking up buffalo bones, which covered the prairie, and selling them. He filed on a homestead southwest of Minot. He lived a useful life and is survived by a large number of friends.*²²

It was at this time that my great-uncle Albert Mork wrote an editorial on proposed league programs. Potential benefits included state-owned and operated elevators, flour mills, and packing plants, and tax exemptions for farm improvements. Businessmen and farmers were at a stalemate. Albert emphasized how *hard-working, hard-thinking farmers* had helped to make North Dakota what it was and advocated *talking this over in a sane, intelligent manner.*²³ I suspect many businessmen saw farmers as ordinary, uneducated men; they likely didn't know they were dealing with a well-informed college graduate.

Using searchable digital newspapers to find facts, clarify and expand my understanding of events and discover historical correlations has yielded good results. Digitized newspapers can be a valued resource to family history researchers. They can help us to better understand what motivated individuals, the dynamics in our families' neighborhoods, and the forces at work in the times that they lived, and give new life to family stories and photographs.

Using Chronicling America

The *Chronicling America*, National Historical Newspapers project was commissioned to locate and preserve copies of newspapers published over the years in the towns, counties, and states of America dating back to 1690. The site currently contains almost 5 million pages of digitized newspapers and a list of virtually all of the newspapers published in America since

1690. Basic (search the entire archive or a state and/or time period) and advanced (select individual newspapers and further selections based on searching any phrase, an exact phrase, or words in proximity) search functions are available.

The websites on p. 26 provide tips on how to search most effectively.

Topics in *Chronicling America* support major themes covered in the American press of the time and links to content.

Library of Congress *Chronicling America* on *FamilySearch.org* (see the research wiki, with separate pages for every state).

Family History Daily offers articles and courses to help with your family history research.

Researchers will also find the *Minnesota Digital Newspaper Hub* and *Swedish American Newspapers* very helpful.

Chronicling America is produced by the National Digital Newspaper Program (NDNP) and jointly sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Library of Congress.

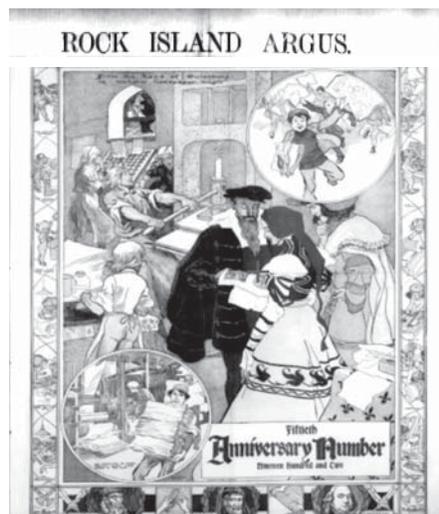
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Endnotes

All sources are from the Library of Congress, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers site*.

- 1) *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 27 Feb 1863, #1.
- 2) *Rock Island Argus*, (Rock Island, Ill.), 17 Oct. 1919.
- 3) *The Black Hills union*, (Rapid City, Pennington Co., Dakota [S.D.]), 28 Sept. 1900.
- 4) *The Times Dispatch*, (Richmond, Va.), 24 May 1914.
- 5) *The evening world*, (New York, NY), 21 Oct. 1892.

- 6) *Watertown Republican*. (Watertown, WI), 26 July 1893.
- 7) *The Minneapolis journal*, (Minneapolis, Hennepin Co., MN) 02 July 1901.
- 8) *Warren sheaf*, (Warren, Marshall Co., MN), 12 Dec. 1907.
- 9) *Warren sheaf*, (Warren, Marshall Co., MN), 12 Aug. 1914.
- 10) *Warren sheaf*, (Warren, Marshall Co., MN), 19 Nov. 1913.
- 11) *Warren sheaf*, (Warren, Marshall Co., MN), 28 April 1915.
- 12) *New-York Tribune*, (New York [N.Y.]), 13 Oct. 1901.
- 13) *Chicago Eagle*, (Chicago, IL.), 20 Nov. 1897.
- 14) *The Ward County Independent*, (Minot, Ward Co., N.D.), 23 April 1914.
- 15) *The Ward County Independent*, (Minot, Ward Co., N.D.), 21 May 1914.
- 16) *The Ward County Independent*, (Minot, Ward Co., N.D.), 18 April 1918.
- 17) *The Ward County Independent*, (Minot, Ward Co., N.D.), 17 Aug. 1916.
- 18) *The Ward County Independent*, (Minot, Ward Co., N.D.), 18 April 1918.
- 19) *The Ward County Independent*, (Minot, Ward Co., N.D.), 20 Feb. 1919.
- 20) *The Ward County Independent*, (Minot, Ward Co., N.D.), 14 Nov 1918.
- 21) *The Ward County Independent*, (Minot, Ward Co., N.D.), 14 Nov 1918.
- 22) *The Ward County Independent*, (Minot, Ward Co., N.D.), 16 Sept. 1920.
- 23) *The Ward County Independent*, (Minot, Ward Co., N.D.), 03 April 1919.



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