Navigating Culture in the Home, Church, School, and Community: Norwegian American Youth in Norman County, Minnesota, 1870-1925

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Navigating Culture in the Home, Church, School, and Community:
Norwegian American Youth in Norman County, Minnesota, 1870-1925

By
Brianna Rose DeValk

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
In
History

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Mankato, Minnesota
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Endorsement

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Navigating Culture in the Home, Church, School, and Community: Norwegian American Youth in Norman County, Minnesota, 1870-1925

Brianna Rose DeValk

This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student’s committee.

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Dr. Lori Ann Lahlum, Advisor

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Abstract

Since the centennial celebration of Norwegian migration to America in 1925, historians have frequently reflected upon the creation of the Norwegian American identity throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet, while investigations on culture and identity continue to expand our understanding of Norwegian America, youth are still frequently left on the margins of focus. The voices of children and adolescents are frequently difficult to hear as they leave few written historical records for historians to analyze. Additionally, few scholars have explored the sources they have left as adults remembering their childhood due to the skepticism of memory. As a result, youth do not get appropriate recognition as agents of culture within their communities. The search of their voices and experiences, however, can be fruitful with the proper tools and procedures. Thus, to bring to light Norwegian American youth experiences within the home, church, school, and community throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this project utilized a combination of primary and memory sources from Norman County, Minnesota. These sources included, newspapers, census records, church and school records, personal and family histories, oral history interviews, and photographs. In employing these sample sources from Norman County together and in collaboration with one another, a more comprehensive understanding of their cultural experiences can be understood. This project finds that Norwegian American youth played an important and active role in maintaining, adopting, and modifying culture. In the various ways with which Norwegian American youth navigated culture, this project additionally maintains that Norwegian American children and adolescents must be recognized as agents of culture – individuals that yield the power to influence and shape cultural processes - within their homes, churches, schools, and wider community.
Introduction

After his father failed to find means to communicate, “Store-Hans stepped out in front, facing the seated red-skins, [and] tried his best to make them understand, using what little English he had learned.”\(^1\) Store-Hans, the son of Per Hansa in the well-known Norwegian American novel, *Giants in the Earth*, became a cultural mediator when his Norwegian immigrant father was unable to communicate in English with Native Americans on the western frontier. He found himself in a strange position between cultures, as his knowledge of English made him appear socially and culturally different than his monolingual father. With additional knowledge of American customs, Store-Hans and the other children in *Giants in the Earth* often found themselves as cultural brokers – navigating daily life for themselves and their immigrant parents.

Conventionally, these children can be seen as undergoing Americanization, for their exposure to English and other American customs at a young age made their connection to America different than their immigrant parents. In this traditional view, *Giants in the Earth* more broadly demonstrates a narrative of a cultural battle against the forces of Americanization, as the new generation is pressured to adopt the dominate American culture. However, is this conventional illustration an accurate depiction of the cultural experiences of Norwegian American children and adolescents during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? Or are these cultural experiences more complex as *Giants in the Earth* may also suggest? This project, thus, aims to carefully evaluate the exchange of culture by Norwegian American youth and the larger role they played in the

Norwegian American experience. It will do this by looking at the lives of youth in Norman County, Minnesota, between 1870 and 1925 as a narrow case study.

Norman County is an ideal location with which to study because its development in the early 1870s takes place during the first mass wave of Norwegian migration, a similar period in which Giants in the Earth is set. While the organized migration of Norwegians to America began as early as 1825, the first significant wave of migration did not occur until after the Treaties of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota were signed in 1851 with the Upper and Lower Dakota. Norwegians then trickled into the southeast corner of what would quickly become Minnesota in 1858. While many migrated to the U.S. before the Civil War, the mass migration movement began in the mid-1860s. During this first mass wave, Norwegians began moving into the northwest corner of the state where Norman County is located, as well as the Dakota Territory as Giants in the Earth portrays.

The events of 1862 played a major role in the settlement of Minnesota for both Americans and immigrants during this first mass wave of migration. The Homestead Act of 1862 promoted emigration, especially from Norway, and had encouraged the

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2 The terms child, adolescent, and youth do not hold consistent definitions across scholarship for several reasons. Modern definitions for these terms may not always fit within the social and cultural context of the period which with these subjects are studied. In using the context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, I use the term child to discuss those between infancy and twelve years of age while I use the term adolescence to define those between twelve and eighteen years of age. I divide these categories at twelve due as this is the average age a child might end of their common school education during this period. However, within rural contexts an adolescent may still reside and depend on the family economy. These are similar, but not exact, categories in which Lori Ann Lahlum uses in a preliminary study on Norwegian American children, adolescence, and young adults. See, Lori Ann Lahlum, “Growing Up in Norwegian-American Communities: A Preliminary Study of Childhood, Adolescence, and Young Adulthood,” in Norwegian-American Essays, 2008: “Migration and Memory,” ed. Øyvind T. Gulliksent and Harry T. Cleven (Oslo: NAHA- Norway, 2008). This project uses the term youth to simply refer to both age groups. These age categories, however, and not intended to be restrictive but help illustrate a social turning point in youths’ experiences.

3 Carlton C. Qualey, Norwegian Settlement in the United States (Northfield, Minn.: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1938), 4-7.
settlement of Minnesota and other newly established states. It provided the opportunity for settlers over the age of twenty-one to receive a deed to their choice in arable land, up to 160 acres. Required from these settlers though was a small registration fee, submitted papers for claiming U.S. citizenship, and an agreement to make improvements to the land during the five years of proving up. In addition, the aftermath of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 further secured the possibility for new immigrants to settle the lands of Minnesota and the Dakotas, as many Dakota Indians were either executed, imprisoned, fled north, or were removed from the state to live on the Crow Creek Reservation next to the Missouri River in southern Dakota Territory. This event encouraged settlers to claim these lands as their own under the Homestead Act.

Furthermore, treaties in 1863 and 1867 with Ojibwe nations, which ceded land to the United States, secured the opportunity and legitimacy of settlement for Americans and immigrants interested in the fertile Red River Valley. This valley would later include the

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location of Norman County, the focus of this study. After these Ojibwe bands were forced onto reservations and the land had been surveyed by the government for redistribution by the early 1870s, Norwegians and other settlers began to claim land in the Red River Valley in large numbers.⁷

The Red River Valley had been one of the last areas in Minnesota to be settled by Norwegian immigrants, thus, many scholars provide only brief accounts on this migration.⁸ Nevertheless, Norwegian migration to the U.S. continued throughout the last decade of the nineteenth century. Those who came after the 1870s are often categorized within the second wave of mass migration, which saw the extension of settlement further westward as new states became incorporated into the Union. Still, mass immigration to the U.S. would continue until the 1924 Immigration Act, which placed significant restrictions and quotas on several immigrant groups. The passage of this act consequently put an end to the movement of many immigrant groups while coinciding with the end of the mass movement of Norwegians.⁹

As the mass immigration movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries ended, scholars such as Isaac A. Hourwich and Carl Wittke immediately took up the pen to tell the vast tales and experiences of the various migrants.¹⁰ Although these tales have evolved, the immense literature on immigration produced over the last century has caused

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the United States to be defined as a nation comprised of immigrants. Moreover, the sustained influx of immigrants from around the world today has aided the continued illustration of the U.S. as a place of opportunity, promise, and refuge for migrants of all ages. As a result, immigration to the U.S. remains one of the most prevalent interests of American historians.

Scholarship on nineteenth- and twentieth-century migrants prior to the passage of the Immigration Act in 1965, which reversed many exclusionist policies, was primarily concerned with the process of assimilation into mainstream American culture. These scholars often use the term “Americanization” to refer to the process by which immigrants adopted the values, beliefs, and customs of American culture. Additionally, it is used to describe the cultural changes which took place in these immigrant communities. Oscar Handlin’s 1951 book, *The Uprooted*, is the primary model of this broad immigration scholarship that emphasizes the Americanization of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century migrants. In *The Uprooted*, Handlin explains that the identities of immigrants were “sundered” as they took up the new American lifestyle.¹¹ This theme of Americanization is also common in fictional accounts of immigrants produced during the first half of the twentieth century as exemplified in *Giants in the Earth*.

Beginning in the 1960s when former exclusionist policies were reversed, immigration scholars began to emphasize the inter-ethnic mosaic of American identity and the various

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demographic features of the nation’s population, often pushing back against claims of Americanization. These scholars grew increasingly interested in analyzing and comparing the different ethnic and racialized immigrant experiences. As a result, scholars increased focus on the disadvantages of Southern and Eastern European immigrants in the early twentieth century, who along with racialized ethnic groups, were a principal target in the 1920s exclusionist immigration policies which aimed to restrict groups that did not fit the white protestant image of a good American. The result has caused many of the old immigrant groups, Central and Northern Europeans, to be overlooked in scholastic discussions, but not wholly disregarded in recent years.

The increased focus on racial and ethnic analyses has also brought significant attention to the growth of Latin American migration to the U.S., as contemporary political discussions also raise critical questions about the evolution of U.S. immigration policy. This is especially true for the concern in the treatment of children and youth seeking refuge in the U.S. This attention to the treatment of migrant children has sparked expansive research on immigrant youth, especially in relation to culture, discrimination, and identity from interdisciplinary approaches. Models of Americanization are often disregarded in these new studies, which reject the lineal understanding of culture which it

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14 For examples and models of these approaches, see John W. Berry, et al., eds., Immigrant Youth in Cultural Transition: Acculturation, Identity, and Adaptation Across National Contexts (Mahwah, New Jers.: Erlbaum, 2006), and Faith G. Nibbs and Caroline B. Brettell, eds., Identity and the Second Generation: How Children of Immigrants Find Their Space (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2016).
can create. Contemporary discussions on refugee status has also caused an increase in study on migration patterns and discriminatory policies.\textsuperscript{15} Several of these studies also revisit discussions on the nineteenth century exclusionist policies against Chinese immigrants, and more broadly, discrimination against Asian Americans.\textsuperscript{16} Collectively, these investigations reassess group culture and identity, as well as access to and experience in the U.S.

These trends, which shift discussion in the direction of policy have caused scholars to find less interest in Scandinavian Americans within the larger field of immigration studies, for they were not greatly affected by the discriminatory policies of the early twentieth century. However, these Old Immigrants are not ignored, for many characteristics of Scandinavian American immigration, settlement, community, and ethnic and racial identity are still explored and find their own niches in larger discussions on nineteenth- and twentieth-century immigration to the U.S. For example, academic journals such as \textit{Scandinavian Studies} and \textit{Norwegian-American Studies} have helped to sustain contemporary investigations into the various Norwegian American experiences.


\footnotetext{16}{For an example of immigration scholarship that addresses the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and immigration policy, see Roger Daniels, \textit{Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1882} (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004).}
Early scholarship on Norwegian Americans followed similar trends in immigration studies with the use of the Americanization framework to define their experience in the U.S. After Olaf M. Norlie’s initial scholarship on Norwegian America, historians sought to evaluate, with greater detail, the movement of these immigrants along the frontier and their transition into mainstream American culture. For example, in *Norwegian Settlement in the United States*, Carlton C. Qualey asserts that as new generations of Norwegian Americans were born in the U.S., they became fully incorporated into the American population. In 1940, with the publication of *Norwegian Migration to America*, Theodore C. Blegen diverged from Qualey by asserting that Norwegian Americans assimilated into American mainstream culture, rather than simply being incorporated into its population. In this book, Blegen specifically discusses a slow transition into American culture, following their transition in various American institutions. The children of these immigrants are primarily responsible for this

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17 Olaf M. Norlie’s 1925 *History of the Norwegian People in America* provides one of the earliest works on Norwegian Americans. According to Norlie, these immigrants were the highest quality pioneers in America because of their bravery and good morals. They were in many ways ideal Americans, easily assimilated into the American mainstream. See, Olaf Morgan Norlie, *History of the Norwegian People in America* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1925). Additionally, Norlie has also contributed to Norwegian American studies with the production of two biographical books on the teachers and pastors of the Synod of the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America. See, Olaf M. Norlie, *School Calendar, 1824-1924: A Who's Who among Teachers in the Norwegian Lutheran Synods of America* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1924), and Olaf M. Norlie, and O. A. Tingelstad, *Who's Who among Pastors in All the Norwegian Lutheran Synods of America, 1843-1927* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1928). These works remain impressive feats in scholarship.


19 Blegen, *Norwegian Migration to America*, 596.

transition, as they acted as a bridge between their parents’ homeland and their own.\textsuperscript{21} This point is, however, only discussed in passing. Instead, this general period of literature on Norwegian America follows the general assimilation and transition trend within broader immigration scholarship prior to the 1960s.

By the 1970s and 1980s, historians of Norwegian America came to reject narratives of complete Americanization. Ingrid Semmingsen, Odd S. Lovoll, and Jon Gjerde approached the analysis of the Norwegian American identity as means to challenge the claims of complete assimilation into the American mainstream.\textsuperscript{22} Semmingsen asserts that Norwegian Americans constructed an ethnic identity that accepted their new American identity and respected their heritage with Norway.\textsuperscript{23} In \textit{The Promise of America}, Lovoll also traces Norwegian American ethnic to a shared common heritage with Norway. Lovoll stresses, however, that this was a conscious revival, initiated during the centennial celebration of Norwegian migration to America in 1925.\textsuperscript{24} Both Semmingsen and Lovoll push back against the claim that Norwegian immigrants became wholly American, insisting that their identity fell somewhere in between the two.

\textsuperscript{21} Blegen, \textit{Norwegian Migration to America}, 225-226.

\textsuperscript{22} Scandinavian American scholars follow similar new framework during this period. For the Swedish American model, see Robert Clifford Ostergren, \textit{A Community Transplanted: The Trans-Atlantic Experience of a Swedish Immigrant Settlement in the Upper Middle West, 1835-1915} (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

\textsuperscript{23} Ingrid Semmingsen, \textit{Norway to America: A History of the Migration} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978), 172.

\textsuperscript{24} Odd S. Lovoll, \textit{The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 222.
In *From Peasants to Farmers*, Jon Gjerde further challenges the early assimilation claims by looking at how the American environment impacted Norwegian American identity construction. Gjerde asserts that in the struggle on the American frontier, Norwegian Americans were active agents in cultural change. These changes, however, were not “incompatible” with their core beliefs, which allowed for considerable cultural retention.\(^\text{25}\) Although Semmingsen, Lovoll, and Gjerde reject the easy and complete Americanization of Norwegian Americans, the language of Americanization is still used as these scholars analyze the degree to which they identified with Norway and America.

Growing alongside these discussions of identity is a rising interest in ethnic and racial analyses. Scholars such as April Shultz, Jon Gjerde, Orm Øverland, and Daron Olson further investigate the development of Norwegian American ethnic identity, expanding beyond simple discussions of assimilation. In 1994, April Schultz revisited discussions on the 1925 centennial celebration of Norwegian migration, placing greater emphasis on the conscious development of the Norwegian American identity. Schultz argues that because ethnic identity is dynamic, Norwegian American identity did not experience a lineal transition.\(^\text{26}\) In *Minds of the West*, Gjerde argues that the American frontier encompassed many ethnic identities, including Norwegian American, which helped to create America’s multiethnic identity.\(^\text{27}\) While the recognition of a more diverse America has been acknowledged within broader immigration scholarship, Gjerde’s investigation

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\(^{25}\) Jon Gjerde, *From Peasants to Farmers: The Migration from Balestrand, Norway to the Upper Middle West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 239.


helps place Norwegian Americans into this grand mosaic. Additionally, these scholars have begun to move away from understanding cultural transformation as lineal.

In addition to Schultz and Gjerde, Orm Øverland has added to the discussion of ethnic identity. In his book *Immigrant Minds*, Øverland argues that home-making myths helped immigrants establish claims to an American identity whether it be for social, economic, or political reasons.\(^{28}\) Øverland’s broad study, which uses a more traditional Americanization framework, offers an original dialogue on the role of ethnic memory and the desire of immigrants to be recognized as American. In *Vikings across the Atlantic*, Daron Olson follows Øverland’s assessment. However, Olson concludes that home-making myths joined Norwegian American identity more closely with Norway than it did with America.\(^{29}\) Øverland has also introduced a critical conversation on Norwegian American immigrants’ whiteness and racial identity within Norwegian American scholarship. This topic has been expanded in recent years, bringing awareness to the racial identity and whiteness of Norwegian Americans.\(^{30}\) However, this significant trend

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that has yet to be explored to its richest extent, especially as it pertains to cultural retention and loss.\textsuperscript{31}

While this scholarship on Norwegian American cultural experiences and ethnic identity has collectively helped bring greater understanding to Norwegian American communities, it is still limited. Fundamentally missing in these discussions on Norwegian Americans is a nuanced study of youth. While Norwegian American youth have not been ignored, few scholars provide a thorough analysis of their contributions to their communities and the Norwegian American identity. This is largely due to the difficulties in constructing a narrative on youth, as they often leave little written historical record behind. Theodore Blegen first laid out these challenges for scholarship in Norwegian America beginning in the 1940s, claiming that there are too many “inaccuracies” in their footprint and too few primary sources available to build a comprehensive narrative of their experiences.\textsuperscript{32} The shortage in written primary source materials makes constructing the narratives of children and adolescents difficult; thus, few scholars have been able to address it in great detail.

Despite the difficulties in exploring the records of youth, scholars still work to include them in their studies of Norwegian American communities and identity. Their analyses particularly focus on the various institutions with which youth interacted, such as the home, church, school, and wider community. According to these scholars, the

\textsuperscript{31} Some scholars have also explored Norwegian American identity in the context of heritage. For examples of heritage discussions, see Anna Rue, “‘It Breathes Norwegian Life’: Heritage Making at Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum,” \textit{Scandinavian Studies} 90, no. 3 (2018): 350–75, and Odd S. Lovoll, \textit{The Promise Fulfilled: A Portrait of Norwegian Americans Today} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

\textsuperscript{32} Blegen, \textit{Norwegian Migration to America}, 225.
home became the primary place with which Norwegian American families maintained Norwegian customs and heritage, such as in the use of language, food traditions, or gender roles. Despite the preservation of customs in the home, American influences still effected Norwegian American families. In the case of gender roles, for example, scholars find consensus that within rural communities, Norwegian gender roles were maintained for a period of time before the American environment and culture effected change. Children and youth are an important piece of these discussions because farming during this period in both Norway and America largely remained family enterprises. Still, comprehensive studies on Norwegian American children’s cultural experiences in the home is limited.

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Youth, however, find greater attention in discussions on church and school. This attention derives from the consensus among scholars that the American common school was the principal vehicle of Americanization, for it taught youth the principles of democracy and the English language, leading the way for the adopting of an American identity.\textsuperscript{36} Despite the changes in contemporary discussions of Americanization, recent scholars still uphold the common schools as the primary institution of children’s socialization with American culture.\textsuperscript{37} Scholars on U.S. education have also argued this about the common schools of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, giving greater understanding that this was a conventional experience for immigrant youth.\textsuperscript{38} On the other hand, the Norwegian Lutheran churches are recognized as places which pushed back against the forces of Americanization by providing Norwegian American youth with education in the Norwegian language and other cultural and religious practices.\textsuperscript{39} This dichotomy between the church and school in the children’s lives dominates discussion on youth in Norwegian American communities. Yet, this scholarship is not primarily focused on youth and thus only provides a partial understanding of their experiences within these important institutions.

\textsuperscript{36} Blegen, \textit{Norwegian Migration to America}, 241-244.
\textsuperscript{37} Nelson and Fevold, \textit{The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian-Americans}, 300; Lovoll, \textit{The Promise of America}, 67; Lagerquist, \textit{In America the Men Milk the Cows}, 55; and Lahlum, “Growing Up in Norwegian-American Communities,” 117.
\textsuperscript{38} Kaestle, \textit{Pillars of the Republic}; Theobald, \textit{Call Schools}; and Parkerson and Parkerson, \textit{The Emergence of the Common School}.
\textsuperscript{39} Lovoll, \textit{The Promise of America}, 67-69. For discussion on the type of religious education provided by the Norwegian Lutheran churches, see also Blegen, \textit{Norwegian Migration to America}, 247; and Lagerquist, \textit{In America the Men Milk the Cows}, 53.
Scholars of Norwegian America have also explored lives of youth in community spaces. It is typically understood that Norwegian American communities created a sense of hegemony which allowed a continuation of important Norwegian traditions. Yet, over time communities came to accept and adopt American traditions, such as, celebrating American independence and learning to play baseball.\(^\text{40}\) While youth are typically not the center of these discussions regarding community life, they are more frequently recognized as participants and contributors. This has begun to change in recent years as Lori Ann Lahlum asserts that youth played a significant and active role in shaping their communities.\(^\text{41}\) Lahlum centers analysis on youth and demonstrates how the voices of children, adolescents, and young adults can be used effectively. Yet to recognize youths’ diverse experiences, additional comprehensive work still needs to be done.

Although investigating youth can be challenging, and not all scholars of children agree that the history of children can be explored, knowledge on youth in America has significantly expanded in recent decades.\(^\text{42}\) This scholarship has begun to flourish due to


\(^{41}\) Lahlum, “Growing Up in Norwegian-American Communities,” 125-126.

\(^{42}\) In 2020, *The American Historical Review* published an important debate in the history of children and childhood about the nature of the field and its future. Important in this debate are questions about whether scholars can truly study the history of children. Sarah Maza initiates this question, claiming that few sources and a lack of children’s agency makes a comprehensive history difficult. Sarah Maza, “The Kids Aren’t All Right: Historians and the Problem of Childhood,” *The American Historical Review* 125, no. 4 (Oct. 2020): 1261–1285. Agreeing that children lack full agency, Nara Milanich, Robin P. Chapdelaine, and Ishita Pande insist that an approach which looks at history through children, as Maza suggested, may still yield useful insights into questions of power, colonialism, race, and other vital
increased questions about children’s education, wellness, and stability, as they play an important role in shaping contemporary everyday civic policy. Studies conducted on children and youth, and more specifically childhood, are generally divided between two camps: social or biological construction. Social construction scholars draw from French historian Phillippe Ariès’ 1962 seminal work, *Centuries of Childhood*. Stemming from an interest to better understand the history of family, Ariès argues that the central theme of childhood and growing up is sociability and social relations.43 In this sense, Ariès’ argument first placed the stages of childhood into a framework which contends that childhood is a social and cultural construction. On the other hand, the biological camp sprung up in the 1990s when several scholars from across different fields argued against Ariès’ assertions. These scholars claim that growing into adolescence is a biological reality and reject the idea that childhood is socially constructed.44

American historians typically find themselves within the social camp as they look at social, not biological, factors in the childhood experience. In *Conflicting Paths*, Harvey J.


Graff follows various childhoods with which children grew up. Drawing on an approach rooted in psychohistory, Graff argues that children’s demographics were “powerful factors in determining the different paths” in which children and adolescents grew up throughout history. In 1997, Priscilla Ferguson Clements’ *Growing Pains*, drew special attention to the Industrial Age, or Gilded Age, as one of the most significant periods in shaping the experience of children in the United States. Clement argues that this period is significant to children and adolescents’ history because of developments in immigration, urbanization, and industrialization. These developments forced drastic changes upon youth, as America became increasingly focused on children’s welfare and childhood experience. As a result of the emphasis of industrialization, socioeconomic status becomes one of the most prominent features addressed in studying the child and their experience in America.

The discussion of socioeconomic status is significant to studying children's history because opportunities are regularly determined by demographic factors, such as gender, race, and class. Historians of American childhood since the 1990s often share this common belief and framework. Due to this shared belief, several scholars have argued that children's experiences are very much socially and culturally constructed. As Steven Mintz explains in *Huck’s Raft*, youths’ experiences were largely shaped by “society,

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time, and circumstances.” Additionally, historians in the twenty-first century employ more specific demographic lenses, such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, in order to better understand the diverse factors that shape youth experience. This analysis also brings discussions of childhood into late twentieth and early twenty-first century historical contexts.

Alongside this rise in the use of demographic lenses is a growing awareness of regional variation in youth experiences. Historians of American children often emphasize the Industrial Age and the urban experience in America; thus, scholars often only highlight the urban poor, middle-class, and upper-class children. As a result, the experience of rural children, especially those living in the middle west, seldom find place for extensive historical analysis. The rural and urban geographical divide is important in the study of children and childhood, as scholar Pamela Riney-Kehrberg points out that the physical environment greatly affects children’s experiences. In this sense, the childhoods of urban children cannot be sufficient to understanding the childhood of rural


children. Thus, exploring rural children’s experiences is a critically important to developing a better understanding of American children more broadly.

While rural Midwestern children have received little attention in the scholarship of American children, they have not been ignored. In the 1991 book, *Settlers’ Children*, Elizabeth Hampsten brings attention to children in the Midwest during the late nineteenth century as immigrants came to settle Dakota Territory. In the book, Hampsten follows child experiences in work and education. She also draws attention to the evaluation of children’s happiness, wellness, and hardship on the frontier. An important feature of Hampsten’s book is the understanding that ethnicity played a role in frontier relations, where it was not uncommon to see “Norwegians stuck to other Norwegians.”  

Although the ethnicity of youth is acknowledged case by case, ethnic identity is not central to the analysis in *Settlers’ Children*.

Additionally, in 2005 Pamela Riney-Kehrberg brings a broader focus to Midwestern states as she explores the experiences of children who grew up on farms. According to Riney-Kehrberg, the experience of rural children is unique for they did not experience the same welfare initiatives as urban children during the Progressive reforms. Additionally, their experience was different because of the isolation of farming communities prior to the 1920s when the radio brought them into contact with the rest of the world. Like Hampsten, Riney-Kehrberg analyzes the best and worst aspects of childhood and youth, exploring their experiences in work, education, play, and welfare. Although Riney-

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Kehrberg makes several references to Norwegian American children and youth, their identity as Norwegian Americans is not a demographic feature unpacked in the narrative.

In recent years, other additions have been made to the scholarship on children and youth in the Midwest, especially in relation to foster children and the infamous orphan trains. Megan Birk, a prominent scholar of childhood in America, has also contributed to a gendered analysis of the rural childhood. In a 2019 article for the *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, Birk explores poor girl’s labor in rural communities across the U.S., focusing on those placed in homes or wards of the state. Although contributing to a still less explored area of study, these historians frequently do not address the importance of culture in the experiences and perspectives of youth.

Vitally missing from the overall scholarship on youth in America is the cultural identity of the various children and youth in the rural communities of the Midwest. As immigration scholars have demonstrated, ethnicity and culture have been essential factors in determining immigrant experiences. Thus, there is a critical need for exploring the cultural components of young immigrants in the Midwest to understand how culture played a role in their experience. This project hopes to fulfil this gap in the study of children and adolescents. In addition, this project hopes to contribute to providing a

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missing piece of the Norwegian American cultural experience in the United States, a
deeper analysis of the experiences and perspectives of Norwegian American youth.

This project attempts to fill both these needs by looking at the lives and experiences
of Norwegian American children and adolescents in Norman County, Minnesota,
between 1870 and 1925.55 This project does not intend to investigate Norwegian
American childhood, in the sense of understanding what it meant to be a child within the
community. Rather, this project seeks to understand how youth interacted with
Norwegian and American culture. More specifically, it seeks to understand the role that
culture played in the lives and experiences of Norwegian American youth in their homes,
churches, schools, and wider community, as well as their responses.56 In addition, this
project does not intend to be comprehensive, as its hope is to bring greater focus to rural
Norwegian American youth during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,
using Norman County as its central analysis.

In doing so, this project must first understand the community which developed under
regional and national contexts and the cultural landscape which youth came to interact.
What did the process of land acquisition, settlement, and community development for
Norman County look like during the late nineteenth century? Additionally, what social
and cultural institutions did youth interact with in this community? Secondly, this project

55 I have chosen 1870 as a starting date for this project because Norwegian Americans did not arrive in
Norman County prior to the land surveys in the first few years of the 1870s. Moreover, I have chosen 1925
as an ending date for this project for two reasons. First, it provides several years for addressing the impact
of World War One and the pressures of Americanization and citizenship in America during this war.
Second, 1925 marks the centennial celebration of Norwegian migration to America, when Norwegian
Americans began to analyze their own past, effecting how they interpret their culture and identity.
56 Within this project, I use a broad and commonplace definition of culture: the beliefs, values,
customs, and language of a group of people.
must investigate youth within these various institutions. How did Norwegian American children and adolescents use different Norwegian and American cultural elements in their homes, churches, schools, and wider community in Norman County between 1870 and 1925? Additionally, what impact did the use or introduction of these cultural elements have on Norwegian American youth? Lastly, this project must understand the role of youth. What role did youth play in these cultural exchanges?

In answering these questions about Norwegian American youths’ experiences with culture, this project uses the language of acculturation rather than Americanization when addressing changes in culture. The reason for this development is the understanding that age effects experience. In another sense, youth are undergoing cultural change and “developmental changes” simultaneously.57 Recent studies on immigrant youth by scholars have developed a framework designed for investigating youth with particular focus on cultural identity and experience. These studies use acculturation, defined by these scholars as a “broad concept,” because it recognizes both simple and complex cultural changes that occur following social contact with a different culture.58 The framework is different than that of Americanization because it views this cultural change

58 Jean S. Phinney, et al., “The Acculturation Experience: Attitudes, Identities, and Behaviors of Immigrant Youth,” in Immigrant Youth in Cultural Transition: Acculturation, Identity, and Adaption Across National Contexts, ed. John W. Berry, et al. (Mahwah, New Jersey: Erlbaum, 2006), 71. In this study, the acculturation framework is developed, in part, for psychological investigation. However, examinations using this framework not only look at attitudes and behaviors, but experiences with culture and cross-cultural interactions. Thus, this project seeks to use a basic form of this language in studying Norwegian American youth experiences with culture.
as a phenomenon, not transition or process. Thus, this project incorporates the language of this concept to recognize the various experiences of Norwegian American youth.

In using the language of acculturation, this project builds from previous scholarship and explores a variety of primary sources, including census data, newspapers, personal, family, and oral histories, as well as photographs and archival material. This project used statistical data coming from compendiums of the U.S. federal census, as well as the census itself, to develop an awareness of the demographic layout and rural setting of Norman County and wider community. More specifically, the demographic data provided by the compendiums and census records revealed substantial details about the community’s ethnic makeup and language usage throughout this period. This data was consulted from the printed compendiums in the Memorial Library at Minnesota State University, Mankato and through Ancestry.com services.

In addition to community data, this project explored an abundance of school and church records. During the summer of 2021, before the outbreak of the Delta variant for Covid-19 prevented further archival research, I travelled to the Minnesota History Center in St. Paul to search the extensive manuscript collections of teacher reports and examinations, class registers, and subject files from the schools in Norman County. In addition, these collections contained reports regarding curriculum and other affairs that were sent to the county superintendent’s office throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In addition to school records, state legislation played a critical role in the regulating of school terms and other affairs in education. These laws and statues were
consulted with print editions at the Memorial Library at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

At the Minnesota Historical Center, I also explored the selected records from the American Lutheran Church in Minnesota on microfilm. Although not consistent, these records contained various bylaws, congregational notes, membership records, minutes from council and ladies’ aid meetings, as well as records of baptisms, confirmations, and marriages useful in understanding the institution of the Lutheran churches and youth experience. In addition to these records, I travelled briefly to Ada, Minnesota to visit the Norman County Historical Society (NCHS) and research center before the Delta variant closed the facility. The NCHS held various church histories and photographs. However, condensed versions of these histories were also found in published histories of Norman County and various townships. These histories were vital to understanding the role in which these institutions played in the cultural experiences of youth.

Local newspapers act as significant sources in understanding the community in which one lived. Thus, various English and Norwegian language newspapers from Norman County and the state were consulted for this project. Online databases, such as Chronicling America and the Minnesota Historical Society Digital Newspaper Hub, offer a significant number of national and state newspapers that have been made available online. The Minnesota History Center in St. Paul also holds microfilm copies of the different local newspapers throughout Norman County that are no longer in publication or have not yet been digitalized.
In addition, many personal narratives have been consulted for this project. Due to the ongoing pandemic, however, several archives containing the written primary source documents (i.e., letters, diaries, and journals) from youth in Norman County, Minnesota, were closed or had limited access. These important records were thus inaccessible during the completion of this project. However, personal, family, and oral histories have helped tremendously to fill in the missing experience and voices of these youth. Memory sources, especially when evaluating youths’ experiences, can be biased as information and ideas are filtered through modern and adult perspectives. However, when used in collaboration with other source material, memory sources can give valuable insights into the lives and experiences of youth.

In exploring memory sources, this project consulted oral history interviews assembled in Gerald Anderson’s *Prairie Voices: An Oral History of Scandinavian Americans in the Upper Midwest*. These interviews offer a critical missing perspective of those who grew up in Norman County, and the surrounding area, during the late nineteenth and early

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59 Several historical societies in the Red River Valley, both the Minnesota and North Dakota side, do hold letters, diaries, journals, and memoirs from children, adolescents, and young adults throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Norwegian-American Historical Association also holds written material by youth throughout this period. However, due to limited online finding aids, relationships to Norman County and residents in these archives are not easily determined without further exploration of the archives.

60 Scholar Colin Heywood, a historian of children in nineteenth- and twentieth-century France, frequently refers to these kinds of memory sources as ego documents for they only reveal information with which the subject wishes to share. In these ways, these kinds of documents can present misleading information about a particular memory. Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018).

61 For recent scholarship which addresses both the problems and benefits of memory sources in understanding child and youth experiences, see Liahna Barener, “Bitter Nostalgia: Recollections of Childhood on the Midwestern Frontier,” in *Small Worlds*, ed. Elliot West and Paula Petrik (Lawrence: University of Press Kansas, 1992); Riney-Kehrberg, *Childhood on the Farm*; and Lahlum, “Growing Up in Norwegian-American Communities.” Although scholars of children agree that history through children is possible, the lack of written primary sources leaves their narratives only partially complete. Chapdelaine, “Little Voices,” 1296–1299.
twentieth centuries. The Livingston Lord Library at Minnesota State University, Moorhead holds the original interviews from this project. In addition, this project consulted the numerous personal and family histories found in the edited Norman County history book, *In The Heart of the Valley*, as well as an autobiography by Carl Narveson, who spent a portion of his childhood in the Wild Rice Children’s Home in Norman County, titled *An Orphan’s Saga*.

Using the various sources available, the first chapter of this project looks closer at the complex process of land acquisition and settlement, as well as the cultural development of Norman County. This chapter draws on various regional sources to place Norman County within the larger narrative of nineteenth and twentieth century United States history, without ignoring the history of the Ojibwe nations. This chapter, additionally, draws on previous scholarship and county histories to examine the spatial layout of the county and the cultural environment in which residents constructed and interacted. In this sense, it gives narration to the temporal development of the county and its community institutions, such as schools and churches, which came to play a significant role in the lives of children and adolescents.

The second chapter of this project explores youths’ experiences in their homes and on family farms. The investigation into the homes of youth gives special attention to the use of language and gender roles. It broadly investigates when and why parents and youth switched primary languages as well as what the divisions of labor looked like on their

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62 Norman County is situated next to the White Earth Reservation for the Ojibwe nations; thus, it is essential to discuss Ojibwe histories and how their land was taken by the United States government to become Norman County.
farms. The third chapter explores the interactions of youth in the Lutheran churches of Norman County and surrounding area, with particular attention on the use of language, traditions, and concepts of gender. More specifically, it investigates changes in language usage, religious instruction, youth-centered sacraments and organizations, as well as the kinds of spaces which boys and girls occupied.

The fourth chapter looks at youths’ experiences in common schools. This investigation gives special attention to the use of language and gender concepts. The chapter more broadly addresses reactions to the introduction of English, their gendered curriculum, and their adaptive success in common schools. The fifth, and final, chapter of this project explores the experiences of Norwegian American youth in the wider community. This investigation gives special attention to cultural celebrations and gender roles. The chapter more broadly explores youths’ participation in Norwegian and American communal activities and the gendered and non-gendered spaces they occupied.

While exploring the lives of Norwegian American children and adolescents in the rural Midwest during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this project has found a more complex narrative of cultural encounters in their homes, churches, schools, and wider communities. Within these various institutions, I contend that Norwegian American youth were primary actors in cultural exchanges and held agency in making diverse cultural decisions in various settings. Additionally, this complex narrative, explored in detail throughout this project, does not reflect a struggle against assimilation as past scholarship and immigrant literature often portrays. Instead, it reflects the exchange, modification, and creation of a Norwegian American culture by Norwegian
American youth. In these ways, Norwegian American youth must be recognized as full agents of culture - individuals who wield the power to shape cultural processes of change and adaption.
Chapter One:

The Early Settlement and Cultural Development of Norman County, Minnesota

The name for Norman County comes not from the well-known Minnesota trader and entrepreneur Norman Kittson, as is sometimes speculated, but from the homeland of those who immigrated and settled the area throughout the late nineteenth century. The fertile land and prairies of the Red River Valley became home to over a thousand immigrants by 1875, just a few years after the land had been surveyed for settlement purposes, with nearly half of these immigrants coming from Norway. By 1881, the large influx of migrants and immigrants caused the southern portion of Polk County to separate and become Norman County. The name Norman, a variation of the popular phrase “north men,” was suggested and chosen in “honor of the Norwegian settlers of [the new] county.” With a significant Norwegian immigrant population at the end of the nineteenth century, Norman County’s numbers would continue to increase at the turn of the century.

In 1900, Norman County had reached a population which surpassed 15,000 residents. Nearly a third of its population, precisely 5,106, were recorded in census records as foreign-born immigrants. Of these foreign-born immigrants, 4,066 had emigrated from Norway. Although nearly two-thirds of Norman County’s population was native-born, only 1,340 of the native-born white residents had native-born parents. These numbers

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64 “The Name Norman County,” *Puhler’s Journal* (Ada, Minn.) October 9, 1885.
suggest that 1900 marked the height of a large second-generation population in Norman County, which still attracted a significant influx of immigrants. Although Norman County became home to various other migrants and immigrants, the county was dominated by its large Norwegian presence. Former resident Carl Narveson exemplified this in an oral history, explaining that “there might have been some non-Norwegians … but I never knew of them.”\footnote{Carl Narveson, excerpt of an oral history conducted in 1976, in \textit{Prairie Voices: An Oral History of Scandinavian Americans in the Upper Midwest} (Moorhead, Minn.: Gerald D. Anderson, 2014), 158.} Narveson’s memory about the ethnic makeup of Norman County during his childhood in the early twentieth century helps demonstrate the degree to which Norman County was a homogeneous Norwegian American community.

The homogeneity of Norman County would come to play a vital role in the cultural development of the region. However, the events that led to the development of this community are both complex and rarely told in comprehensive detail. The development of Norman County is representative of broader trends in Norwegian immigration and settlement throughout the Midwest during this period. Yet, this broader process of U.S. expansion, the successive settlement of immigrants, and the cultural development of these communities by the settlers are frequently oversimplified in immigrant histories. For example, as scholar Gunlöf Fur asserts, few scholars examine the “entangled histories of Scandinavian immigrants and American Indians in the Upper Midwest.”\footnote{Gunlöf Fur, "Indians and Immigrants- Entangled Histories," \textit{Journal of American Ethnic History} 33, no. 3 (2014): 70.} This history, however, is critical to understanding the settlement and cultural development of the communities.
The lack of this attention is particularly true for the counties in the Red River Valley as the earliest narratives of these communities were church histories. More specifically, scholars chronicled the development of the Norwegian Lutheran churches while immigrants traveled to the valley to claim land.68 These descriptions, however, lack the historical context necessary to understand the series of events that led to the creation of these Norwegian congregations. Additionally, scholars of Norwegian America have cultivated some literature on the immigration to the valley, but few give full attention to connecting the events that led to its development. For example, in the 1930s Carlton Qualey highlights several events that contributed to migration into the valley, noting the 1860s treaties with the Ojibwe, the Homestead Act, the expansion of railroads, and the promotion of Norwegian emigration.69 However, these references are scattered across Qualey’s research. Other scholars follow a similar pattern by discussing one or more events that contributed to encouraging immigration, but not drawing strong connections between them.70 Additionally, these specialists often overlook how these events shaped the histories of the Dakota and Ojibwe who were greatly displaced in the process of Norwegian settlement.

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68 For early scholarship on the churches in the valley, see Hillesland, “The Norwegian Lutheran Church in the Red River Valley,” and, Norlie and Tingelstad, Who's Who among Pastors in All the Norwegian Lutheran Synods.

69 Carlton C. Qualey, “Pioneer Norwegian Settlement in Minnesota,” Minnesota History 12, no. 3 (1931): 249, 252. See also, Qualey, Norwegian Settlement in the United States, 99-100, 104.

70 For example, Theodore C. Blegen discusses the Homestead Act and U.S.-Dakota War but in unrelated sections. See Blegen, Norwegian Migration to America, 321, 405-408. In 1984, Odd S. Lovoll discusses homesteading and the war, but in independent sections. See, Lovoll, The Promise of America, 83-84, 86-90. In 2006, Odd S. Lovoll includes a larger discussion on the U.S.-Dakota War in the context of Norwegian immigration and western expansion in Minnesota. However, the Ojibwe are not primary characters in his discussion on the Red River Valley. See, Lovoll, Norwegians on the Prairie, 20-24.
Scholars outside of Norwegian America have contributed to discussions on the development of the Red River Valley. However, many are still not comprehensive. For example, Vera Kelsey discusses events such as the fur trade and the U.S.-Dakota War, but her 1951 narrative neglects the Ojibwe who ceded land following the war. In 1970, Hiram Drache acknowledges the non-violent nature of the Ojibwe against the backdrop of stereotypes from the 1860s, but does not discuss the Ojibwe beyond this reference. Scholars in the 1980s were no better at addressing the complexities of 1862 and the advancement of settlers into Minnesota and Dakota Territory. On the other hand, the 1990s did see a shift with the inclusion of more Dakota and Ojibwe history. However, despite recognizing the “appetite of the Minnesota expansionists,” William Lass still makes weak connections to the events of 1862 and the removal of the Dakota and Ojibwe from their lands. Scholars in the early twenty-first century have included more discussion on these events and how they shaped settlement on the Midwestern frontier, but they are still not comprehensive.

This chapter seeks to explore the complex narrative of land acquisition, immigration, settlement, and community development in Norman County during the nineteenth century.

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75 Carroll L. Engelhardt has contributed to discussing the development of Fargo and Moorhead in the valley, centering on the development of the rails. See Carroll L. Engelhardt, *Gateway to the Northern Plains: Railroads and the Birth of Fargo and Moorhead* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 8. Sara Sundberg has also contributed to discussing women on this frontier but dedicates only a single paragraph to Native American and white relations. See Sara Brooks Sundberg, “‘Picturing the Past’: Farm Women on the Grasslands Frontier, 1850 - 1900,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (2010): 204-205.
The purpose of this is to understand the development of this Norwegian American community and the cultural landscape which would come to play a role in shaping the lives and experiences of youth during this initial period of settlement. In doing so, this chapter specifically asks how the process of land acquisition, immigration, and settlement played out in the Red River Valley? What major events led to Norman County’s development as a Norwegian American community? Finally, what Norwegian American cultural institutions were established with which youth would interact?

Placing these events within national contexts, this chapter argues that the acquisition of the Red River land by the U.S. government for settlement purposes was neither quick nor easy. Over time, however, impressions of native hostility and the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 provided grounds for the U.S. to pressure land cessions with Ojibwe nations to ensure success in a western expansionist agenda. Moreover, the Homestead Act of 1862 played a critical role in pressuring this expansion and ensuring its success through the promotion of immigration. Once land acquisition was complete, settlement and community development by the Norwegian immigrants in Norman County was immediate. At the center of these efforts were the development of religious organizations, schools, and homes. Following these developments were businesses, transportation, and other community institutions. Collectively, these developments came to impact youth

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76 In recent years, a settler colonial framework has attracted a great deal of scholarship that seeks to answer similar questions across the upper Midwest and Red River Valley region. For examples, see, Ken Peterson, "Ransom Powell and the Tragedy of White Earth," *Minnesota History* 63, no. 3 (2012): 88-101; Treuer, *Warrior Nation*; and Karen V. Hansen, Grey Osterud, and Valerie Grim, ““Land Was One of the Greatest Gifts”: Women’s Landownership in Dakota Indian, Immigrant Scandinavian, and African America Communities,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (2018): 260.
cultural experiences as these became the primary institutions in which youth would come to interact.

**American Intervention in the Red River Valley**

The transition of ownership of the Red River Valley land from the Ojibwe to the United States government was not a hasty development. Since the arrival of Europeans to the Red River, however, there was little doubt that the valley held great potential. French traders throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century sought to place a trading post along the northern end of the Red River for its advantageous position in the Upper Midwest. The location attracted many traders, both French and British, and slowly grew into the populous Pembina Settlement, known for its Métis population. However, the land that would become Norman County, settled by thousands of Norwegian immigrants by the 1870s, remained home to the Ojibwe nations during this period. This was true during Major Stephen Long's 1823 expedition through the Red River Valley on behalf of the U.S. government and would remain so for another four long decades.

Although Major Long's expedition launched U.S. initiatives into the Red River Valley, this was not done with the purpose of developing the valley for settlement. The expedition team was only assigned for “scientific reconnaissance.” During an encounter with a northern Dakota band, whose hunting grounds bordered Ojibwe territory, the

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77 For an overview on the development of Pembina Settlement, the Métis population, and activity in the Red River Valley during the early nineteenth century, see Wingerd, *North Country*, 125-128.
members of the Dakota band blocked the expedition’s path north with guns. The expedition interpreted this as hostile, believing that their “intentions could not be misunderstood.”\textsuperscript{80} The expedition narrative goes as far as to explain that the team feared the Dakota and sought to sneak away from them in the night. However, the Dakotas’ actions were likely misunderstood, for it is quite evident that the expedition misinterpreted many Native American customs. The team, for example, had observed the Dakota and Ojibwe burn the prairies, interpreting it as a hostile assault tactic.\textsuperscript{81} The misinterpretations illustrate the degree to which the U.S. lacked a true understanding of the Dakota and Ojibwe. The expedition’s impressions of the hostile nature of these nations during these encounters would considerably impact the events that transpired over the next few decades by having created a negative stereotype of the Dakota and Ojibwe.

The impressions of hostility immediately drew U.S. officials into Native American affairs in and around the Red River Valley. In 1825, the U.S. established negotiations with the Ojibwe, Dakota, and several other native nations in the Upper Midwest. The negotiations were set, not for acquiring the land, but to establish peaceful boundaries between the natives, who wandered into other bands territory to hunt, often causing conflict. U.S. officials, however, failed to recognize the reason for why this was

\textsuperscript{80} Keating, \textit{Narrative of an Expedition}, 14.
\textsuperscript{81} The expedition team believed that the burning of the prairie land was a strategic tactic used to distract their enemies during attacks, see Keating, \textit{Narrative of an Expedition}, 36. However, burning prairie land was a common practice among the Dakota, likely for agricultural and hunting reasons, see, Westerman and White, \textit{Mni Sota Makoce}, 100.
occurring in the first place.\textsuperscript{82} Important from these negotiations was the impression of the Ojibwe and Dakota as a “ferocious looking body of true savages.”\textsuperscript{83} The negotiations illustrate the continuation of damaging native stereotypes. Nevertheless, the treaty was signed and later approved in congress and strict boundaries were established between the nations in the Upper Midwest. However, the ultimate failure to understand the customs and conditions of the Dakota and Ojibwe during the early nineteenth century would continue to perpetuate negative and harmful stereotypes into later decades.

The Mission of Minnesota Statehood

The U.S. made its first attempt to broker a deal with the Ojibwe for the Red River Valley land in 1851. This attempt, however, was not a top priority nor entirely supported. When Minnesota became an official territory in 1849, government officials wanted to set Minnesota on the fast track to statehood. This required more land to support an increasing population.\textsuperscript{84} Thus, Territorial Governor Alexander Ramsey asserted that “towards facilitating the settlement of the territory, [he] would rank the purchase of the Sioux Indian Country, west of the Mississippi River” his top priority.\textsuperscript{85} By 1851 U.S. officials, and individuals interested in gaining position with the government, succeeded in

\textsuperscript{82} By 1823, the Dakota and Ojibwe Indians in the Upper Midwest had begun to experience a multitude of changes to their ways of life, including the broken treaty promises of the U.S. government, a dwindling buffalo population, and an unfamiliar market economy. See, Westerman and White, \textit{Mni Sota Makoce}, 149. See also, Martin Case, \textit{The Relentless Business of Treaties: How Indigenous Land Became US Property} (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2018), 72-74.

\textsuperscript{83} Lawrence Taliaferro, “Autobiography,” \textit{Lawrence Taliaferro Papers, 1813-1868}. Microfilm, Roll 4, Lass Center, Minnesota State University, Mankato, Minn.

\textsuperscript{84} For a more in-depth discussion on the politics of Minnesota statehood and its relation to taking Dakota and Ojibwe land, see Lass, \textit{Minnesota}, 84-85. See also, Case, \textit{The Relentless Business of Treaties}, 148-150.

\textsuperscript{85} \textit{Message from the Governor of the Territory of Minnesota, to the first Legislative Assembly: September 4, 1849} (St. Paul: Chronicle and Register, Print, 1849), 16.
brokering treaties with the Dakota in the Minnesota Territory. Although not part of his asserted priority, Governor Ramsey took a shot at a treaty with the Ojibwe in the North following negotiations with the Dakota.\textsuperscript{37}

This bid was rejected in Congress, as some scholars assert that southern senators were discontent with the possibility of yet another new state. Thus, U.S. officials sacrificed the Ojibwe treaty to ensure the success of the Traverse des Sioux and Mendota treaties.\textsuperscript{38}\textsuperscript{66}

Whether or not this was a sacrifice, such rejection indicates that securing the Red River Valley land was not a top priority. The apathy towards the land, however, is best illustrated in an article from 1852, declaring that “the country from Lake Superior west to the borders of Red River Valley, is fit for nothing but Indians and wild beasts.”\textsuperscript{38}\textsuperscript{88} This article demonstrates that acquiring the land in the valley was not fully supported at this time. The failure to pass the 1851 treaty also helps illustrate that the acquisition of land in the valley was not a clear or easy process.

The burgeoning economic interest and development of the Red River during the mid-1850s would, however, slowly pique the interest of the Minnesota expansionists once again, but only after statehood was achieved in 1858. Settling the Red River Valley was not an immediate priority to the U.S. following the 1851 treaty attempt, but interest in the

\textsuperscript{37} In Governor Ramsey’s 1852 message to the public, the concern for this territory of Pembina was not entirely about land acquisition, but about including the Métis into the official population of Minnesota Territory. “Governor’s Message,” The Minnesotian (St. Paul) January 10, 1852, Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS). MNHS will replace this from here on.

\textsuperscript{38} William Watts Folwell, A History of Minnesota (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1956), 290-291. William Lass disagrees with this idea, suggesting instead that the rejection came from “irregularities” in the treaties with the Dakota, sacrificing the treaty with the Ojibwe to ensure such irregularities were corrected. See, William E. Lass, Shaping the North Star State: A History of Minnesota’s Boundaries (Saint Cloud, Minn.: North Star Press of St Cloud, Inc., 2014), 155.

\textsuperscript{88} “Messrs. Editors,” The Weekly Minnesotian (St. Paul), July 31, 1852, MNHS.
Red River Valley was marked by the desire for “direct and easy communication” through the establishment of “a steamboat” route to Hudson Bay.\textsuperscript{89} Scholars who discuss the Red River Valley often find the railroad as the vital development that led to settlement in the region.\textsuperscript{90} However, this overlooks the importance of the 1850s economic interest in the steamboat route to Hudson Bay and how it played a critical role in turning the attention of Minnesota officials to the valley to see its potential for settlement. It was not until the introduction of new agricultural mechanisms in the mid-1850s that “attention further North” to the lands of the valley became a significant talking point.\textsuperscript{91} The eventual steamboat route had led many to see that the Red River “waters one of the finest prairie regions on the continent.”\textsuperscript{92} This interest in settlement, however, only emerged to this extent after Minnesota became a state. The slow development of interest in the land helps demonstrate that the acquisition of the land in the Red River Valley was not a hasty occurrence.

Immediately after Minnesota and U.S. officials developed interest in settling the Red River Valley, they began to use the hostility of natives, developed in part through Major Long’s 1823 expedition, as justification for their military presence in the valley. In 1849, Governor Ramsey reported that the nations were “hostile to each other,” and that securing

\textsuperscript{89} “Direct Communication with Red River,” \textit{The Weekly Minnesotian} (St. Paul), August 6, 1853, MNHS.
\textsuperscript{90} Many scholars who discuss the development of the Red River Valley do not acknowledge the importance of the steamboats or completely disregard it from the discussion of settlement. For example, see Engelhardt, \textit{Gateway to the Northern Plains}.
\textsuperscript{91} “The Yankee Traveling North,” \textit{The Weekly Minnesotian} (St. Paul), July 5, 1856, MNHS.
\textsuperscript{92} “Steamboat Navigation from the Red River of the North! Proceedings of the Chamber of Commerce of the City of Saint Paul,” \textit{Saint Paul Weekly Minnesotian} (St. Paul), January 29, 1859, MNHS.
the frontier with military force would be necessary to protect any settlers.\textsuperscript{93} Significant pressure to send U.S. forces into the lower Red River Valley came in 1860 as settlers were being “exposed to frequent trespasses by the Indians.”\textsuperscript{94} Military occupation was thus justified for the “security of settlers” and to “suppress Indian depredations.”\textsuperscript{95} As pleas for the presence of the military were being made, it had become clear that attempts to broker a deal with the Ojibwe were once again in the making. In January of 1861, when Governor Ramsey addressed next steps for developing the state, he declared that the Red River Valley would “eventually be the most valuable in the State.”\textsuperscript{96} The pleas for military presence and Ramsey’s plans for the future of Minnesota demonstrate clear intentions – the land in the valley had become a priority to obtain from the Ojibwe.

**Western Expansion and Settler Colonialism in the Upper Midwest**

The Homestead Act of 1862 would play a critical role in encouraging the U.S. to pressure Native Americans into ceding their lands for new immigrants. Enacted by the U.S. government in May of 1862, the act allowed the opportunity for settlers to receive up to 160 acres of land to cultivate with a small registration fee, the intention to become naturalized citizens, and an agreement to make improvements to the land over the course of five years.\textsuperscript{97} Minnesota newspaper editors would display this news across the state,

\textsuperscript{93} *Message from the Governor of the Territory of Minnesota*, 13.
\textsuperscript{94} “To the President of the United States,” *The Weekly Pioneer and Democrat* (St. Paul), January 13, 1860, MNHS.
\textsuperscript{95} “To the President of the United States,” *The Weekly Pioneer and Democrat* (St. Paul), January 13, 1860, MNHS.
\textsuperscript{96} “Governor’s Message,” *The Weekly Minnesotian* (St. Paul), January 11, 1861, MNHS.
reporting that “the passage of the Homestead bill cannot fail to accelerate emigration, bring on a large number of bready settlers, and add largely to the material growth and prosperity of the State.”98 To the expansionist looking to bring more settlers into the Midwest, it was a “splendid achievement.”99 The act would soon accelerate the pressure placed on the U.S. government to broker new deals with Native Americans to cede their lands for the new immigrants. In Minnesota, this meant pressuring the Ojibwe for the land in the Red River Valley.

When Minnesota officials called for military action to suppress petty crimes against the settlers in 1860 and 1861, they had once again misunderstood the actions of the natives. These actions help explain why the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 was initiated.100 However, when violence broke out, the Minnesota newspapers would point to the Dakota as hostiles who were at fault for the difficulties in protecting settlers land on the frontier. Public sentiment firmly believed that the solution to protecting white settlement, in lieu of the violence that had occurred, would be to “either kill every Sioux Indian within [the] border or drive the tribe out of the state [sic].”101 The state government reported a belief no different than this sentiment, asserting that the Dakota “presence of [the] frontier would be a perpetual barrier to the growth of the state,” and that the solution for this

98 “State News,” The Saint Paul Daily Press (St. Paul), May 22, 1862, MNHS.
99 “The Good Result and Its Authors,” The Saint Paul Daily Press (St. Paul), May 27, 1862, MNHS.
100 The frontier had been agitated for years by the Dakota and Ojibwe expressing frustration over their treatment, lack of annuity payments, and dwindling food sources. Scholars in recent years have dedicated a larger focus onto the conditions for why members of the Dakota had sought violence against the U.S. and white settlers. For this recent scholarship, see Wingerd, North Country, 295-296; Westerman and White, Mni Sota Makóce, 192-194; and Treuer, Warrior Nation, 51.
101 Editors of the Press, “The Indian War – A Few Suggestions,” The Saint Paul Daily Press (St. Paul), August 30, 1862, MNHS.
barrier would be for the Dakota to “disappear or be exterminated [sic].”\textsuperscript{102} These sentiments regarding the Dakota are critical for understanding how the U.S. government responded to the Ojibwe in the north during this period, whose lands the government now desired.

The U.S. government used the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 as an opportunity to justify the presence of military force in the Red River Valley during negotiations with the Ojibwe. An armed expedition of 220 men was launched into the valley in 1863. The expedition team saw themselves at war with all natives in Minnesota and held clear intentions for “offensive operations in striking at the homes of Indians,” if necessary.\textsuperscript{103} Believing strongly that all natives were hostile and that they were at war, the U.S. sent the armed men into the valley to obtain a treaty with the Ojibwe. Although the U.S. had qualms with the Dakota, the first article of the Old Crossing Treaty in 1863 with the Red Lake and Pembina Ojibwe was an article establishing “peace and friendship.”\textsuperscript{104} Although an article establishing peace and friendship was tradition in land cessions, the military presence and most recent events suggests that the threat of war was imminent if not signed. The 1863 treaty with the Red Lake and Pembina Ojibwe ceded all lands owned by the bands, including the tract of land that would later become Norman County, for twenty thousand dollars annually over the course of twenty years.\textsuperscript{105} Historians have


\textsuperscript{103} J. A. W., “The Treaty Expedition,” \textit{Saint Paul Daily Press} (St. Paul), September 22, 1863, MNHS.


categorized these negotiations as manipulative on part of Governor Ramsey, for the use of the military and threats to the Ojibwe for responsibility in an attack on a Red River steamboat which occurred in 1862. Nevertheless, the treaty was signed by representatives of each party. The presence of the military and threats made to the Ojibwe nations ultimately make for questionable strategies to obtain and secure the acquisition of land.

Despite many assertions from scholars, the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862 did not entirely discourage settlers from entering the Red River Valley. This is because transferring land from the Ojibwe to the U.S. government was a slow process, one that could never be guaranteed, as the 1851 attempt had shown. Congress amended the 1863 treaty with the Red Lake and Pembina bands in 1864 and another treaty had to be signed acknowledging these amendments, delaying further actions. This 1864 treaty allowed the Red Lake and Pembina Ojibwe to remain on ceded lands until reservations had been cleared and lots had been assigned for them, to take up “civilized life.”

While the U.S. government worked to fulfill this goal, Ojibwe land remained in their control. As reported in 1866, the Ojibwe and several Dakota bands, had continued to live in the valley. It was not until the treaty of 1867 that the Ojibwe were to finally be sent to reservations. The treaty

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109 Press, “Indian Matters,” The Mantorville Express (Mantorville, Minn.), July 20, 1866, MNHS.
signed in March of 1867 with the Ojibwe would be ratified by April of the same year.\textsuperscript{110} While it is likely that settlers did fear the natives in the Red River Valley, the slow process of making treaties and transferring ownership to the U.S. government played an important role in why the valley would not be heavily settled by whites until after 1867.

\textbf{Attracting Immigrants}

Once the Ojibwe were moved to reservations in 1867, the U.S. government could begin surveying the land. The year after the treaty was signed, Minnesota officials proposed the development of a land office to begin coordinating and promoting immigration into the Red River Valley. The proposal eventually passed in February of 1868.\textsuperscript{111} The state then instituted several techniques to attract settlers, especially those from Norway and the other Scandinavian countries. Such an attempt had been started in 1850 with the visit of Swedish writer, Fredrika Bremer, who famously remarked: “what a glorious new Scandinavia might not Minnesota be!”\textsuperscript{112} Bremer’s positive remarks cast Minnesota as an ideal place for Scandinavian immigrants, a tactic which officials later utilized to attract white settlers to the Red River Valley.

In 1868 Paul Hjem-Hansen, a Norwegian immigrant author and journalist in Minnesota, was hired to travel into the valley and encourage its settlement. In one of the letters that Hjem-Hansen wrote, he observed that the valley “presents so many advantages for Scandinavian farmers that immigrants are likely to stream in here within

\textsuperscript{110} “The Chippewa Treaty,” \textit{The Rochester Post} (Rochester, Minn.), April 27, 1867, MNHS.
\textsuperscript{111} “Senate Bills Passed,” \textit{Minneapolis Daily Tribune} (Minneapolis), February 27, 1868, MNHS.
\textsuperscript{112} Fredrika Bremer, \textit{The Homes of the New World: Impressions of America} (United States: Harper & Brothers, 1853), 56.
the next year."\textsuperscript{113} Hjem-Hansen also noted the advantages of homesteading, which would provide free land to immigrants interested in emigrating to America.\textsuperscript{114} Newspapers also began promoting the fertility of the valley in 1870, describing it as the “Nile of the North” and prized for the “astonishing fertility” of the soil.\textsuperscript{115} Following these accounts, a rush of Norwegian settlers came later in the year to Alexandria’s land office in the lower part of the valley.\textsuperscript{116} These attempts to promote immigration soon after the land was transferred into the hands of the U.S. government quickly succeeded in encouraging immigration.

\textit{Settlement and Community Development of the County}

By the time Norwegian immigrants arrived in the Red River Valley, the Ojibwe had been moved to reservations and land in Polk County (later part of Norman County) was in the final phase of governmental surveys. The Homestead Act of 1862 played a key role in encouraging the settlement of the land in the valley. Looking closely at township plot maps and purchasing records can help illustrate the degree which the Homestead Act attracted settlers, specifically Norwegian settlers, to Polk County along the Red River. For example, Shelly Township not only attracted an overwhelming Norwegian population, but according to the General Land Office (GLO) records, Shelly had a

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{113}] Paul Hjelm-Hansen, at Alexandria, Minnesota, to the Public, July 31, 1869, in \textit{Land of their Choice: The Immigrants Write Home}, ed. by Theodore Blegen (St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), 441.
\item[\textsuperscript{114}] Paul Hjelm-Hansen, at Alexandria, Minnesota, to the Public, July 31, 1869, in \textit{Land of their Choice: The Immigrants Write Home}, ed. by Theodore Blegen (St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), 441.
\item[\textsuperscript{115}] \textit{The Stillwater Republican} (Stillwater, Minn.), May 17, 1870, MNHS.
\item[\textsuperscript{116}] “Our Own State: Compiled from State Papers and Correspondence,” \textit{Minneapolis Daily Tribune} (Minneapolis), December 8, 1870, MNHS.
\end{itemize}
number of successful homesteads by these Norwegian settlers (see Figure 1).\textsuperscript{117} While GLO records do not account for lands granted to the railroad or other third parties, nor the failed claims, the data nonetheless reveals that the settlement of Shelly Township by Norwegian immigrants owed part of its success to the Homestead Act of 1862.\textsuperscript{118}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{LandsGrantedSold.png}
\caption{Lands Granted or Sold to Individuals by the State of Minnesota in Shelly Township, 1875 - 1899}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{117} The data for this study comes from the General Land Office Records database for Minnesota township 146, ranges 48 and 49. A total of 98 land patents ranging from 1875 to 1899 exist in the GLO records. These land records were cross-referenced with the 1875, 1885, and 1895 state census records to determine the validity of the records and the ethnic make-up of the settlers. Land patents unaccounted for in census have been acknowledged in their own category. These records do not include purchases made from the railroad companies or sale of land from other parties. For the land patents records used in this study, see Land Patents, General Land Office Records, U.S. Department of the Interior: Bureau of Land Management, accessed April 19, 2021, \url{https://glorecords.blm.gov/default.aspx}; and State Census, Minnesota Historical Society, Minnesota People Records Search, accessed April 19, 2021, \url{https://www.mnhs.org/search/people/#?int=prefix\&ln=prefix\&mnt=prefix\&census=1\&wotr\&pg=1\&ep=census,wo\&fromD=&fromM=&fromY=&toD=&toM=&toY=&st=last_name_slim\&sd=asc\&cs=default\&cd=asc\&places=Norman%20County}.

\textsuperscript{118} The traditional narrative regarding the Homestead Act of 1862 characterizes the act as a failure, seeing a greater number of claimants fail to prove up. Exact numbers are still in determination while other scholars agree that the act was successful in the settler colonialist agenda to replace natives with white landowners. For a brief overview of this discussion, see Richard Edwards, “Invited Essay: The New Learning About Homesteading,” \textit{Great Plains Quarterly} 38, no. 1 (2018): 2.
As land was surveyed and immigration was encouraged in the area, the white population in Polk County (later Norman) would explode to over 10,000, with nearly half of this white population foreign-born immigrants.119 Many of these settlers to Polk County came in or after 1872 when surveys of the land were almost complete. As one original settler of Shelly Township remembered, “a few came as early as 1870 and 1871 but the real influx of permanent settlers was in 1872.”120 The large arrival of settlers caused Polk to split, creating Norman County at the southern end of the county line, incorporating a total of 24 townships by 1890. At such time, Norman County alone had surpassed 15,000 white settlers and was still growing into the twentieth century.121

While the white population grew, the Ojibwe did not disappear from the region. Established during the 1867 treaty, the White Earth Reservation lay just east of Norman County. Interaction between the Ojibwe and newcomers was frequently recorded in the family histories of the white residents. Several of the histories chronicled the receiving of help during early years or the eventual development of “friendly” relationships.122 Despite these positive remarks, the legacy of the U.S.-Dakota War remained a very real

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strain to their encounters and perceptions of their neighbors. Alma Ramse, former resident of Norman County, remembered that the Ojibwe would say “‘Chippewa’ and that meant that they were friendly,“ opposed to the Dakota whom they “were always kind of afraid.” Ramse’s memory about the careful distinction made between the Ojibwe and Dakota validates the legacy of the war and the fear that was engrained into white settlers’ thoughts about Native Americans as they came to settle these lands. However, despite the continued presence of the Ojibwe in Norman County, soon after these immigrants settled on the land, they immediately began constructing a new cultural landscape which reflected their own world view.

**The Cultural Landscape of Norman County**

At the center of efforts to create a new cultural landscape in Norman County, was the development of a church community. The Norwegian immigrant presence greatly shaped the religious landscape of the community, quickly creating a dominantly Lutheran environment. In Shelly Township, the first congregation, Marsh River Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation (*Marsh River Norsk Evangelisk Lutherske Menighed*) was formed in August of 1872. This was only two months after the land was officially surveyed, two years before the township was incorporated into Polk County, and some time before many settlers built permanent homes. During this meeting, over 50 total

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124 Congregational Minutes, Constitution, 1872-1894, Microfilm, Reel 90 [ALC 219], selected congregational records of the American Lutheran Church in Minnesota, 1800-1988, MNHS.
members joined the congregation. A total of eight baptisms took place the same day the congregation was formed on August 13th.\textsuperscript{125} Confirmations and marriages soon followed. However, other churches and congregations did not develop until several years after settlement began. For example, in Fertile, many congregations were not established until the early 1880s. Faaberg Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation (\textit{Faaberg Norsk Evangelisk Luterske Menighed}), for example, was not established until July 12, 1881.\textsuperscript{126} On this day, a single baptism was recorded, but several more were observed in the months afterwards.\textsuperscript{127} Similar to Marsh River, observances of confirmations and marriages quickly followed in the records.

The congregations in Norman County typically found comfort in Lutheran doctrine. This is not surprising as the Church of Norway at the time of mass emigration was Lutheran. Catholics, Methodists, Congregationalists, and Baptists existed in Norman County during early years of development; however, their numbers were significantly smaller. While Norman County had a significant number of Lutheran congregations, they were not united. Without a state structure to create unity like in Norway, synodical associations for Norwegian Lutheran churches in the U.S. varied greatly. In Norman County, congregations were most commonly affiliated with the Norwegian Evangelical

\textsuperscript{125} Ministerial Records 1872-1899, Microfilm, Reel 90 [ALC 219], selected congregational records of the American Lutheran Church in Minnesota, 1800-1988, MNHS.

\textsuperscript{126} Reverand P.M. Trelstad, Historical Sketch, June 13, 1931. Microfilm, Reel 93 [ALC 222], selected congregational records of the American Lutheran Church in Minnesota, 1800-1988, MNHS.

\textsuperscript{127} Ministerial Records 1881-1903, Microfilm, Reel 93 [ALC 222], selected congregational records of the American Lutheran Church in Minnesota, 1800-1988, MNHS.
Lutheran Church (Norwegian Synod), the United Norwegian Church, or the Hauge Synod respectively.  

The affiliation of the different congregations was important to the immigrants of Norman County as affiliation had a critical impact on the doctrine and material used in services and teachings. As a child during the early twentieth century, Wilfred Anderson remembered that there was “some animosity” between the churches. Anderson’s memory of the animosity highlights the disunity between the Lutheran churches. Such antagonism stemmed from the different doctrines and teachings used during services. These different teachings between the churches are important because they affected outlooks on acceptable and unacceptable behaviors by youth. For example, one resident who grew up in North Dakota across the Red River recalled that in some churches “dancing was frowned upon by certain people, and my father preached against it […] any kind of drinking was looked down on.” Other churches did not see these as unacceptable behaviors. These doctrines and teachings regulating behavior would come to play an important role in shaping youth learning and experiences in the church.

Although animosity did exist between the churches, these affiliations were quite fluid - fluid in the sense that church goers and congregations themselves changed frequently.

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128 By 1890 the number of recorded United Norwegian Churches organized was twenty-five and Hauge Synod with only three recorded. The numbers for the Norwegian Synod, however, are not present. See, Henry K. Carroll, *Report on Statistics of Churches in the United States at the Eleventh Census, 1890* (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1894), 470-479. County histories and township histories report the number of Norwegian Synod affiliations. For example, consult *In the Heart of the Red River Valley: A History of the People of Norman County, Minnesota*, ed. Dorothy Olson and Lenora I. Johnson (Ada, Minn.: Norman County Heritage Commission, 1976).


throughout settlement years. For example, William Melby who grew up just outside Norman County remembered that many “would jump back and forth” between the churches. Melby further explained that “they’d get mad at the minister and go to the other church. They were pretty stiff necked in those days.”131 While many individuals might switch affiliations, whole congregations (churches) themselves also switched their affiliations. For example, the East Marsh River Lutheran Church organized under the Norwegian Synod in 1879 until 1887, switched to the Anti-Missouri Synod until 1890, when it transferred to the United Norwegian Lutheran Church.132 Over time these affiliation conflicts subsided, when in 1917, the Norwegian Synod, Hauge Synod, and United Norwegian Lutheran Church merged into the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

While these congregations were quickly established and organized to support settlers’ religious needs, early meetings and services were conducted without a church building. Settlers usually gathered in the homes of their neighbors. As many early settlers often remember, the “services were conducted at [different] farmhouses” in the community.133 Services were not the only church affairs conducted in small homes early on, “the private and parochial schools were conducted in the homes” as well.134 Without state structure like in Norway, money for buildings and cemeteries had to be raised by the congregations

132 The Anti-Missouri Synod merged with the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in 1890, suggesting that the final switch in affiliation may have been due to the merger. For list of affiliation changes, see “East Marsh River Lutheran Church,” in In the Heart of the Red River Valley: A History of the People of Norman County, Minnesota, ed. Dorothy Olson and Lenora I. Johnson (Ada, Minn.: Norman County Heritage Commission, 1976), 493.
themselves, leaving some congregations without buildings for long periods of time. The cultural development of religious institutions, predominately Lutheran congregations, would come to shape the lives of Norwegian American youth as they grew to be centrally important institutions in the community.

Alongside the development and construction of churches, schools quickly became the next institutions organized in the various townships. Typical frontier communities are depicted as dominated by young adult men. However, in Polk County during the 1880 census, the county had reached a population of just under 3,000 youth between five and seventeen years old. These children and adolescents made up nearly a third of the population at the time.\textsuperscript{135} By 1890, the ratio changed towards an older population. However, Norman County alone was now home to over 3,500 youth between five and twenty years old.\textsuperscript{136} With a young population, several school districts organized before the end of the 1870s when still part of Polk County. John Oien, an early settler of Shelly remembered the first district organized, District 14, established in April of 1877.\textsuperscript{137} However, this settler also explained that “weekday schools were conducted some time before they got the school districts organized and built schoolhouses.”\textsuperscript{138} The early efforts to build educational institutions, secular or religious, suggest that the education of the children was an important feature of these communities.

\textsuperscript{135} Compendium of the Tenth Census, June 1, 1880 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), 657.
Settlers were able to establish these common schools with relative ease, as the Free Public School Movement had already pushed westward in the mid-nineteenth century. The movement, which sought free public education for children, encouraged territories and states to support and maintain opportunities for public education.139 By 1849, the Minnesota Territory established its first statute ensuring the protection of education for those under twenty-one years of age. In the statute, each township became its own district, under the provision that a minimum of five families occupied that district. Townships with more than ten families were given permission to request the establishment of another district.140

Later in 1899, Minnesota’s legislature enacted a compulsory education law, requiring children between eight and sixteen years of age to attend school, public or private. The statute provided provisions in which parents could excuse their child, such as if the child was working in a “useful” occupation.141 By 1919, the state had issued more compulsory attendance laws, as well as regulating school terms. The 1919 statute put a limit on terms to no more than ten months out of the year. The Minnesota legislature strengthened compulsory attendance by requiring parents to secure special permission if their children needed to be excused from school.142 These laws requiring school attendance and the

140 *Laws of Minnesota*, 1849, Chapter 7.
141 *Laws of Minnesota*, 1899, Chapter 226.
142 *Laws of Minnesota*, 1919, Chapter 320.
establishment of schools in Norman County would come to impact youth experiences as they reached school age.

As these important institutions organized in the various townships across Norman County, settlers also immediately began constructing their own homes. Those who came to Norman County varied greatly in their economic status. Many of these settlers, bound to the homestead claims, started with temporary dwellings. As one German family remembered “the first house was built of old railroad ties packed on the outside with sod and a roof of […] prairie grass.” Norwegian families who settled Norman County also remembered early structures as sod structures. It seemed more common, however, for settlers and their families to “cut logs to build” small cabins and homes as their initial dwelling spaces. Still, some settlers with more wealth to spare or invest over time, could quickly built frame houses, such as in figure 2.


145 “George Johnson Family,” in In the Heart of the Red River Valley: A History of the People of Norman County, Minnesota, ed. Dorothy Olson and Lenora I. Johnson (Ada, Minn.: Norman County Heritage Commission, 1976), 203. Others also remember living in log cabins, see “Hans Christian Aalgaard,” in In the Heart of the Red River Valley: A History of the People of Norman County, Minnesota, ed. Dorothy Olson and Lenora I. Johnson (Ada, Minn.: Norman County Heritage Commission, 1976), 7; “Ole E. Bakke,” in In the Heart of the Red River Valley: A History of the People of Norman County, Minnesota, ed. Dorothy Olson and Lenora I. Johnson (Ada, Minn.: Norman County Heritage Commission, 1976), 31; and “Kvamme Family,” in In the Heart of the Red River Valley: A History of the People of Norman County, Minnesota, ed. Dorothy Olson and Lenora I. Johnson (Ada, Minn.: Norman County Heritage Commission, 1976), 217. One resident remembers that a log cabin was the “better home” that was built on the homestead. See, “B.O. Lee Family and Iver Larson Family,” in In the Heart of the Red River Valley: A History of the People of Norman County, Minnesota, ed. Dorothy Olson and Lenora I. Johnson (Ada, Minn.: Norman County Heritage Commission, 1976), 229.
These homes, they often remembered as “small” at first, but many “had an addition built onto it” after some years had passed. Although housing arrangements changed over time, during early years of settlement these structures could visibly indicate one’s wealth and class in the community.

In addition to building homes on their claims, families usually began making improvements to the land. Although not all, many of the families that settled Norman County became farmers. Census records in Norman County report that Norman County had a total of 1,634 farms in 1910. The county produced largely wheat and other cereal

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146 “Mr. and Mrs. Ole Mattison and their Family,” in *In the Heart of the Red River Valley: A History of the People of Norman County, Minnesota*, ed. Dorothy Olson and Lenora I. Johnson (Ada, Minn.: Norman County Heritage Commission, 1976), 256. Frame houses often became the second home settlers lived in after some years. For example, see “Nels and Synneva Amundson,” in *In the Heart of the Red River Valley: A History of the People of Norman County, Minnesota*, ed. Dorothy Olson and Lenora I. Johnson (Ada, Minn.: Norman County Heritage Commission, 1976), 18.

grains. According to the 1910 Supplemental for Minnesota, oats, wheat, and barley were among the county’s leading producing crops in quantity. Other crops, such as flaxseed and potatoes, followed closely behind in production. Many farms also raised cattle, sheep, and other livestock. These rural and agricultural conditions of families would come to play a vital role in shaping Norwegian American youth experiences in the homes and on family farms.

Due to the rural nature of Norman County, community development outside the important institutions, such as churches and schools took some time. During the earliest years of settlement, some townships could be located “150 miles” away from the nearest trading post in Alexandria. After Fargo had been established, this closer post made these long trips shorter and more bearable. These trips were often made on foot as railroad lines were incomplete during the first decade of settlement. Although the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad had laid tracks south of Ada, the future county seat, by 1872, it would not be until the late 1880s and early 1890s that tracks would reach into the far corners of the various townships. The steamboats on the river created some comfort in travel to Fargo as it grew into a prosperous city; however, these routes declined shortly after the main rail along the river to Manitoba was completed in 1878.


Small businesses slowly sprang up throughout the townships and in Ada during this period. In Shelly Township, for example, the earliest businesses which developed included the Shelly Elevator and Stockyard, as well as a railroad depot by the late 1890s. Many of these businesses were created to support the agricultural economy of the area. Other business, such as a general merchandise store, meat market, creamery, and hardware store quickly developed during the late 1890s and early 1900s. By the turn of the twentieth century, settlers looked to Ada as a central location for banking, doctors, and entertainment. This central hub created opportunities for the people of the county to come together despite the distances. The development of these businesses would become places with which youth interacted outside the home throughout this period.

**Concluding Remarks on the Development of Norman County**

This chapter explored how the acquisition of the Red River land by the U.S. government for settlement purposes was not quick nor easy. Impressions of native hostility, the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, and the Homestead Act of 1862 played a critical role in pressuring western expansion and ensuring its success through the promotion of immigration. Following this acquisition, the settlement and community development by the Norwegian immigrants in Norman County was immediate. At the center of these efforts were the development of religious organizations, schools, and homes. These became the primary institutions in which youth would come to interact. Following these

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152 *This Is Our Story, Shelly, Minnesota: Including City of Shelly, Shelly Township and Good Hope Township*, ed. Shelly Centennial Book Committee (Hendrum, Minn.: Heritage Publishing Co., 1997), 78-87.

developments were businesses, transportation, and other community institutions.
Collectively, these developments came to impact youth experiences. The next few chapters will explore these experiences in greater detail.
Chapter Two:
Norwegian American Youth Inside the Home and on the Farm

Growing up in a Norwegian American home during the early twentieth century, John Gronner used to regularly help his “mother prepare lutefisk.” This traditional Scandinavian dish brought to America by immigrants was something Gronner “still [hasn’t] gotten away from” as an adult.\(^{154}\) Gronner’s recollection in preserving a traditional Norwegian folkway, the making of lutefisk, resembles a lasting assertion in scholarship on Norwegian American homes. As discussed in an earlier section, this assertion is that the home was a place of lasting Norwegian folkways and culture.\(^ {155}\) However, Gronner’s role, as a child, in this preservation is seldom recognized as youth are not the focus of these analyses. As a result, children and adolescents are not commonly seen as full agents of culture, holding their own autonomy when it comes to cultural practices and decisions.

There are two specific areas which require further attention by scholars on Norwegian American culture in the home with regard to youth. The first is language usage. Scholars regularly investigate Norwegian Lutheran churches and American common schools as places which either rejected or promoted the adopting of English, but seldom turn attention to the use of language in the home.\(^ {156}\) Additionally, these analyses typically


\(^{155}\) Theodore C. Blegen makes this argument in a general manner, explaining all the ways Norwegian folkways American. See Blegen, *Norwegian Migration to America*, 240.

\(^{156}\) For examples of scholarship that discusses the role of the church and the common school in the Americanization of Norwegian-Americans, see Blegen, *Norwegian Migration to America*, 249-251; Semmingsen, *Norway to America*, 92; Lagerquist, *In America the Men Milk the Cows*, 39; Lovoll, *The
describe a process of cultural change from an institutional approach, overlooking the voices and cultural experiences of youth.


Additionally, farming during this period in both Norway and America largely remained family enterprises, meaning that children and youth are not wholly ignored.\footnote{Some scholars recognize the importance of child and youth labor on farms due to agriculture being family enterprises. For examples of scholars on Norwegian America who discuss their contributions, see, Gjerde, The Minds of the West, 136; Lahlum, “Growing Up in Norwegian-American Communities,” 110-113; and Laurann Gilbertson, “Textile Production in Norwegian America,” in Norwegian American Women: Migration, Communities, and Identities, edited by Betty A. Bergland and Lori Ann Lahlum (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2011), 157-180. For broader discussions on rural children in the Midwest who contributed labor on family farms during this period, please consult, Riney-Kehrberg, Childhood on the Farm, 3.}

However, comprehensive studies on Norwegian American youth’s gendered experiences in the home and on the farm lack specific discussion by the scholars of Norwegian America.\footnote{Lori Ann Lahlum’s 2008 study does give attention to gender roles for youth in rural Norwegian American communities but is constructed as a preliminary study. Lahlum, “Growing Up in Norwegian-American Communities,” 110-113.}

Thus, to further explore the cultural experiences of Norwegian American youth within the home, language and gender roles are given special attention.
To better understand their full participation in cultural activities and exchanges, I first ask how Norwegian American children and adolescents used the Norwegian and non-Norwegian language and gender roles in their homes and on their farms in Norman County? What impact did the use of American and Norwegian languages and concepts of gender have on these youth? Lastly, what role did youth play in these cultural exchanges? In looking at Norman County census data, family, personal, and oral histories, as well as photographs, youths’ experiences in the home with language and gender can better be understood. Through an evaluation of these sources, it is ultimately recognized that Norman County’s Norwegian American youth used the Norwegian and non-Norwegian language and gender roles in a complex manner, demonstrating their participation as full agents of culture in the home.

**Use of Language in the Home**

This first section investigates youths’ experiences with language in the home, specifically focusing on the use of Norwegian and the learning of English. It contends that while Norwegian remained a primary home language for many first-, second-, and third-generation Norwegian American children and adolescents in Norman County, significant internal and external pressures urged children and their parents to learn and speak English. Although many did learn the new language, both parents and youth throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century responded to the learning of the language in numerous ways: continuing to use Norwegian exclusively, making the change to English, or using both languages. In the various ways they adapted to changes
with language in the home, Norwegian American youth must be recognized as agents of culture, for they played an active role in the exchange of language.

As chapter one demonstrated, Norman County’s population was heavily foreign-born Norwegian throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, understanding how many families spoke Norwegian in the home is not easy. Census records are not ideal for understanding home language because they only reveal whether parents could read, write, and sometimes, speak English. For example, in Shelly Township by 1900 only 32 out of 134 Norwegian families with children under twenty-five years, had parents unable to speak English. This census data would appear to suggest that many children, especially second-generation children, grew up with the knowledge of English. However, census records skew the understanding of home language because the census does not indicate whether these families spoke English in their homes regularly. For example, at the age of five during the 1910 federal census second-generation Norwegian American Richard Aanenson’s home was recorded as English speaking. However, according to the 1940 federal census, Aanenson, who was chosen among a sample, recorded that the earliest language used in his home was Norwegian. Several of these samples illustrate discrepancy in relying on census data to understand which language was used in the home.

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160 1900 United States Federal Census, 1900, Microfilm, Roll 778, Shely, Norman County, Minnesota, 1-22, Ancestry.com. In this census, Shelly is spelled with only one “L.”
While census records may not illuminate the use of language in the home accurately, oral and family histories help to fill this gap. These histories reveal that throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Norwegian was the first and primary language of children living in Norman County. For many first-, second-, and even third-generation Norwegian American youth in Norman County and the surrounding community, “practically only Norwegian was spoken in [the] home.”\(^\text{163}\) While many children would grow up to learn how to read, write, and speak English in American common schools, Norwegian often remained, what a third-generation Norwegian-American Glarence Glasrud explained was, their “native language.”\(^\text{164}\) While not all Norwegian American youth used Norwegian in the home, many former residents recalled that they had early on in their childhood.\(^\text{165}\) These histories help understand the degree to which many children did grow up with Norwegian as a native and primary language in their home.

Whether Norwegian was used in the home of these youth or not, its usage could still cause anxiety. This is because, as children, it was not always their own choice. The


determination of primary language appears to have been guardians’ decisions. As scholar of the Norwegian language in America Einar Haugen notes it was often the “desire of the parents” to carry on their Norwegian language or take up that of the English language for their children.\textsuperscript{166} Other scholars recognize this important decision and the struggle they had with choosing between their traditional language or the language of their new home.\textsuperscript{167} Thus, as the authority figure, guardian choice could influence or outweig youth’s own decisions about which language would be spoken regularly.\textsuperscript{168}

Guardians in Norman County frequently chose these home languages for various reasons. One important reason could be caused by a guardian’s lack of knowledge with English. In one recollection, Alva Hest of Hendrum noted that “[my father] couldn’t speak a word of English when he came over, and [he never learned] very much.” Hest continues to explain that this was “because there was no reason for them to speak English […] everybody … was Norwegian.”\textsuperscript{169} Scholars often recognize how rural communities, much like Norman County, were more able to retain foreign languages early on in the

\textsuperscript{166} Haugen, \textit{The Norwegian Language in America}, 234.
\textsuperscript{167} Blegen, \textit{Norwegian Migration to America}, 234, and Semmingsen, \textit{Norway to America}, 143. See also, Haugen, \textit{The Norwegian Language in America}, 234.
\textsuperscript{168} Einar Haugen briefly discusses how youth and guardians protested the others’ different language choice in the home. See, Haugen, \textit{The Norwegian Language in America}, 271-274.
development of settlement due to their homogeneity and sparse population density. Thus, it is understandable why Hest’s father did not feel as though learning English was necessary in Norman County during this period. The language barrier between generations effected other residents in the community. As one explains more generally, Norwegian was spoken in the homes because “there were too many old-timers that didn’t speak English.” The educational divide between generations played a significant role in which households needed to speak Norwegian regularly.

For other children, their parents simply refused to substitute their native language with English in the home. As Clara Hanson recalled, “my brother and I were never allowed to speak English even after we had learned.” According to Hanson, her father “wanted [them] to know the Scandinavian language and know it well.” This staunch determination to keep traditional language for children was not uncommon among Norwegian immigrants who wanted their children to inherit an important piece of their Norwegian culture and heritage. While many parents and guardians recognized the importance and value of learning English, scholars acknowledge that they also wanted to keep Norwegian rather than simply reject it for English. These examples help illustrate

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170 Haugen, *The Norwegian Language in America*, 247. Some scholars recognize urban cities and areas as places with stronger pressures to use the English language. For example, see, Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 140.


how parents and guardians often dictated the use and restriction of certain languages in the home for Norwegian American youth.

Although the use of Norwegian was common in the homes of many youths, this was not always a static situation throughout their childhood. Parental language choice could change over time for various reasons, which impacted youth’s language learning and usage. One of the more prominent reasons guardians in Norman County switched languages was out of concern for their children’s education and future. Scholars regularly note that it was common for Norwegian immigrant parents to seek out the English language for their children, seeing it as a necessary tool for success in America.175

The difficulties youth had with learning English became a primary concern of parents in the home. As Florence Fritz recalled as an adult, “in our home we spoke Norwegian until my brother started school and he had such trouble … so then [my parents] decided that we would never speak Norwegian at home, and we spoke English all the time. And I think that was true of many homes.”176 Other parents sought to prepare their children for their American education by introducing English early on. As Vern Fugelberg, who grew up just outside Norman County in North Dakota, recalled “I spoke Norwegian fluently until I was about four years old. And then they decided that I only had two years before I started first grade so they would just speak English.”177 These examples help demonstrate the reasons which parents and guardians might change home language usage. However, it

175 Blegen, Norwegian Migration to America, 275, and Lovoll, The Promise of America, 67.
also illustrates the degree of involvement with which Norwegian American youth played in these changes. In this sense, their education and struggle with English caused their parents to ensure that their learning was high priority.

Parental want and youth struggle with American education, however, were not the only pressures influencing the learning and use of the English language in the homes. By the second decade of the twentieth century, significant pressure was placed on immigrant communities to learn and speak English more frequently and to lose their foreign language and identity altogether.\(^{178}\) Many residents remember the changes in language usage during this period. For example, Clarence Glasrud remembered that Norwegian was frequently spoken in his home in Norman County “until 1920.” Following the end of the war, Glasrud explained that “it all stopped. It was very sudden.”\(^{179}\) Glasrud’s recollection highlights the changes made to immigrant communities during and after the war when these communities experienced pressure to change language practices to fit with a more American image.\(^{180}\) Some families abided by this pressure and they “never used Norwegian much at home,” while others did not.\(^{181}\) Such examples, nonetheless,

\(^{178}\) For scholarship on pressures within Norwegian America, see Haugen, The Norwegian Language in America, 255-258; Semmingsen, Norway to America, 156-157; Lovoll, The Promise of America, 193; and Gjerde and Qualey, Norwegians in Minnesota, 58. For broader discussions on immigrant communities and effects of World War One in language and assimilation agendas, see John Christgau, “Enemies”: World War II Alien Internment (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1985), and Ellis Cose, A Nation of Strangers: Prejudice, Politics, and the Populating of America (New York: Morrow, 1992); and Nancy C. Carnevale, A New Language, a New World: Italian Immigrants in the United States, 1890-1945 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

\(^{179}\) Clarence Glasrud, excerpt, 335.

\(^{180}\) For more former residents from the Red River Valley area who remember how the war shaped public pressures to speak English, see, Beatrice Schaefer, excerpt, 444; and Wilfred Anderson, excerpt, 444.

\(^{181}\) Arthur Waldon, excerpt, 333.
illustrate the complexities that existed surrounding language in the home and children’s limited power to control important changes in regard to the use of their primary language.

Despite pressures from World War One and parents’ decisions to make changes in the use of language, some homes of Norwegian American youth did not simply adopt English and reject Norwegian. Instead, many households spoke both languages. For example, while Norwegian was the native language of Clarence Glasrud, he explains that he and his “folks [also] spoke English regularly” in their home throughout his childhood.\textsuperscript{182} Other Norwegian American children recalled how their “parents knew English but didn’t speak it” in the homes.\textsuperscript{183} Still, others remember beginning to speaking English in the home while their parents would “just talk Norwegian to each other when” they would go to sleep.\textsuperscript{184} These examples illustrate the degree to which these families had knowledge of multiple languages, employing active choice in when and what kinds of situations these languages would be spoken. This bilingual nature of Norwegian American families, and specifically youth, demonstrates the complex exchange of culture taking place within the home which children and adolescents took an active part.

Although guardian authority appeared to outweigh youth decisions about the use of language in their homes, they still played an active role in the exchange of language. This can be seen in their role of influencing the learning and usage of English or being the reason for their parents’ desire to continue with the use of Norwegian. Additionally, children and adolescents played active roles in using these languages, individually or

\textsuperscript{182} Clarence Glasrud, excerpt, 335.  
\textsuperscript{183} William Nelson, excerpt, 335.  
\textsuperscript{184} Vern Flugelberg, excerpt, 333.
together with their parents and guardians. Thus, Norwegian American youth must be recognized as agents of culture for their participation in this cultural experience. Understanding how youth felt about this complex narrative of language use and potential disagreements that arose between youth and guardians requires further attention and investigation. Such investigation may reveal further knowledge of the role of youth in the use of language in the home.

**Gender Roles in the Home and on the Farm**

This next section shifts to investigate youths’ experiences with gender roles in the home and on the farm, specifically focusing on how Norwegian and American concepts of gender affected youth experience. It ultimately contends that Norwegian American youth in Norman County learned to follow traditional Norwegian divisions of labor in their homes and on their farms, while also participating in a shift to American and Norwegian American divisions of labor. In this sense, youth labor in the home and on the farm throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century blurred beyond both Norwegian and American understandings of divisions of labor. In this complex narrative of gendered labor, Norwegian American youth must be recognized as agents of culture, for they played an active role in this complicated exchange of gender roles.

It must first be recognized that basic gender roles in rural and agricultural areas of the U.S. and Norway did not appear fundamentally different during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Minor differences, however, did exist and are important in
understanding shifts in culture over time. For agricultural communities in America and Norway, concepts of gender similarly differed from traditional middle-class notions of gender. In Norway, not unlike in the U.S., the household was a “production unit,” in which men, women, and children were all important contributors. Norwegian men primarily worked to complete tasks in the fields, while women in rural Norway also commonly worked to complete these same tasks, in addition to haymaking, childrearing, cooking, cleaning, and working with livestock for the purpose of milking. Scholars frequently understand the division of labor along gendered lines to be clear in Norwegian agricultural communities. While it was clearly divided by gender, women’s contribution was seen to be equally important and meaningful to that of men’s labor. This is important because this was not the case in America. Although scholars often argue that these concepts of gendered labor were brought to America by Norwegian immigrants, American concepts about gendered labor on farms caused men and women to alter production tasks over time.

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185 This section of this project only serves as an introduction to understanding youth roles within the complex gendered narrative of Norwegian American communities. It is not intended to be comprehensive to all roles or thorough in understanding the shifts which took place. See scholars in following couple notes for a more comprehensive layout of gender roles and shifts over time.

186 Typical middle-class ideals about gender held that men should exhibit masculine qualities, such as strength and occupy political and public spheres, while women should exhibit feminine qualities, such as purity and submissiveness and occupy domestic and private spheres. For a brief overview on these perceptions of proper middle-class gender roles in Norway, please consult, Lønnå, “Gender in Norway.” For a brief overview on perceptions of these proper gender roles in America, please consult, Fink, *Agrarian Women*.


188 Lagerquist, *In America the Men Milk the Cows*, 16-17; Lønnå, “Gender in Norway,” 34; Lahlum, “Women, Work, Community,” 84.

189 Lagerquist, *In America the Men Milk the Cows*, 16-17.

190 In America, women were not seen as equal in labor production on the farm. Instead, women assumed the role of helpers. For scholarship which addresses this reality for rural farm women, see Riley, *Women and Indians on the Frontier, 1825-1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984); Fink, *Agrarian Women*. 
In Norman County throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Norwegian American boys were commonly found supporting traditional male labor tasks in their homes and on their farms. Farming, which was a family enterprise, relied heavily on the contributions of both adults and youth in order to be successful.191 This was especially true of field labor. In this regard, young boys were expected to help their fathers perform this labor. For example, second-generation Norwegian American, Alex Baker, remembered how he regularly “helped his father” with these tasks while growing up.192 Young boys who grew up in the Wild Rice Children’s Home (Wild Rice Barnehjem), operated by the Norwegian Lutheran Synod, had a similar experience with field labor. In the orphanage, “the chores were divided between boys and girls,” where the boys typically “helped with farming operations” in the various fields on the property.193 Carl Narveson, who spent some time in the orphanage with his three brothers elaborates further on his experiences, explaining that,

At haying time a gang of twenty to thirty boys would go out in the field and make haycocks. […] After haying came the harvest of grain. Our job was to shock the grain. […] When the maize-corn harvest was ready we went into the field to shock the corn. […] When threshing and silage cutting times came school had begun. It was only the biggest boys who did the [threshing and silage] work.194

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Narveson's recollections about the work he did as a boy in the orphanage helps give detail to the experiences, he, and other Norwegian American boys, had on farms. These various field tasks were tasks typical of Norwegian and American men, suggesting a complimentary understanding of gender for boys.

Despite agrarian life holding a romantic image in American reformist thought, field work was heavy manual labor, often comprised of dangerous tasks. As contributors in this manual labor, Norwegian American boys faced many of these dangers on their farms due to their involvement in these divisions of labor. As one Norman County newspaper reported, “a twelve-year-old son of C.T. Strand […] had his left arm caught in the tumbling rod of a threshing machine […] and it was broken in several places up over the elbow.” Although the farming scene has and still is viewed as beneficial for youth by urban reformers in America, it is dangerous work for young children. In another story, Helmer and Nels Hallom had taken a young bull to do the work of an ox to plow the field. In the end, the bull broke loose and dragged Helmer Hallom “most of the way home” across the field, providing the boy with several bruises. Collectively, these tales highlight the kinds of work young Norwegian American boys performed on their farms, often without adult supervision, particularly in direct relation to field labor, and the degree of danger associated with this work.

195 American reformers during the nineteenth century visualized farm and country life as idyllic for children, an escape from the downtrodden urban cities. For a more detailed discussion on this movement, see, Riney-Kehrberg, *Childhood on the Farm*, 10-35.


197 “Hallom Family,” in *In the Heart of the Red River Valley: A History of the People of Norman County, Minnesota*, ed. Dorothy Olson and Lenora I. Johnson (Ada, Minn.: Norman County Heritage Commission, 1976), 139.
In addition to threshing, plowing, and other field work, Norwegian American boys in Norman County also regularly worked and cared for small and large animals. These animals primarily included horses and cattle, such as cows and goats. The care of cattle had been a shared role with women in Norway but had become more male oriented in the U.S. during the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{198} While living in the Wild Rice Children’s Home, Carl Narveson details this shift. Narveson remembers that “the care of the horses” was one of his responsibilities in the orphanage.\textsuperscript{199} The care for the larger stock animals was not atypical for boys. However, Narveson also remembers that when he first came to the orphanage from Minneapolis at the age of nine, he actually started with the care for smaller animals working his way to the horses.\textsuperscript{200} Boys in the orphanage worked closely with dairy animals, providing them the opportunity “to learn the principles of the dairy industry.”\textsuperscript{201} In Narveson’s remembrance of his time at the orphanage, a significant shift in gender roles becomes evident as boys appear to take on the care of all livestock.

The orphanage was not the only place where Norwegian American boys in Norman County more frequently worked with animals. It was common on family farms to see this labor performed by the young boys. For example, second-generation Norwegian American Andreas S. Heiberg and his brothers frequently “assisted the hired man in the

\textsuperscript{198} Cattle had been women’s domain in Norway, as they were responsible for caring for them and turning their products into useful family resources. Young boys would have also helped in this process. Lagerquist, \textit{In America the Men Milk the Cows}, 16-17; Lønnå, “Gender in Norway,” 34; Lahlum, “Women, Work, Community,” 84.  
\textsuperscript{199} Carl Narveson, excerpt, 208.  
\textsuperscript{200} Carl Narveson, excerpt, 208.  
\textsuperscript{201} “Wild Rice Children’s Home,” 472.
care of the stock,” in addition to his traditional “farming operations.”

Collectively, the experiences of Narveson and Heiberg illustrate that caring for the animals, horses and cattle alike, was a common feature of their role on the farm. Their taking on the care of cattle and dairy animals suggests a shift in cultural gender roles. In this shift, Norwegian American boys can be identified as agents of culture, actively participating in this complex exchange of culture on their farms.

Similar to boys, Norwegian American girls were commonly found participating in traditional divisions of labor. A significant part of this labor which took place in the home, was in the tasks and chores of sewing, stitching, and knitting. Young girls likely learned sewing, stitching, and knitting skills from the older women in their families and from the wider community, for it was common that many Norwegian American women continued this work when coming to the U.S. throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see figure 3).

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203 Gilbertson, “Textile Production in Norwegian America” 166.
Figure 3. Ingebor Efteland, with spinning wheel, circa 1920s-1930s. Image from author’s personal collection.

It was common for young girls to also learn and enhance these skills in their schools and church communities. The learning of these skills can be recognized as a continuation of culture, which was also compatible with American gender roles.

This work done at home by young girls in Norman County made major contributions to the family economy. Scholars frequently recognize that the production of butter and eggs was common for agricultural families, particularly the women, in Norway to supplement family income. This labor and practice was also common in the U.S., as some girls in Norman County assisted their mothers with selling eggs, cream, and butter to provide for the household economy. Not listed as frequently in the remembrance of these girls was the care of dairy producing animals, which had been a significant part of female labor in Norway, suggesting a shift in roles. In other cases, nonetheless, articles of clothing made by the young girls and older women who utilized their domestic skills, were sold in town to also provide supplemental family income. In one example, Norwegian American Clara Brodahl recalled that the “older girls would help with the knitting. They made men socks and sold them for $0.50 a pair in exchange for

204 Gilbertson, “Textile Production in Norwegian America,” 170. The learning and enhancing of such skills will be further addressed in following chapters.
206 One girl who grew up outside Norman County in North Dakota remembers going with her mother to sell sweet cream. See, Matilda Blumer, excerpt of an oral history conducted in 1978, in Prairie Voices: An Oral History of Scandinavian Americans in the Upper Midwest (Moorhead, Minn.: Gerald D. Anderson, 2014), 204.
groceries.” The case provides an example of how Norwegian American girls’ domestic responsibilities contributed to the family economy outside of farming labor.

Similar to boys’ roles in farm labor, girls’ roles in domestic tasks, complimented American understandings of appropriate gender roles. In addition to domestic responsibilities in sewing, stitching, and knitting, Norwegian American girls took part in other feminine chores. Some of these chores at home and on the farm were cooking and cleaning. In one example, a Norwegian American girl recalled that her primary job growing up during the threshing season was to “grind coffee beans. At least a gallon pail full then covered tightly, ready for use.” The experience assisting in the preparation of food demonstrates the role in which girls played in home and farm responsibilities. The girls in the Wild Rice Children’s Home also adhered to these same domestic chores. The girls in the home “set the dining room tables, cleared them, they peeled potatoes and washed dishes.” These examples of domestic roles for Norwegian American girls in Norman County help understand how concepts of gender influenced children’s experiences in their homes and on their farms during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The cultural experiences of Norwegian American boys and girls in Norman County is further complicated with the understanding that youth broke these roles regularly,

blurring understandings of proper roles and divisions of labor according to culture. As in Norway, it was common for women to work in field labor on a regular basis as part of their contribution to the division of labor. This role was carried to America and persisted for several generations, as young girls in Norman County can be recognized for working in fields into the early twentieth century. In one example, third-generation Norwegian American Stella Lee remembered aiding in field work as she “harnessed and drove the horses that worked the fields.” Second-generation Norwegian American, Alma Ramse recalled, “I always helped in the field – shocking, making the stacks. I’ve worked most of the machinery on the farm with horses.” In another recollection, the Bakken children, “Agnes, Alice, Grace, Elaine and Eldried all did their part, cultivating the row crops” and helping with “silofilling and picking potatoes.” It is possible that these girls assisted their father due to the lack of boys in the family, however, such inquiry may be left ambiguous. Their work in fields complicates narratives of simple cultural shifts, as these recollections illustrate more complex notions of gender roles.

Norwegian American boys also frequently broke gender scripts by both Norwegian and American tradition. In several cases, Norwegian American boys assisted in

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210 Scholars recognize the blurred lines of gender which young boys and girls operated in their homes. Lori Ann Lahlum, for example, has asserted that Norwegian American girls often “provided essential agricultural labor” in rural settings. See, Lahlum, “Growing up in Norwegian-American Communities,” 111-112.
211 “B.O. Lee Family and Iver Larson Family,” 229.
214 Scholar Pamela Riney-Kehrberg notes that it was not uncommon for boys in the Midwest to “cross gender lines” on the farm. See Riney-Kehrberg, Childhood on the Farm, 44.
domestic roles in their homes and on the farm. For example, John Gronner who recalled that he “used to help mother prepare lutefisk,” aided in the preparing of food.215 It is possible that because it dealt with fish that Gronner’s role in this preparation was seen as appropriate. In another example, Arthur Benson, who never passed through fourth grade gives an interesting example of the blurring of gender roles. It was explained that after his mother died, he “had to stay home and help care for the younger children,” despite the family having help from his grandmother.216 The story of Benson’s role in the caring of his young siblings breaks traditional understandings of men's place in the care of children, on both the Norwegian and American sides. His, and other boys’ experiences with more domestic gender roles in their homes and on their farms in Norman County raises questions about the broader gendered experiences of Norwegian American youth.

Although youth may have been following these tasks as assigned by their parents and guardians, they still played an active role in shaping gender roles in their homes and on their farms. This can be seen in youth’s contribution to following traditional Norwegian divisions of labor, adopting American divisions and practices, or using a combination – Norwegian American. Their significant contribution in labor demonstrates the need for youth to be recognized as agents of culture and critical participants in this cultural experience. Understanding how Norwegian American youth felt about their labor and chores, however, requires further investigation that may reveal further knowledge of the role youth played in gender roles in the home and on the farm.

215 John Gronner, excerpt, 402.
Concluding Remarks on Language and Gender in the Home

This chapter has explored the cultural experiences of Norwegian American youth in their homes and on their farms with special attention to language and gender. While analyzing youths’ cultural experiences with language, it has found that parents and youth made important cultural decisions with language in the home. Although guardian authority often outweighed youth decisions, youth still played a critical role in the exchange of culture through language. This can be seen in their role of influencing the learning and usage of English or actively using these languages independently or collectively with their parents and guardians. Additionally, while examining youths’ experiences with gender, this chapter has found that children and adolescents played a critical role in shaping gender roles in their homes and on their farms. Although youth may have been following assignments by parents and guardians, youth still contributed to shaping gender roles. This can be seen in youths’ involvement to following traditional Norwegian divisions of labor, adopting American divisions and practices, or using a combination – Norwegian American. Their influence and participation in using language and gender in these various ways demonstrates the need for youth to be recognized as full agents of culture in the cultural narratives of Norwegian American homes.
Chapter Three:

Norwegian American Youth Inside the Lutheran Church

In an oral history, Christian Schulstad recalled that his Norwegian Lutheran church in Norman County began to use the English language more frequently than the Norwegian language, “so that the young people could understand.” At first glance, Schulstad’s recollection of the changes made regarding the use of language in St. Petri Lutheran Church in Gary, Minnesota, appears to support a central assertion in the scholarship of Norwegian American Lutheran churches. This assertion is that forces of Americanization pressured the Norwegian Lutheran churches to adopt a more American image. More specifically, as briefly discussed in the introduction, Norwegian Lutheran churches fought against these pressures through the teaching of Norwegian and other religious customs as means to retain old cultural practices. These analyses, however, were designed to focus on the institution and efforts by church authorities to educate youth rather than the youth themselves. As a result, these youth are not wholly recognized as autonomous agents in this cultural narrative.

Although youth are not the focus of these previous studies, they do illuminate important aspects of Norwegian Lutheran churches that affected youths’ experiences. DeAne Lagerquist, for example, investigates the role the church played in preserving Norwegian culture through religious instruction, which was usually “modeled on that

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218 Nelson and Fevold, The Lutheran Church Among Norwegian-Americans, 300; Lovoll, The Promise of America, 67; Lagerquist, In America the Men Milk the Cows, 55; and Lahlum, “Growing Up in Norwegian-American Communities,” 117.
given in similar Norwegian schools.” Additionally, scholars such as Theodore Blegen find that Norwegian Lutheran churches, regardless of affiliation, usually taught youth the Bible, church history, Norwegian hymns, and more. Most central to these discussions is the use of Norwegian due to the cultural significance of the language, especially to the Norwegian Lutheran Synod, which firmly believed that Norwegian was the “language from the heart.” Although this discussion of language and instruction of youth is important, it is not designed to focus on youth itself. Additionally, few scholars give focus to youth in discussions of sacraments or gender. Thus, to further explore the cultural experiences of Norwegian American youth within the church, language, sacraments, and gender roles are given special attention in this study.

To better understand youths’ full participation in cultural activities and exchanges, I first ask what role the church played in shaping youth cultural experiences with language, traditions, and gender? What impact did language, tradition, and gender have on youth in the church and how did youth respond and manage these experiences? Lastly, what role did children and adolescents play in these cultural experiences? In looking at Norman County church records and histories, newspapers, photographs, and reminiscences, these children’s cultural experiences in churches can better be understood. Through an

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219 Lagerquist, *In America the Men Milk the Cows*, 53.
220 Blegen, *Norwegian Migration to America*, 247.
221 Blegen, *Norwegian Migration to America*, 251.
222 Confirmations have been acknowledged by some scholars, but not discussed in great detail as they often focus on the religious instruction leading up to confirmations. For scholarship that explores some aspects of confirmations in greater detail, see Blegen, *Norwegian Migration to America*. Discussions on women and gender in the church receives a great amount of attention by scholars; however, attention on youth in these settings is overlooked. For scholarship that explores women in the church and religious settings, see Lagerquist, *In America the Men Milk the Cows*; and Lahlum, “Women, Work, Community.”
evaluation of these sources, it ultimately finds that Norman County’s Norwegian American youth used language, sacraments, and gender in a complex manner, demonstrating their full participation as agents of culture in the church.

**Use of Language in the Church**

This first section explores Norwegian American youth experiences with language in Norwegian Lutheran churches, specifically focusing on the spoken and written forms of language, instruction, and attitudes. It ultimately contends that while tremendous pressure was placed on congregations to speak English throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Norwegian American youth listened, read, and spoke the Norwegian language in their Lutheran churches. This usage came in many forms, yet still place heavy emphasis on memorization rather than comprehension. Additionally, churches responded in various ways: continuing to use Norwegian exclusively, switching to English, or using a combination of both languages. In the various ways these churches responded to regulating these languages, Norwegian American youth played a significant role in following these regulations. Thus, they must be recognized as full agents of culture in this exchange of language.

When Norwegian immigrants flooded the area that became Norman County and established various Lutheran congregations, their native language became the exclusive language of communication in the church. It was used in everyday worship and sermons, regardless of their affiliations with the different synods. Norwegian was an important

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223 Church histories throughout Norman County record Norwegian as the exclusive language in the church services and records for the Norwegian Lutheran congregations. For a few examples, see “East Marsh River Lutheran Congregation,” 493, and “Jevanker Lutheran Church,” in *In the Heart of the Red*
feature of immigrant churches because it was the true “language of the heart.” It was also an important piece of the immigrant’s “religious heritage,” and thus an important feature of church culture and life. As adults, former residents recognized its importance to their childhood, noting how their parents “thought it wasn’t Christianity unless it was in the Norwegian language.” Thus, Norwegian American youth grew up with this language in everyday use within the church. As third-generation Norwegian American Ruth Erickson recalled, “all the sermons were in Norwegian.” Others remembered that “the minister wouldn’t preach in English,” and so Norwegian continued to be used. These recollections suggest that first-, second-, and third-generation Norwegian American youth were regularly exposed to the spoken form of Norwegian in their churches.

As discussed in the previous chapter, many Norwegian American youth used spoken Norwegian in their homes. Important, however, is that great dialectical differences existed within spoken Norwegian. As scholar Theodore C. Blegen notes, the “language problem” was “complex” for Norwegian Americans in large part because of the many dialects spoken by Norwegian immigrants. Dialectical differences played an important

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Blegen, Norwegian Migration to America, 251.

Lagerquist, In America the Men Milk the Cows, 45.

Odin Strandness, excerpt, 270.

Ruth Erikson, excerpt of an oral history conducted in 1976, in Prairie Voices: An Oral History of Scandinavian Americans in the Upper Midwest (Moorhead, Minn.: Gerald D. Anderson, 2014), 270. Others recalled that their churches only used Norwegian. For example, see, Alma Ramse, excerpt, 249.

Clarence Glasrud, excerpt, 270.

Blegen, Norwegian Migration to America, 77. This is a discussion that other scholars of the Norwegian language in American have noted, such as Einar Haugen. See Haugen, The Norwegian Language in America.
role in how youth experienced and came to think about the Norwegian sermons in the church. As Clara Johnson recalled in an oral history, “as a little kid I had to sit and listen to that tiresome speech in a dialect that I couldn’t understand.” Johnson’s language used to describe the experience of listening to the different dialect suggests negative attitudes towards such experience. In the interview, Johnson continued, explaining that because of this experience “I think I hated church for the rest of my life.” Johnson’s experience with spoken Norwegian in the church certainly highlights the complexities of such language in the church heard by these Norwegian American youth – despite their knowledge and regular use of the Norwegian language.

Challenges of language can extend beyond dialectical difference. For example, challenges of age can play an important role in listening to sermons in the churches. This is because as young children, their shorter attention spans can impact the quality and perception of the experience. A second-generation Norwegian American, Ingman Wollertson, remembered that “services would last from one and a half to two hours.” He further recalled that as “a young boy” his “head would sometimes start to nod,” for the lengthy sermons were tiresome. Wollertson’s memory illustrates a sense of boredom and struggle to pay attention to the church sermons. His experience highlights how his age, as a young boy, played a role in his perception of the spoken language.

230 Clara Johnson, excerpt, 269.
231 Clara Johnson, excerpt, 269.
232 “Memories of the Shelly Church,” in This Is Our Story, Shelly, Minnesota: Including City of Shelly, Shelly Township and Good Hope Township, ed. Shelly Centennial Book Committee (Hendrum, Minn.: Heritage Publishing Co., 1997), 169.
Norwegian American youth were also active participants in speaking the Norwegian language as they regularly read and sang Norwegian hymns during services and other devotional meetings. As second-generation Norwegian American Gunhild (Grant) Laske confirmed in memory, “the hymns and everything were in Norwegian.”233 Carl Narveson remembered that during his time in the Wild Rice Children’s Home, they “learned many hymns.” He remembered, especially, those of Christmas hymns, such as “‘Her komme dine arme smaa,’ […] ‘Et lidet Barn saa lystelig,’ […] ‘I denne sode Juletid,’” and many more.234 Although Synod and United congregations employed different hymnals, they were usually both using the Norwegian-language hymnals.235 The Bethany Lutheran Congregation in Good Hope Township, a United congregation, specifically resolved to use the Landstad Hymnal in their church when it organized officially in 1906.236 The Landstad Hymnal used a more modern Norwegian-language text and played a significant role in shaping the use of Norwegian in Norwegian Lutheran churches across the U.S. during the late nineteenth century.237 Norwegian American youth in Norman County and the surrounding community regularly used these Norwegian texts well into the early twentieth century. The significance of this is that youth were not only exposed to

234 Hymns translated to English by Narveson are: “Here Come Your Little Ones,” “A Little Child So Merrily,” and “In This Sweet Christmas Time.” Narveson, An Orphan’s Saga, 22.
listening to spoken Norwegian but were active participants in speaking and using the language in the churches themselves.

During the early twentieth century, tremendous pressure was placed on the churches of Norman County to eliminate the use of foreign languages. Many of the Norwegian Lutheran churches were threatened with pressures to remove their Norwegian from the name due to the “impact of war” between 1918 and 1920. The threat also affected the discussions of language uses in the churches throughout this turbulent period. As scholar, Carl H. Chrislock explains, some members in churches promoted this change in churches for they believed that progression towards full English was inevitable and because they did not want to be perceived as a foreign church. However, as other scholars note, major changes in the use of Norwegian, or rather the elimination of the language, within the church did not occur until after the war period.

Whether the slow dissolution of spoken Norwegian was caused by the pressure to appear more American, Norwegian American youth were witnesses to the changes of language within their churches. These were important memories of second- and third-generation youth throughout the area. Alva Hest remembered that “Norwegian was used in the churches definitely until 1916 or 1917.” However, others remember their churches “continued until the early thirties.” While still others recalled that “the last

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240 For example, see Haugen, The Norwegian Language in America, 261-268.
241 Alva Hest, excerpt, 271.
242 William Nelson, excerpt, 270. Church histories recall the ending of Norwegian services during the thirties. One example includes, “East Marsh River Lutheran Congregation,” in In the Heart of the Red
time Norwegian services were used regularly was about 1940, or maybe 1945,” during the Second World War. These differences demonstrate the difficulty in measuring a decline in the language while also illustrating that the use of Norwegian prevailed well into the twentieth century for many of Norman County’s Lutheran churches.

While this demonstrates that Norwegian was used as a spoken language well into the twentieth century, it was common for the Lutheran churches to alternate Norwegian and English services every few weeks beginning around the war era. As Wilfred Anderson exemplified in memory, services in his church had “one Sunday in English and one Sunday in Norwegian.” Anderson’s recollection illustrates a multilingual experience in the church, an experience which was common in many of the Norwegian Lutheran churches during the twentieth century. It also reveals the complexity of the continued use of the language in the churches. This is important for it demonstrates that many second- and third-generation Norwegian American children often lived between the two

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244 Wilfred Anderson, excerpt, 271.

245 Several of the churches in Norman County began alternating services between English and Norwegian beginning after WWI. Many also alternated every third service. For examples, see “Augustana Lutheran Church of Halstad,” in In the Heart of the Red River Valley: A History of the People of Norman County, Minnesota, ed. Dorothy Olson and Lenora I. Johnson (Ada, Minn.: Norman County Heritage Commission, 1976), 491; and “Faaberg Lutheran Church,” in In the Heart of the Red River Valley: A History of the People of Norman County, Minnesota, ed. Dorothy Olson and Lenora I. Johnson (Ada, Minn.: Norman County Heritage Commission, 1976), 493.
spoken languages, listening to both Norwegian and English sermons throughout their youth.

The decline of spoken Norwegian in the churches of Norman County and the surrounding community is vital to the understanding of Norwegian American children’s cultural experience with language. This is because the decline in the use of the language is largely blamed on youth, particularly third-generation children – whether directly or indirectly. As Christian Schulstad explained, English became an increasingly important language in the churches “so that the young people could understand.”

Children regularly used and spoke English in their common schools, putting pressure on adults to use and speak English at home. Church histories recall this change in the homes. In 1939, Marsh River Lutheran Congregation began alternating Norwegian and English languages in the church, because “Norwegian was no longer used in most homes.” Whether or not youth was to blame for the declining use of Norwegian, it was noticeable that “the period between the two wars, there got to be more and more pressure to use English.”

Third-generation Norwegian American children in Norman County and the surrounding community witnessed and contributed to this change in language first-hand.

In the Norwegian Lutheran churches of Norman County during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Norwegian American children and youth also interacted directly and frequently with a written Norwegian language. This interaction most

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significantly came from religious instruction. As Clarence Glasrud explains, religious instruction was an “important factor in keeping us Norwegian,” where during the summer, “all the Norwegian youngsters” attended the parochial schools sponsored by the churches.249 As former residents frequently recall, this education was usually always “taught in Norwegian” during this period.250 Parochial schools, according to Norwegian-American Johanna Aune, “was mostly bible history.”251 However, youth would also “study the Norwegian language […] and Norwegian History” in these schools.252 Regardless of affiliations, the Norwegian Lutheran churches provided youth the means to study written forms of Norwegian, certainly influencing their experience with the language.

While nearly all Norwegian American youth of the Lutheran churches, Synod or United, learned a written form of Norwegian, variations of intensity existed. Many Norwegian American youth attended parochial schools between one and two months out of the year, usually during summer when common schools did not meet regularly.253 However, they were limited in their exposure to formal study of the Norwegian language. Children and youth living in the Wild Rice Children’s Home, which was owned and operated by “the Norwegian Lutheran Church,” or the Norwegian Lutheran Synod, had a different experience.254 These children, under the direction of the Synod were exposed to

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249 Clarence Glasrud, excerpt, 233.
251 Johanna Aune, excerpt, 233-234.
252 Alva Hest, excerpt, 234-235.
253 Clarence Glasrud, excerpt, 233; Johanna Aune, excerpt, 233-234; and John Gronner, excerpt, 234.
254 Carl Narveson, excerpt, 236-237.
more intensive study of Norwegian. While community children had between four and eight weeks of Norwegian instruction in parochial schools, children in the orphanage, on average, “had an hour of Norwegian every day,” while also receiving their regular education.255 In his autobiography, Narveson explains that “the school day began at 8:00 a.m. with singing a hymn, prayer in Norwegian, then at least that one hour of Norwegian instruction.”256 Narveson’s recollection about Norwegian instruction demonstrates a gradation in which youth in Norman County were exposed to the formal study of Norwegian.

While the length of time in which youth studied Norwegian varied, those in the orphanage usually studied more religious material. Youth outside the orphanage remember having to read and memorize “everything in Luther’s Catechism and Explanation” as part of their religious instruction for confirmation.257 However, Carl Narveson illustrates a more detailed plan of study from the orphanage, in which he recalled “repeating from memory the 10 Commandments with their full meaning, a Bible story to go with the lesson, and questions and answers from the explanation.”258 According to Narveson, those teaching in the orphanage “were quite well educated. We could notice it when we were reading for the minister.”259 Although giving credit to the teachers in his preparation, Narveson suggests that those in the orphanage were better

255 Carl Narveson, excerpt, 236-237.
256 Narveson, An Orphan’s Saga, 22.
257 “Let’s Reminisce about Our Church’ Centennial Group Memories,” in This Is Our Story, Shelly, Minnesota: Including City of Shelly, Shelly Township and Good Hope Township, ed. Shelly Centennial Book Committee (Hendrum, Minn.: Heritage Publishing Co., 1997), 170.
258 Narveson, An Orphan’s Saga, 22.
259 Carl Narveson, excerpt, 236-237.
prepared for their confirmation classes. This further suggests that the intensity and quality of language and religious instruction mattered.

In both cases, however, youth rarely had to write Norwegian, for there was a far heavier emphasis on reading and speaking the language. The importance of pressure being placed on written Norwegian skills is important for understanding how they interacted differently with the two languages. Yet, while youth were taught to read and write Norwegian in their churches, it was limited. The objective of reading Norwegian, for example, was to have passages “memorized word for word” and to recite these passages for the minister. In this sense, youth were rarely required to write in the Norwegian language. As a result, children’s skills in written Norwegian significantly declined. Scholar Lori Ann Lahlum notes the limited Norwegian writing skills second- and third-generation Norwegian American children possessed when writing home to their extended family in Norway, and typically blame this on the much longer time spent learning English in the common schools. Nevertheless, children’s limited knowledge of written Norwegian partially stems from the limited type of Norwegian instruction the church provided, which played an influential role in the decline of language retention.

While external pressures existed for youth to use English in the church, Norwegian American youth in Norman County throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries maintained the use of different forms of Norwegian in a variety of ways. Additionally, while English becomes integrated into the church, the use of language

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260 “‘Let’s Reminisce about Our Church’ Centennial Group Memories,” 170.
remains complex as churches used these languages at different times. Lastly, while adults made many of these decisions for youth in the church, children and adolescents played active roles in following regulations of language use and influencing changes during the early twentieth century. Thus, Norwegian American youth must be recognized as full agents of culture for their participation in this cultural exchange.

**Sacraments, Traditions, and Organizations in the Church**

This next section explores Norwegian American youth experiences with religious sacraments, traditions, and organizations in the churches, specifically focusing on youth participation in these activities. It contends that while Norwegian American youth regularly participated in important traditional Norwegian church traditions, they too, actively took part in new American church societies. In addition, some of these traditions appropriated and blurred elements of Norwegian and American culture. In these complex cultural exchanges taking place in the Norwegian Lutheran churches, Norwegian American youth must be recognized as full agents of culture for their participation and contribution to these changes.

For many Norwegian American youth in Norman County and the surrounding community, religious instruction by the church became a central memory in their church experience. Children and adolescents regularly attended parochial schools or Sunday schools held by their Lutheran churches. In many cases, “before Sunday School was organized, religious training was held in summer parochial schools.”262 Parochial schools were commonly held in the homes of church members during early years of settlement or

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262 “Faaberg Lutheran Church,” 494.
in the “district schools for varied lengths of time” after school buildings had been constructed. Early on, the average length of time in which youth attended their parochial schools during the year was six weeks, but overtime, it decreased to fewer weeks.

Although parochial schools resembled more traditional forms of religious instruction, Sunday schools soon developed in the churches alongside the parochial schools. In one example, Shelly’s Marsh River Lutheran Congregation opened their Sunday school as early as 1878. Regardless of which school Norwegian American youth attended in Norman County, they usually “memorized the catechism, studied Bible stories and saying lots of songs.” In some cases were churches had both Sunday School and Parochial schools, they often “cooperated” with the same goal to “further the work of educating the young in the Bible.” By attending these schools, Norwegian American youth in Norman County and the surrounding community carried on old church traditions within their Lutheran churches.

While Norwegian American youth carried on the tradition of receiving a religious instruction through their Lutheran church, this instruction was leading up to an important sacrament: Confirmation. Religious instruction was not only designed to introduce

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263 “The Marsh River Lutheran Congregation,” 152. It was common for regular church services to held in homes or schools until church building were constructed. For example, see “Jevnaker Lutheran Church,” 499.

264 For a detailed discussion on the differences between the kind of religious instruction offered in Norwegian American communities, see Erik Luther Williamson, “From Norsk Religionsskole to Parochial School in Fifty Years: Norwegian Lutheran Congregational Education in North Dakota,” Norwegian-American Studies 34, (1995), 299-320.


266 “Memories of the Shelly Church,” 169.

267 “Jevnaker Lutheran Church,” 499.
children to the word of God but prepare youth for the rite of passage into full-fledged members of the congregation through confirmation. Youth typically studied for long periods of time leading up to their confirmation day. As one group recalled, “reading with the Minister for confirmation was an all-day affair.” Confirmation days were usually held in the fall after summer instruction had run its course. Described by former children of a church in Shelly:

On confirmation Day, the confirmands would sit one on each side of the inside aisle. During one part of the service, the pastor would walk up and down between the confirmands and ask questions from Luther’s catechism. You were not given any forwarding as to what the question may be. Carl Narveson, who had lived in the Wild Rice Children’s Home, gives a similar account of his confirmation experience, explaining that “we stood in a row in the aisle by the church benches while he catechized us for our day of Confirmation.” Carl was confirmed in 1917, his older brothers, Art and Martin, in 1915, and younger brother Lawrence in 1919. Once confirmed, youth became full members, and considered adults, in their Lutheran church. For some, confirmation was also the day youth received their first communion. In taking part in these traditions, Norwegian American youth in Norman County contributed to the maintaining of old church traditions.

For these Norwegian American children who took part in confirmation, it was both a spiritual and emotional experience. As the same group of children from the church in

268 “Concordia Congregation,” in In the Heart of the Red River Valley: A History of the People of Norman County, Minnesota, ed. Dorothy Olson and Lenora I. Johnson (Ada, Minn.: Norman County Heritage Commission, 1976), 492.
269 “Let’s Reminisce about Our Church’ Centennial Group Memories,” 170.
270 Narveson, An Orphan’s Saga, 23.
271 “Let’s Reminisce about Our Church’ Centennial Group Memories,” 170.
Shelly recalled, “you sat there terrified, hoping and praying you would know the answer.” This recollection reveals the high level of stress and anxiety this old tradition placed on Norwegian American youth. As the group more explicitly explained, “spiritually this was an important day for everyone” but “emotionally, we were all glad when it was over!” The completion of the ceremony was a huge emotional relief for the youth who were now full members, and adults, within their Lutheran church.

Within the context of the Lutheran churches, confirmation was a critical rite of passage for Norwegian American youth. Confirmation signaled their finishing of instruction and crossing into full church membership. For many Norwegian American Lutheran children throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, this usually occurred at the age of fifteen. Confirmation records for several Norman County Lutheran churches show the same. After confirmation, Norwegian American youth were encouraged to partake in more social activities. As Norwegian American, Palmer Tverdal, explained in memory, “confirmation was graduation and after that you are free to go out and sew your wild oats.” In many ways, confirmation did not only symbolize children’s spiritual journey, but symbolized a greater social introduction within and outside the church community. As Tverdal further explained, “you were almost...

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272 “’Let’s Reminisce about Our Church’ Centennial Group Memories,” 170.
273 “’Let’s Reminisce about Our Church’ Centennial Group Memories,” 170.
274 For example, in Our Savior’s Lutheran Church, between 1889 and 1891, 60% of confirmands was 15 years of age, followed by 16% at 16, and another 14% at 17 years of age. Between 1893 and 1894, 58% of confirmands were 15 years of age, followed by 32% at 14, and another 10% at 16 years. Additionally, between 1899 and 1900, 40% of confirmands were 15, followed by 37% at 16, 18% at 14, and an additional 5% at 17 years old. See, Ministerial Records 1879-1907, Microfilm, Reel 89 [ALC 218A], selected congregational records of the American Lutheran Church in Minnesota, 1800-1988, MNHS.
275 Palmer Tverdal, excerpt, 259-260.
encouraged do it, partying and dancing and drinking was the rule, and it wasn't frowned on.”

Tverdal highlights how confirmation was an important aspect of socialization in the community and what it entailed for Norwegian American youth. However, not all churches supported the kinds of activities Tverdal explained. Churches affiliated with the Synod usually prohibited these activities. Nevertheless, confirmation was an important milestone for these youth in Norman County.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Norwegian American youth also regularly participated in social church organizations. Luther League, sometimes called Young People’s Societies, became a focal point in youth life within the Lutheran churches across the U.S. during the late nineteenth century. Norman County church histories often recalled the formation and contributions of Luther Leagues to the church, especially their financial assistance since these churches did not have state support like in Norway. For example, Lansdale Lutheran congregation noted the presentation of an organ in 1911 and a large donation towards a church bell in 1917. While these organizations did make large financial contributions, many residents of Norman County remember them as “social events” and their “main source of entertainment.” Many of these organizations held community events in which both young and old members of the church attended, such as ice cream socials.

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276 Palmer Tverdal, excerpt, 259-260.
277 Odin Strandness, excerpt, 260.
278 “Landstad Lutheran Congregation,” 500.
279 William Nelson, excerpt, 382-383.
280 Ice Cream Socials were popular among the Luther League gatherings. For various announcements and reports of the gatherings, see “East Flom News,” Norman County Post (Ada, Minn.), September 4, 1918, MNHS; and “Flom News,” Norman County Post (Ada, Minn.), September 4, 1918, MNHS. For other general announcements and social gatherings held by Luther Leagues and Young People’s Societies, see
Additionally, while Luther Leagues and Young People’s Societies were distinctly an American creation, many Norwegian American congregations utilized it as a way to incorporate aspects of the Norwegian American culture and identity. In one example, Ole Rølvaag and Waldemar Ager, two important figures in creating the Norwegian American identity, came to visit a Luther League meeting held by one the organizations that developed in Norman County.\footnote{William Nelson, excerpt, 382-383.} These youth utilized the new American tradition, Luther Leagues, to explore Norwegian American culture and identity. Additionally, this example of cultural exchange illustrates how Norwegian American children and adolescents in Norman County contributed first-hand to their churches and cultural identity, as full agents of culture.

As this section has demonstrated, Norwegian American youth in Norman County throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries made significant contributions to the maintenance of traditional Norwegian church customs. They too, accepted American-made church organizations and blurred cultural elements in these various activities, paving way for Norwegian American activities in the church. This complex narrative of cultural exchange in which youth were a central part of, demonstrates their need to be recognized as agents of culture. Understanding how youth felt about these activities and their role in these organizations requires further investigation, for which will reveal more about youth’s role in cultural exchange.

**Gender Roles in the Church**

“Of Local Interest,” *Norman County Post* (Ada, Minn.), November 18, 1920, MNHS; “Flom,” *Norman County Post* (Ada, Minn.), November 22, 1922, MNHS; and “News Notes from Norman County: Northwest Flom Report,” *Norman County Post* (Ada, Minn.), February 21, 1923, MNHS.
This last section shifts to explore youths’ experiences with gender roles in the church, specifically focusing on how cultural conceptions of gender affected experience and responses to these roles. It contends that Norwegian American youth in Norman County followed traditional gender norms in their churches, dividing space according to gender. However, youth also accepted new spaces which allowed for the mixing of gender. In addition, girls and young women created new space in the church while still fulfilling traditional feminine roles. The various responses and decisions by Norwegian American youth about gender roles and space demonstrates that these youth were full agents of culture within the church.

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Norwegian American youth in Norman County grappled with a physically divided gendered church environment. Within their various Lutheran congregations, Norwegian American youth regularly adhered to traditional divisions of physical separation during church services. As Gale Iverson explained in an oral history, the Lutheran churches in Norman County and surrounding community, “had that old-fashioned Norwegian custom of men sitting on one side of the church and ladies on the other.”282 Iverson’s remembrance of the physical nature of weekly church services gives insight into the everyday gendered experience within these Lutheran institutions.

Although younger children may have sat with their mother or father without regard to the divisions of gender, it is likely that many children and youth adhered to these physical

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separations. This is because physical separation between boys and girls was incredibly important in the Wild Rice Children’s Home, an orphanage operated by the Norwegian Lutheran Synod. Carl Narveson, former resident of the home, explained that “there were about a hundred and twenty children there, about seventy boys and about fifty girls. And the boys didn’t talk to the girls and the girls didn’t talk to the boys. I don’t think I talked to a girl until I was thirteen years old. We were kept separated.”

While describing his gendered space, Narveson highlights how the church played a significant role in the separation of boys and girls. He further explained that “girls were taboo,” and that boys and girls actively sought separate spaces to play in the yard. These memories about the separated gendered spaces suggests its importance to the church and its wide-spread experience.

However, the gendered experience of Norwegian American boys and girls in Norman County is more complex than simple adherence to traditional gendered spaces. Religious instruction and new social organizations, which developed in the Lutheran churches across America, created new opportunities for boys and girls to come together in the same equal space. More specifically, these new American social organizations created opportunities for both boys and girls to become leaders within their churches. For example, Taylor Carlson and Tillie Efteland became, respectively, the president and vice-president of the Haabets Young People’s Society at the Zion Lutheran church in Shelly in

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283 Carl Narveson, excerpt, 236-237.
284 Narveson, An Orphan’s Saga, 29.
These young girls frequently took advantage of this opportunity, earning high rankings in the organization’s political and social structures. This is significant because adult women, in several synods, were still barred from casting official votes in the church during the early twentieth century. These youth social organizations thus offered young Norwegian American women the opportunity to cross gendered boundaries within their churches.

The gendered experience of Norwegian American children and youth in Norman County churches becomes more complex with the development of new social organizations created specifically for young women and girls. Ladies Aid societies were common among the Norwegian Lutheran churches and provided essential financial support to these congregations. The societies typically gathered in “homes and schools” and spent afternoons “knitting, crocheting and quilting.” There products were always sold as ways to raise money for additional projects or for their congregations. The

285 “The Zion Lutheran Congregation,” in *This Is Our Story, Shelly, Minnesota: Including City of Shelly, Shelly Township and Good Hope Township*, ed. Shelly Centennial Book Committee (Hendrum, Minn.: Heritage Publishing Co., 1997), 155.
286 In 1911, Olga Lee became the treasurer of the Young People’s Society in Landstad Lutheran Congregation. See, “Landstad Lutheran Congregation,” 500.
287 Many church histories record the time in which these restrictions were lifted for women in the churches. In the Kirkebo Church, for example, women were barred from politics until the 1940s. See “Kirkebo Church,” in *In the Heart of the Red River Valley: A History of the People of Norman County, Minnesota*, ed. Dorothy Olson and Lenora I. Johnson (Ada, Minn.: Norman County Heritage Commission, 1976), 499. For another church history that discusses the barring of women in church votes, see “Faaberg Lutheran Church,” 493. For secondary context in these churches on women’s power and influence, see Erik Luther Williamson, “Norwegian-American Lutheran Churchwomen in North Dakota,” (M.A. thesis, University of North Dakota, 1987).
289 Scholars often recognize the significance of these contributions from Ladies Aids in these churches. For example, Lori Ann Lahlum claims that because of these contributions, “women carried out the actual
creation of Girls Aid Societies, modeled after Ladies Aids, were established in some of the Norman County churches for younger women and girls of all ages. As illustrated by figure 4, membership into the Zion Lutheran Girls Aid ranged from school age to young adult.

Figure 4. Zion Lutheran Girl’s Aid. Image from authors personal collection.

These young girls made significant contributions to their Norwegian Lutheran church in Shelly. The Zion Lutheran Church in Shelly Township organized the Girls Aid in 1894, with its main objective to raise money for “the santal mission” in India. There work soon expanded and they began to work on more domestic “projects in their own church.”

The new American social organization in the Lutheran church provided these young girls with a great deal of social freedom by carving out a special place in the church they otherwise would not have had outside the home.

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290 “The Zion Lutheran Congregation,” 155.
However, the participation in American church organizations such as Girls Aid Societies is complex. Although women and young girls were barred from voting in the church, they made substantial financial contributions by supplying the churches with finances through various activities.\textsuperscript{291} The Girls Aid was part of this contribution. Important, though, is that these women and girls did this through activities the community deemed appropriate for women and girls. Within Zion’s Girls Aid, one former member remembered learning to “weave baskets from straw taken from the wheat fields, make flowers of wool yarn and from tissue paper, piece quilting,” and more.\textsuperscript{292} The image of the Zion girls aid also depicts these young girls participating in these activities (see figure 4). The feminine quality of these experiences complicates the understanding of these new American social freedoms for girls in the old-fashioned churches. While new American organizations altered the kinds of spaces boys and girls could occupy in the church, especially those designed for girls, these spaces were still gendered.

As this section has demonstrated, Norwegian American youth in Norman County throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries made many contributions to the maintenance of traditional gendered spaces in their Lutheran churches. They too, however, accepted new American influences and carved out new spaces for which they employed to their own benefit. These various actions reflect Norwegian American youth

\textsuperscript{291} “The Zion Lutheran Congregation,” 155.
\textsuperscript{292} Aamodt, “Nels Aamodt Family,” 9.
as agents of culture, actively participating in the exchange, modification, and creation of cultural spaces.

**Concluding Remarks on Language, Sacraments, and Gender in the Church**

This chapter has investigated the cultural experiences of Norwegian American youth in their Lutheran churches with special attention to language, traditions, and gender. While analyzing youth’s involvement with language, it found that Norwegian American youth employed Norwegian, and English in various ways throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While English became integrated into the church, the use of language remains complex as churches frequently used Norwegian at different times. Lastly, while adults made many of these decisions, children and adolescents played active roles in the use of these languages. When it came to church traditions, youths’ participation in the blurring of cultural elements further complicates narratives of cultural exchange as youth maintained, created, and adapted Norwegian and American traditions. Lastly, youth experiences with gender become more complex. While youth maintained traditional gendered spaces, they created new spaces with which they could modify to their own benefit. Their participation and shaping of language, traditions, and gender in the churches demonstrates the recognition of youth as agents of culture within the narrative of Norwegian American churches.
Chapter Four:

Norwegian American Youth Inside the Common Schools

While attending an American common school, Norwegian American Solveig Johnson recalled that the teacher “taught us American culture.”\(^{293}\) At first glance, Johnson’s recollection resembles an important assertion too frequently found in the scholarship of Norwegian America. This popular claim, as briefly explored in the introduction, is that the American common school was the principal instrument in the Americanization of Norwegian immigrants and their children.\(^{294}\) Included in these discussions, is the recognition that Norwegian Lutheran churches, the Norwegian Lutheran Synod in particular, fought against the common schools for their influence of American culture, dissatisfied with the secular education of the children.\(^{295}\) These discussions, however, are designed to investigate the schools and churches as institutions, rather than youth themselves. Additionally, the gendered experiences of these Norwegian American children in the common schools requires further attention by scholars of Norwegian America.\(^{296}\) Consequently, youth are not frequently recognized as important agents of

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\(^{295}\) The Norwegian Lutheran Synod believed that the poor education of the teachers, lack of prayer, and the use of the English language for the instruction of the children in American common schools was destroying the immigrants’ distinct Norwegian culture. Semmingsen, *Norway to America*, 92. See also, Lovoll, *The Promise of America*, 69.  
\(^{296}\) Although still limited, the study of women and gender in Norwegian American communities continues to expand. For diverse examples of scholarship on women, see Ingrid K. Urberg, “A Sense of Place: America Through the Eyes of Norwegian-American Women Novelists” (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1996); Lori Ann Lahlum, “‘There Are No Trees Here:’ Norwegian Women Encounter the Northern Prairies and Plains” (Ph.D. diss., University of Idaho, 2003); and Betty A. Bergland and Lori Ann Lahlum, *Norwegian American Women: Migration, Communities, and Identities* (St. Paul: Minnesota
culture in these narratives. Thus, to further explore the cultural experiences of Norwegian American youth within the common schools, language and gender concepts are given special attention in this project.

To better understand youths’ full participation in cultural activities and exchanges, I first ask how Norwegian American children in Norman County reacted to the introduction of the English language and American gender conceptions in the common schools? What impact did the introduction of this second language and American concepts of gender have on Norwegian American youth and how did they come to terms with its usage in the schools? Lastly, what roles did youth play in this cultural narrative? In looking at Norman County’s class and attendance registers, newspapers, and reminiscences, these youth’s cultural experiences with language and gender in the American common schools can better be understood. Through an evaluation of these sources, this chapter recognizes that youth in Norman County used language and gender in a complex manner, demonstrating their full participation as agents of culture in the common schools.

**Language Usage in the Common Schools**

This first section investigates youths’ experiences with language in the American common schools, specifically focusing on the initial reactions to the introduction of English and responses by youth. This chapter maintains that while learning to read, write, and speak English, Norwegian American youth struggled emotionally and intellectually...
with English as a language. This is because first-, second-, and many third-generation Norwegian American children spoke Norwegian exclusively at home, causing their initial reactions to a new language to be negative and emotional. Additionally, this struggle to learn English had an important intellectual impact on the children’s early academic success. Still, youth overcame this cultural barrier by learning the English language and becoming successful students. These ways with which youth navigated the use of language in the schools demonstrates their need to be recognized as full agents of culture, for they played an active role in cultural exchanges within their schools.

As discussed in chapter two of this project, first-, second-, and third-generation Norwegian American youth in Norman County, and the surrounding area, often maintained Norwegian as their native or primary language at home. As second-generation Norwegian American, Oscar Bratlien reiterates, “all the kids here were using the Norwegian language at home exclusively” throughout the early twentieth century.297 The result of Norwegian being a primary home language was that these children were rarely exposed to the English language before they entered the common schools. Thus, when they reached school age, usually around the ages of five or six, “a lot of the pupils didn’t know English.”298 In another sense, when Norwegian American children entered their common schools they became English language learners, often without any prior knowledge or experience with the new language.299 Their various one room classrooms in

298 Wilfred Anderson, excerpt, 175-176.
299 For other Norwegian Americans who had no prior experience with English before school, see Anna Melberg, excerpt of an oral history conducted 1977, in Prairie Voices: An Oral History of Scandinavian Americans in the Upper Midwest (Moorhead, Minn.: Gerald D. Anderson, 2014), 220; and Solvieg
Norman County became new and unfamiliar cultural environments in which many of the children lacked the knowledge and means to communicate in the appropriate and required language.

The consequence of the Norwegian American children having limited knowledge of English upon entrance to the common schools was that the prompt introduction of the new language became emotionally traumatizing for some of the young children. For example, starting school at the age of five, second-generation Norwegian American, Eva Thortvet recalled a traumatizing experience with learning the English language. Thorvet, who “could hardly speak English” as she began school remembered that “every morning, for a solid week, I cried because I didn’t want to go to school.” For Thorvet, the introduction of English for (perhaps) the first time prompted an immediate negative response due to its unfamiliarity. It was a response shared by other Norwegian Americans in the community. For example, Oscar Bratlien recalled observing a younger student just starting school have a similar response. Oscar explained that “when the teacher came to talk to him, he’d start crying.” For many of these young children, the introduction of the English language triggered an immediately negative response, showcasing their emotional adjustment to the new cultural element.

The reason for Norwegian American children’s immediate and emotional response to the introduction of the English language was partly due to their limited communicative

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Johnson, excerpt, 225. In a study of Benson Village in Swift County, Minnesota, Odd S. Lovoll discusses a similar experience in which Norwegian American children rarely understood English when they came to their common school. See Lovoll, *Norwegians on the Prairie*, 195.


301 Oscar Bratlien, excerpt, 230-231.
abilities as children and English language learners. Students’ lack of experience with the English language created a significant communicative barrier between themselves and their teacher. As third-generation Norwegian American, Alma Ramse, recalled about her teaching experience in the schools, the children “couldn’t express themselves” because they did not understand the language well enough.

There teachers often could not understand these students either. It is because of this that Ramse allowed young students to use Norwegian or Swedish as needed for she “understood them” when spoke these languages and used it as an opportunity to help their learning of English in the common schools.

For many students, however, their teachers only spoke English. This reality, and cultural barrier, created a significant struggle in the common schools.

The language barrier in many schools was amplified by the forbidding of foreign languages. Common schools had developed at the community level, meaning that regulation of these public institutions was usually local and regional. Early Minnesota laws did not restrict or outlaw foreign languages in schools and despite significant assimilation agendas during World War One, Minnesota law did not change to enforce stricter adherence to the use of English in the common schools.

School reports throughout Norman County, however, bring to light the local restriction and enforcement

302 Alma Ramse, excerpt, 222-223.
303 Alma Ramse, excerpt, 222-223.
304 In 1919, Minnesota amended a 1913 law which set the basic language for common school instruction to be in English. However, neither the 1913 nor 1919 law rejected the teaching of foreign languages in schools. See, Laws of Minnesota, 1919, Chapter 320. During 1917, Minnesota passed a law requiring the teaching a patriotism in public schools. However, a requirement of English was not provided in the law. See, Laws of Minnesota, 1917, Chapter 109.
of “the forbidden language.” Although reports do not mention Norwegian, it is safe to assume that this foreign language was Norwegian due to the ethnic make-up of the communities. These teacher reports suggest that Norwegian was regularly discouraged, and the use of English was frequently enforced. This regulation of Norwegian enhanced the difficult communicative and intellectual barriers for young Norwegian American children still unfamiliar with the new language.

This language barrier heightened with the difficulty to get help considerably affected the academic participation and performance of some students in Norman County and surrounding community. Some students who struggled to communicate in English withdrew from classroom participation. For example, Mabel Enger remembered that because she struggled with English as a language, she withdrew from participating in class. In her own words, “I didn't say anything. I looked at the book. There were so many others in the same position.” Enger’s memory of withdrawing from participation in class was a common experience among many immigrant children. For young learners of second languages, this issue is still present today. Withdrawing from participation, however, was not the only significant effect on Norwegian American children.


307 In the last few decades, significant emphasis has been placed on the research of second-language learners and the importance of creating safe and supportive learning environments. In recent studies, scholars across disciplines discuss the effect in which learning second languages has on children in relation to their participation and success. For an example, see Patton O. Tabors, One Child, Two Languages: A Guide for Early Childhood Educators of Children Learning English as a Second Language (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Pub. Co., 2008). Research has also explored the sociocultural implications of second language learning in schools and the acknowledges the struggles children endure during the initial introduction period of the second language. For an example, see Caroline Bligh, The Silent Experiences of
The difficulty to communicate and get help learning English also affected the early academic performance of the Norwegian American children in Norman County and surrounding community. This academic struggle is identifiable in the reports of students who fell behind in their studies. Teachers in Norman County schools frequently reported to their successors who needed help and in what areas. In some cases, whole classes of students in Norman County’s rural schools needed a “great deal of drill in reading.”

In other cases, students needed “a great deal of drill in pronouncing words beginning with th and j.”

Teachers’ notes about students struggles in reading and pronunciation can be signs of the students’ language barrier. For example, in one report a teacher noted that a young student learning to read had been “very slow to learn but is getting along much better at the end of term as he can now understand English.” These reports showcase how the language barrier affected the progress of learning new content.

Additionally, Alma Ramse explains that “it was hard to get individual help” because all the grades were together in one room. The difficulty of getting special attention

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Young Bilingual Learners: A Sociocultural Study into the Silent Period (Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2014).


310 Elizabeth Hoi, “Suggestions to Successor,” in *Class Record for Ungraded Elementary Schools*, 1925, Records 1892-1954, School District No. 13 Shelley Township, Norman County Schools, 128.B.12.11B, 13 Class Record 1925-1930, 9 (Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul, Minn.). Some students recalled their early struggles. For example, Norwegian-American Anna Melberg recalled in an oral history that she struggled the first few days due to the language barrier. See, Melberg, excerpt, 220.

311 Alma Ramse, excerpt, 222-223.
from their teacher when experiencing an academic struggle showcases the kind of cultural and intellectual battle endured by the Norwegian American children learning the new and unfamiliar language. In some more extreme cases, the struggle to speak English and get additional help from the teacher held students back in school. In one example, Inga Moore recalled, “I couldn’t speak English. So, then I didn’t pass the first grade. I went two years. It held me back.”\textsuperscript{312} For Moore, the inability to speak English before entering school caused her to repeat the first grade. These reports and reminiscences signify that the academic struggle of Norman County students and surrounding community could be quantified as an expression of the intellectual struggle associated with learning and adjusting to the use of a new or second language.

While Norwegian American youth struggled emotionally and intellectually with the introduction of English, they actively sought to overcome these cultural challenges by learning the new language. This can be quantified through youths’ later academic progress and success. In many situations, Norwegian American youth in Norman County completed their common school education and went on to earn degrees in higher education.\textsuperscript{313} Scholars of Norwegian America often note the importance of higher education to Norwegian American communities. They identify them as places for


\textsuperscript{313} Many of the youth in Norman County went on to receive various higher education degrees. For example, Manley Furuseth attended Business School in Fargo, see “The Manley Furuseth Family,” in \textit{In the Heart of the Red River Valley: A History of the People of Norman County, Minnesota}, ed. Dorothy Olson and Lenora I. Johnson (Ada, Minn.: Norman County Heritage Commission, 1976), 114. In many cases, whole families had children who attended college. For example, siblings Anna, Katrina, Einar, Helen and Donald Anderson all attended schools throughout the Red River Valley, see “The Jens Anderson Family,” in \textit{In the Heart of the Red River Valley: A History of the People of Norman County, Minnesota}, ed. Dorothy Olson and Lenora I. Johnson (Ada, Minn.: Norman County Heritage Commission, 1976), 23.
immigrants and their children to achieve greater opportunities in America and a place for religious refuge in education.\textsuperscript{314} The Norwegian-language newspapers in Norman County demonstrate this support among Norwegian Americans by regularly including advertisements for opportunities, such as local business schools or colleges.\textsuperscript{315} Newspapers across the county also highlighted the frequency in which Norwegian American youth in Norman County would continue their instruction in higher education.\textsuperscript{316} These examples demonstrate the later intellectual and academic success of the Norwegian American youth who came out of the common schools in Norman County and the surrounding areas despite the penetrating struggles of adjusting to the new language.

Although Norwegian American children in Norman County adopted the English language in their common schools throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they did not lose their Norwegian language. The common schools provided first-, second-, and third-generation Norwegian American children and youth the opportunity to become bilingual speakers. This bilingual reality expresses itself first-hand in the children’s experiences. Oscar Bratlien, who recalled an experience in which a young student had trouble understanding English, explained that he “had to translate” for

\textsuperscript{314} Blegen, \textit{Norwegian Migration to America}, 541-542; Semmingsen, \textit{Norway to America}, 92-95; Lovoll, \textit{The Promise of America}, 110-112.
\textsuperscript{315} These newspapers advertised a wide range of schools. For same examples from the \textit{Red River Tidende}, see “Grand Forks College,” \textit{Red River Tidende} (Fergus Falls, Minn.), August 22, 1985, MNHS; “Park Region Luther College,” \textit{Red River Tidende} (Fergus Falls, Minn.), August 29, 1895, MNHS; “Bruflat Academy and Business College,” \textit{Red River Tidende} (Fergus Falls, Minn.), September 19, 1895, MNHS; and “Crookston Normal School and Business Institute,” \textit{Red River Tidende} (Fergus Falls, Minn.), October 31, 1895, MNHS.
\textsuperscript{316} “Of Local Interest!” \textit{Norman County Post} (Ada, Minn.) September 4, 1918, MNHS. See also, “Local Happenings,” \textit{Norman County Post} (Ada, Minn.) November 22, 1922, MNHS
the student and the teacher for neither could understand one another.\textsuperscript{317} His ability to act as a mediator between the younger student and the teacher showcases that he was allowed to utilize both the English and Norwegian languages in the common schools.

Additionally, Alma Ramse recalled that as a teacher it was okay when a student struggled with English, for she “understood them […] and] when they talked Norwegian or Swedish [she] could correct it” in English.\textsuperscript{318} Ramse’s recollection not only provides a testament to her bilingual nature as a third-generation Norwegian American, into adulthood, but also the bilingual exchange or code-switching between the teacher and the student. These examples illustrate the bilingual nature of first-, second-, and third-generation Norwegian American youth as they learned a new and second language.

In summary, first-, second-, and third-generation Norwegian American youth in Norman County made significant contributions to adjust to the introduction of English throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although these children initially struggled to learn the new language, this struggle was not a fight against the adoption of the language. Instead, Norwegian American youth responded to the introduction of English in a variety of ways, which changed as they progressed through their education. The struggles to learn and the actions with which youth took to overcome such difficulties ultimately demonstrates Norwegian American youths’ participation in narratives of cultural adaption as full agents of culture.

\textbf{Gender Roles in the Common Schools}

\textsuperscript{317} Oscar Bratlien, excerpt, 230-231.
\textsuperscript{318} Alma Ramse, excerpt, 222-223.
This next section shifts to explore youths’ experiences with gender roles in the American common schools, specifically focusing on how American gender norms affected the instruction and attendance of boys and girls differently, as well as its subsequent impact on their academic success. It contends that concepts of gender played a critical role in the intellectual experience of Norwegian American boys and girls. These children were given different elective instruction in the common schools along these gendered lines. However, in feminine roles, Norwegian American girls found greater opportunities in school clubs, enhancing and developing skills otherwise not offered to these girls in Norway. In addition, due to the rural nature of Norman County, boys more frequently missed school to work on the farm than their female counterparts. In this complex narrative of gendered education, Norwegian American youth must be recognized as full agents of culture, for they played an active role in this complicated exchange of culture.

The gender norms presented to Norwegian American children in Norman County in the common schools did not appear to be radically different than those held by Norwegian culture during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Similar to America, Norway began to draw strict lines between male and female spheres of influence in the middle class. According to these ideals, and despite the rise in an international woman suffrage movement, men were to exhibit masculine qualities of strength and occupy political and public spheres, while women were to exhibit feminine
qualities of purity and submissiveness and occupy domestic and private spheres. These ideas about proper gender roles for boys and girls, according to both Norwegian and American custom, appeared quite visible in common school curriculum across the U.S. during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Despite appearing similar, Norwegian American children in Norman County and the surrounding area struggled with these similar gender concepts. This is partly because they would have learned and read from materials that reinforced these ideas of what were proper gender norms for boys and girls in the common schools. The core curriculum in the American common schools did not directly divide children by gender, as it encouraged all children to learn to read, study arithmetic, sciences, and more. However, the ideas presented to them through supportive materials suggests that boys and girls were exposed to and indoctrinated about proper and appropriate masculine and feminine roles in their society.

Norwegian American children also wrestled with these concepts of gender in other areas of their instruction, which further restricted their access of knowledge according to gender. Although the core curriculum of the common schools was intended to be

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319 For discussion on gender roles in Norway, see Lagerquist, *In American the Men Milk the Cows*, 13-21; and Lønnå, “Gender in Norway,” 23-47. For discussions on established gender roles in American during this period, see, Riley, *Women and Indians on the Frontier*; and Fink, *Agrarian Women*.

320 Scholarship in gendered education has expanded significantly in the last few decades; however, for a brief overview on gendered curriculum in common schools during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, please consult, Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958*, 3rd ed. (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004). For primary sources on influential educational ideas for these common schools, see S. Alexander Rippa, ed., *Educational Ideas in America; a Documentary History* (New York: D. McKay Co., 1969).

inclusive in the education of boys and girls, a gendered curriculum could present itself more explicitly when teachers taught electives to their students. In this sense, the selective topics taught in the common schools often purposefully divided students by their gender and instruction given to boys and girls based on appropriate gender roles. One example of this gendered instruction comes from School District 40 in Hendrum, Minnesota, under the instruction of Olive Ness Rostvold (see fig. 5). The illustration showcases that the boys in Rostvold’s early twentieth-century class were taught woodworking. Noticeably absent from this training are the girls in the class.

![Figure 5. Olive Ness Rostvold Taught in Hendrum School District #40, Circa 1912-1915, Print, Image used with permission by the Norman County Historical Society (Ada, Minn.).](image-url)

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322 In 1915, Minnesota passed a law defining the industrial subjects which could be taught in these public schools. Included in these industrial subjects were “agriculture, home training, […] manual training, and commercial training.” See *Laws of Minnesota*, 1915, Chapter 239.
Teacher reports across Norman County suggest that this elective was a common one for boys throughout the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{323} It is likely that this elective was chosen specifically based on the group of children attending these common schools, as figure 5 also depicts these boys constructing scale models of barns. Nevertheless, these boys refined their industrial skills through carpentry, a masculine activity in which their female counterparts were barred from in the common schools.

While the boys of Norman County common schools refined their masculine skills of carpentry, girls enhanced their domestic and feminine skills. As illustrated in figure 6, the girls in Rostvold’s class were given time to perform sewing, stitching, and other needle work.

\textbf{Figure 6.} \textit{Olive Ness Rostvold Taught in Hendrun School District #40, Circa 1912-1915}, Print, Image used with permission by the Norman County Historical Society (Ada, Minn.).

Teacher reports in other Norman County school districts suggest that this too was a common elective for girls during this period. Such skills, which were seen as both domestic and feminine, were reserved only for the girls in these common schools. This gendered barring of knowledge demonstrates how concepts of gender effected the education of Norwegian American youth differently in the common school.

Norwegian American boys in Norman County struggled with their gender roles because of the rural and agricultural setting. As discussed in chapter two, farming during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries were family enterprises that relied on the labor of adults and youth. Common schools, however, required youth attendance during important times in the farming seasons, resulting in frequent absences. Boys, who often worked on harvesting and threshing crews and operated farm machinery, regularly quit school for various lengths of time or accumulated numerous absences as they worked in the fields. While it was not uncommon that Norwegian American girls also accumulated absences due to their commitment to the family enterprise, it was more frequent that boys collected these absences. Although women and girls supported threshing season, the threshing crews themselves usually consisted of men and boys in

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325 Various family histories in Norman County recall young boys missing school to work on the family farm. For some examples include the boys of Ole P. Birkeland, Merl Docken, and Gilbert Gilbertson. Respectively, see, “Birkeland Family,” in In the Heart of the Red River Valley: A History of the People of Norman County, Minnesota, ed. Dorothy Olson and Lenora I. Johnson (Ada, Minn.: Norman County Heritage Commission, 1976), 49; and “Merl and Helen Docken,” in In the Heart of the Red River Valley: A History of the People of Norman County, Minnesota, ed. Dorothy Olson and Lenora I. Johnson (Ada, Minn.: Norman County Heritage Commission, 1976), 82; and “Gilbert B. and Laura Strand Gilbertson,” in In the Heart of the Red River Valley: A History of the People of Norman County, Minnesota, ed. Dorothy Olson and Lenora I. Johnson (Ada, Minn.: Norman County Heritage Commission, 1976), 119.
the community, creating a gendered activity. The importance of this experience is that these Norwegian American boys were then regularly absent from schools. Teacher reports frequently recognized the absence of many boys who began to fall behind in their studies due to these absences. These absences illustrate the experiences of Norwegian American boys in the common schools as their gendered roles impacted their educational progress.

Although American and Norwegian rural concepts of gender appear quite compatible as both cultures saw men and women in similar roles, they diverged when it came to certain aspects of education. This difference comes from Norway, which did not allow girls into certain areas of education. As explained by historian Elisabeth Lønnå, young girls in late-nineteenth-century Norway were not frequently allowed access to a high school education. This education was a prerequisite for exams to get into universities in Norway, meaning that the barring of high school education for girls also restricted these girls from higher education. It was not until the early twentieth century that these restrictions began to lift. The reason girls were barred from this education is because higher levels of education were pathways to greater social and economic opportunity outside the home. Women and girls were expected to stay within their proper sphere. In

326 Field work was further discussed in chapter two. For scholarship on the gendered aspects of threshing for young boys in rural communities, see Lahlum, “Growing Up in Norwegian American Communities,” 110-113; and Riney-Kehrberg, Childhood on the Farm, 56-58. In this book, Rinery-Kehrberg elaborates on the danger threshing brought children.

327 In District No. 19, a 1913 report noted the absence of Oliver Gilbertson and Ruben Sandvald. See “Suggestions as to Classification, Conduct, Books, Etc.”, in Class Record for Ungraded Schools, 1913, Records 1913-1950, School District No. 19 Anthony Township, Norman County Schools, 128.B.12.10F, 9 Class Record 1913-1938, 9 (Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul, Minn.).

the United States girls and young women could find greater opportunity to become educated and economically independent. It diverged from the Norwegian adherence to traditional gender norms, in believing that women should be well educated to accept their role in childrearing.\textsuperscript{329} American education for women remained feminine in many areas, however, it allowed women opportunities not afforded to those in Norway.

Norwegian American girls in Norman County achieved a higher degree of education in American common schools due to American concepts of gender, which provided access for these girls. For example, extra-curricular activities began appearing more frequently by the early 1900s. In a 1916 class record book from district No. 9, it was reported that the school had developed Housekeeper Club and Sewing Club.\textsuperscript{330} The domestic quality of these clubs, reinforced notions of appropriate gendered activities for young girls. However, the girls who participated in these clubs benefited from the leadership skills they could gain from being president, secretary, or treasurer. Additionally, the schools would host sales with the products these girls produced. The 1916 class record book reported that at their basket social, the girls’ baskets “brought in $40.05 and the sewing over $40.”\textsuperscript{331} Dedicated to service, the students donated some of their profits to the Lake Park Orphans Home. During the period of World War One, the

\textsuperscript{329} Kaestle, Pillars of the Republic, 84.
\textsuperscript{331} Tilda O. Torgerson, “Suggestions as to Classification, Conduct, Books, Etc. – Continued,” in Class Record for Ungraded Schools, 1916, Records 1890-1949, School District No. 9 Halstad and Shelly Townships, Norman County Schools, 128.B.12.10F, 9 Class Record 1914-1919, 22 (Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul, Minn.).
schools organized a Junior Red Cross. Boys were not said to be barred from the participation in these clubs, but girls regularly held all positions. The participation in these activities provided these girls with critical business skills many of the boys did not have access to due to the gendered realm of the schools.

Although Norwegian American girls were viewed in American common schools as feminine individuals, barred from several activities which their male counterparts enjoyed, they achieved greater educational success than they would have been allowed in Norway. In fact, girls substantially gained from their common school experiences which provided them with greater social freedom and business skills. Several Norwegian American girls in Norman County went on to study business. For example, second-generation Norwegian American, Bertha Efteland went on to earn a business degree from Akre Business School in Fargo. Newspapers in Norman County illustrate that it was more frequently that young girls would continue their education in business schools, state


333 In the 1918 report for District No. 9, all three positions in the Housekeepers club were filled by girls. See, “Suggestions as to Classification, Conduct, Books, Etc. – Continued,” in Class Record for Ungraded Schools, 1918, Records 1890-1949, School District No. 9 Halstad and Shelly Townships, Norman County Schools, 128.B.12.10F, Class Record 1914-1919, 46 (Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul, Minn.).

334 “Emil and Bertha (Efteland) Swenson,” in This Is Our Story, Shelly, Minnesota: Including City of Shelly, Shelly Township and Good Hope Township, ed. Shelly Centennial Book Committee (Hendrum, Minn.: Heritage Publishing Co., 1997), 505. In many cases, families sent multiple female siblings to attended college. For example, Agnes, Nettie, Norah, and Frieda Amundson all attended either Moorhead State College or business school in Fargo. See “Nels and Synneva Amundson,” 18-19.
normal schools, or Lutheran colleges than their male counterparts. Although young boys did regularly complete their common school education, they less frequently went on to business schools and normal schools. Nevertheless, the gendered educational experiences of Norwegian American youth in Norman County common schools greatly impacted their lives upon graduation.

In summary, Norwegian American youth in Norman County made significant contributions to the maintenance of traditional gender scripts in their common schools throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, youth in Norman County common schools also adapted to and used American concepts of gender for various reasons, often employing them to their own educational benefit. The ways which youth employed gender to their benefit demonstrates youths’ participation in cultural exchanges as full agents of culture.

**Concluding Remarks on Language and Gender in the Common Schools**

This chapter has investigated the cultural experiences of Norwegian American youth in their common schools with special attention to language and gender. While analyzing youths’ involvement with language, it discovered that although youth adopted English, they struggled emotionally and intellectually with its introduction. Still, youth overcame these struggles and learned English for their own benefit. Additionally, while examining youths’ experiences with gender, this chapter finds that Norwegian American boys and girls utilized Norwegian and American gender roles in various settings, often blurring the

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335 “Of Local Interest!” *Norman County Post* (Ada, Minn.), September 4, 1918, MNHS. See also “Local Happenings,” *Norman County Post* (Ada, Minn.), November 22, 1922, MNHS.
lines between these divisions. These complex experiences with language and gender demonstrates the need for youth to be recognized as full agents of culture within the narrative of Norwegian Americans in the common schools.
Chapter Five:
Norwegian American Youth in Community Life

John Gronner, who grew up just east of Norman County, remembered the lively social events that took place in the rural Norwegian American communities of the Red River Valley. In his recollections, Norwegian Americans celebrated two major holidays, *Syttende Mai* (Seventeenth of May) and the Fourth of July. The two holidays celebrated the construction of Norway’s Constitution in 1814, and American Independence in 1776. Gronner remembers that “as the first generation of the American born Norsemen [grew up]” the Norwegian celebration “washed out because the Fourth of July” became the “important celebration to all of us Americans.”

Gronner’s recollection resembles a similar assertion made by scholars of Norwegian America that Norwegian and American community celebrations co-existed during the early years of settlement. Over time, however, American influences either Americanized Norwegian celebrations or put pressure on the reinventing of these traditions, leaving only the roots of these celebrations Norwegian. These analyses are centered on the celebrations themselves or the community, rather than individuals. Thus, it is difficult to determine youths’ role in these cultural narratives as they are not intended as the focus of scholars’ attention.

There are two significant areas which require further attention by scholars on Norwegian American culture outside the home. The first are social and cultural

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336 John Gronner, excerpt, 381.
celebrations briefly noted earlier. Scholars of Norwegian America usually identify distinct Norwegian celebrations, such as Syttende Mai, and activities, such as julebukking (Christmas fooling or Christmas mumming), as key sponsors in the maintenance and keeping of a Norwegian ethnic identity. In some ways, these events acted as means to create and maintain solidarity within their communities. The focus of these scholars is asking “what degree” Norwegian Americans replaced Norwegian cultural practices with American ones. While youth are listed as contributors, these discussions, though important, are preliminary. More comprehensive studies on youth contributions in their communities is necessary to understand their cultural experiences.

Another area that requires further attention by scholars of Norwegian America is gender roles. This is because discussions of gender tend to focus on women, including young women and adolescence. These studies on Norwegian Americans within their communities, outside the home and church, frequently center around domestic labor and the social freedom they found in America. Within context of cultural experiences, scholars look to the “familiar domestic work” they found in America, highlighting the

338 Blegen, Norwegian Migration to America, 213-214; Lovoll, The Promise of America, 182; Stokker, Keeping Christmas, 231.
339 Gjerde and Qualey, Norwegians in Minnesota, 57. April R. Schultz contributes to a larger discussion on identity construction in discussing the Centennial celebration of Norwegian migration to American in 1925 in the book Ethnicity on Parade. In this book, Schultz challenges the notion of lineal ethnic identity progression. It is however within the context of ethnicity and not culture. See Schultz, Ethnicity on Parade.
340 For example, see Lahlum, “Growing Up in Norwegian-American Communities,” 125.
retainment of gendered skills they or their mothers had learned back in Norway. While these discussions are important and ongoing, they are limited because they lack a focus on Norwegian American youth. Thus, this chapter seeks to expand the conversation by highlighting the cultural experiences of Norwegian American youth in their communities, while participating in celebrations, and as they navigated gender roles.

To better understand youths’ full participation in cultural activities and exchange in their wider community, I first ask how Norwegian American youth in Norman County contributed to Norwegian and American social celebrations and gender roles in their communities? What impact did these celebrations and concepts of gender have on Norwegian American youth? Lastly, what role did youth play in these cultural exchanges? In looking at various Norman County newspapers, oral and personal histories, these youths’ cultural experiences with celebrations and gender can better be understood. Through an evaluation of these sources, this chapter recognizes that Norwegian American youth responded to contact with American traditions and gender concepts in a myriad of ways outside the home, demonstrating their role as agents of culture in the community.

**Community Celebrations and Social Activities**

This first section investigates youths’ experiences with community celebrations, specifically focusing on how youth participated and contributed to the celebration of both Norwegian and American social and cultural activities. It contends that youth were important cultural actors in Norwegian social and cultural celebrations as well as

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342 Mauk, “Finding Their Way in the City,” 130.
American social and cultural celebrations. These events also saw frequent appropriation of Norwegian and American cultural elements, creating a complex narrative of cultural encounters and exchanges. This complex narrative demonstrates the need to recognize Norwegian American youth as agents of culture in these narratives for the active role they played in the exchange of culture.

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Norwegian American youth in Norman County were active participants in keeping up with Norwegian social and cultural celebrations. For example, youth in Norman County and the surrounding area regularly participated in julebukking, a tradition brought to the United States from Scandinavia. In this tradition, participants traveled door to door in costumes and masks, so that they could not be recognized by neighbors, between Christmas Day and New Year’s Day. Neighbors being called upon guessed who the julebukkers were, and if correct, the julebukkers could take off their masks. As Norwegian immigrant Leif Christianson (1898-1979) explained, “we who were young, we would dress up, we called it Julebuk. We would dress up in all kinds of costumes and wear a mask, and we’d call on the homes.” As Christianson reveals, those who were young were significant actors in the tradition. Across the United States, this was an old tradition largely taken up by youth in the community. In Norman County, the activity gave youth a great deal of social

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343 For an excellent discussion behind the history of julebukking, see Stokker, Keeping Christmas, 92-97, and 189-191.
344 William Melby, excerpt, 432; and Clara Hanson, excerpt, 435.
freedom outside their homes and isolated farms, a likely motivation for their tenacity on the continuation of this folkway celebration.

Although adolescents were the primary participants in travelling door to door as julebukkers, julebukking was a community activity. It was common for those being called on to contribute in other ways. For example, as Norwegian American Nilmer Bjondahl explained about his experience with the tradition, “some of ’em gave coffee and something like root beer.” Offerings to julebukkers was standard practice. It allowed all members of the community, both young and old, to participate in the tradition. Sometimes the older youth participating would “scare the kids.” As Amy Erickson remembered, “if we were children, it was more fun to have [julebukkers] come to our house.” Nevertheless, Norwegian American youth in Norman County were among the primary actors who played a vital role in keeping julebukking a lively celebration.

During this period, Norwegian American youth were also active participants in other Norwegian cultural celebrations in their wider community. For example, Syttende Mai celebrations, in honor of Norway’s construction of a constitution in 1814, were common in many Norwegian American communities. Newspapers in Norman County regularly discussed these festivities in the community, notifying the area of these celebrations. For example, in 1885 *Puhler’s Journal* reported that “the Norwegians of Norman County will

346 Nilmer Bjondahl, excerpt, 433. See also, Clara Hanson, excerpt, 435.
349 Lovoll, *Norwegians on the Prairie*, 119-121
celebrate the seventeenth day of May, the anniversary of the signing of Norway’s constitution, in Ada.\textsuperscript{350} The title of the article was appropriately called “Norwegians Fourth of July.” Following the celebration event, the newspaper promptly reported that the get-together and dance was “a decided success.”\textsuperscript{351} Syttende Mai celebrations were common around the entire Red River Valley throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Norwegian American youth in Norman County and the surrounding area regularly attended Syttende Mai celebrations. Former residents of the community frequently recalled these celebrations they attended in their youth. Clara Johnson, for example, recalled that “we had Syttende Mai celebrations and we danced like the dickens, you know.”\textsuperscript{352} Much like julebukking, these celebrations allowed youth great social freedom in their communities, allowing them to participate in favorable youth activities like dancing.\textsuperscript{353} Some townships in Norman County only held “a grand ball” in celebration on the Seventeenth of May.\textsuperscript{354} Nevertheless, these events were always “well attended” and frequently determined to be “a decided success.”\textsuperscript{355} Norwegian American youth of all

\textsuperscript{350} “Norwegians Fourth of July,” \textit{Puhler’s Journal} (Ada, Minn.), May 15, 1885, MNHS. For more reports, see “City News,” \textit{Puhler’s Journal} (Ada, Minn.), May 1, 1885, MNHS; “Crookston og Omegn,” \textit{Red River Tidende} (Fergus Falls, Minn.), May 13, 1897, MNHS.

\textsuperscript{351} “City News,” \textit{Puhler’s Journal} (Ada, Minn.), May 22, 1885, MNHS.

\textsuperscript{352} Clara Johnson, excerpt, 378.

\textsuperscript{353} Scholars often interpret favorable attitudes towards dancing, especially young women, as agency in social and sexual independence or freedom. For examples, see Lahlum, “Growing Up in Norwegian-American Communities,” 121; Jensen, “I’d Rather Be Dancing’,” 6. In this article, Jensen explores broader discussions of youth in Wisconsin and the changes taking place in society, pushing many to migrate into cities.

\textsuperscript{354} “Local News,” \textit{The Time Valley Times} (Ada, Minn.), April 21, 1897, MNHS.

\textsuperscript{355} “Local News,” \textit{The Time Valley Times} (Ada, Minn.), May 19, 1897, MNHS. See also, “Home Lake,” \textit{Twin Valley Times} (Twin Valley, Minn.), May 24, 1899, MNHS. This article also notes the high attendance by the youth population.
ages attended and participated in these celebrations, honoring an important day in Norwegian history, to which youths’ participation helped keep such a tradition alive in the Norwegian American communities.

While youth played a vital role in keeping Norwegian cultural celebrations like julebukking and Syttende Mai alive, the retainment of these observances is more complex. This is because children, youth, and adults incorporated American cultural activities into these celebrations. American activities, such as baseball games, American parades, and fireworks, were often adopted into these Norwegian celebrations. As Norwegian American Marlene Lien remembers, “on Syttende Mai we went to the closest town and watched the ball games and they had parades.”\(^{356}\) Lien’s experience at these celebrations highlights the complex incorporation of American social activities into a Norwegian social celebration. Ballgames were among the most popular adaptations. As Alma Ramse simply explains, “we played ball in those days, too.”\(^{357}\) The incorporation of these American activities into Norwegian social and cultural celebrations suggests an appropriation of elements rather than a transition into American culture.

Norwegian American youth also regularly took part in American social and cultural celebrations and traditions. For children and adolescents, the travelling circus was a highlight of summer social experiences across communities in the U.S.\(^{358}\) Soon after the

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\(^{357}\) Alma Ramse, excerpt, 378. For newspapers discussing ballgames for these celebrations, see “Fossum,” *Twin Valley Times* (Twin Valley, Minn.), May 2, 1900, MNHS.

\(^{358}\) For an example of scholarship on the circus and American cultural experience, see Janet M. Davis, *The Circus Age: Culture and Society Under the American Big Top* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).
railroad in Norman County had been laid, Ada became a hotspot for the travelling circus. Newspapers were not shy with advertising and reporting these celebrations. For example, in 1885 *Puhler’s Journal* advertised the coming of the R. N. Weldon and Com. New Railroad Circus and Menagerie for a July 8th performance in the county seat. The Norwegian-language papers throughout the county and surrounding area also regularly supported these efforts to advertise the coming of the circus.

These events were highly attended in Ada, and neighboring communities, and occurred frequently. As the newspaper promptly reported after the July 8th performance: “from early morning until late at night, out streets were thronged with every variety and description of humanity.” Additionally, the town of Mary reported that “some of our boys say they will remember Weldon’s circus for a while.” These articles illustrate the importance and popularity of such American social and communal activities in Norman County. The articles also suggest the variety in ages of attendees, both young and old. In coming to the circus, Norwegian American youth in Norman County and the surrounding area took part in a rising American social tradition within their communities.

The Fourth of July also became a widely popular and well-attended social celebration by the youth of Norman County and the surrounding area, honoring American

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359 *Puhler’s Journal* (Ada, Minn.), July 3, 1885, MNHS. For other circus advertisements, see *Puhler’s Journal* (Ada, Minn.), June 12, 1885, MNHS.

360 For examples, see “Lemen Bros. Worlds Best Shows,” *Red River Tidende* (Fergus Falls, Minn.), June 27, 1895, MNHS; “Lemen Bros. Worlds Best Shows,” *Red River Tidende* (Fergus Falls, Minn.), July 4, 1895, MNHS; “Vent for Storby-Showmen!” *Red River Tidende* (Fergus Falls, Minn.), July 4, 1895, MNHS; “Kommer til Crookston 2den Juni, Ringling Bros.” *Red River Tidende* (Fergus Falls, Minn.), May 21, 1896, MNHS. Many of these advertisements reported larger shows outside of Norman in neighboring communities, such as Crookston.

361 “The Circus,” *Puhler’s Journal* (Ada, Minn.), July 10, 1885, MNHS.

362 “Town of Mary,” *Puhler’s Journal* (Ada, Minn.), July 10, 1885, MNHS.
independence. These Independence Day celebrations were important to the Norwegian American community. As one Norwegian American explained in an oral history, “Sytende Mai and Fourth of July were of equal in importance.” These Independence Day celebrations across the county and surrounding area were usually filled with various American social activities. As Elaine Birkeland remembered that these celebrations were always “complete with parades, firecrackers, games [baseball], contests, picnics,” and more. Newspapers in Norman County regularly advertised these Fourth of July festivities. They regularly highlighted the parades, horse-racing, fireworks, baseball games, and more. Often these newspapers printed complete agendas for the festivities during the community celebrations. The youth of Norman County were among the active participants in these American festivities.

However, the participation and contributions of Norwegian American children in these American celebrations does not indicate that Norwegian Americans experienced Americanization in adopting these traditions. Instead, Norwegian American children and youth participated in American social celebrations that also frequently held elements of Norwegian culture. For example, it was common for the picnics of various community social activities and celebrations to include Norwegian ethnic and cultural foods such as lutefisk and lefse, as well as various desserts. For example, common school picnics

363 John Gronner, excerpt, 380. See also, Solveig Johnson, excerpt, 379.
364 “Birkeland Family,” 49.
celebrating the end of term regularly served “primost, roseettes [sic], krumkake,” and more.\textsuperscript{366} In addition, the community of Norman County invited Knute Nelson to the 1885 Fourth of July celebration as its main speaker.\textsuperscript{367} Nelson, a Norwegian immigrant, was a symbol of Norwegian American identity. Through their act of inviting Nelson to the American independence celebration, the community attempted to incorporate aspects of Norwegian identity into the American tradition. Additionally, it was common for these celebrations to raise both the American and Norwegian flag, a symbol of their dual identities and position between Norwegian and American culture.\textsuperscript{368} These examples show how Norwegian American youth in Norman County were exposed to complex American and Norwegian social experiences. Such complexity additionally demonstrates the creation of a Norwegian American culture.

In summary, Norwegian American youth made significant contributions to the maintenance of traditional customs. They too, however, accepted American celebrations and blurred elements of cultural identity, creating a Norwegian American experience. Norwegian and American community celebrations were thus used by Norwegian American youth in various ways. Youths’ involvement in these various celebrations and traditions demonstrates their engagement as agents of culture. Understanding how youth

\textsuperscript{366} Eloise Kromarak, excerpt of an oral history conducted in 1990, in \textit{Prairie Voices: An Oral History of Scandinavian Americans in the Upper Midwest} (Moorhead, Minn.: Gerald D. Anderson, 2014), 228. Others note the frequency of these foods in community spaces. See Odin Strandness, excerpt, 405. Primost is a spreadable cow’s milk cheese. Rosettes are typically fried cookies made traditionally using irons with decorative shapes. Krumkake is a wafer thin decorative Norwegian cookie often made using an iron griddle or waffle press. As indicated in these oral histories, these ethic foods were brought to America and were frequently made during special occasions.

\textsuperscript{367} “City News,” \textit{Puhler’s Journal} (Ada, Minn.), June 12, 1885, MNHS.

\textsuperscript{368} In the newspaper, see “Grand Fourth of July Celebration at Twin Valley, Minnesota,” \textit{Twin Valley Times} (Twin Valley, Minn.), June 22, 1904, MNHS. In reminiscence, see Solveig Johnson, excerpt, 379.
felt about this role in the community or why youth chose to participate in these various social and cultural activities requires further inquiry, which will yield additional knowledge about youths’ contributions to their community.

**Gender Roles in the Community**

This next section explores youths’ gendered experiences in the wider community, specifically focusing on how Norwegian and American cultural conceptions of gender and the division of labor affected youth’s lived experience. In addition, it seeks to understand how children and youth responded to these cultural concepts. This section contends that socially, Norwegian American youth were given great social freedom regardless of their gender. However, they were still bound to appropriate gender scripts. When it came to labor outside their own homes and farms, Norwegian American youth followed more rigid divisions of labor according to both Norwegian and American concepts of gender. The navigation of these complex roles demonstrates the need for youth to be recognized as agents of culture for their participation and contribution to shaping these roles in their community.

In Norman County during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Norwegian American boys and girls were given the social freedom to participate in social and cultural community events. This interaction was relatively on equal terms, in the sense that neither gender was barred from social activities in their communities. Social events such as the Fourth of July were events in which “everybody” in the county was
“invited,” both young and old. Social dances and parties in Norman County and surrounding area were also well attended by both the “lads and lassies.” It should be noted that while such events and parties were well-attended by Norwegian American youth, partygoers most likely had been confirmed. As noted earlier, confirmation marked a right of passage that allowed both boys and girls to participate freely in these activities as independent individuals.

In Norman County, courting was an important activity for boys and girls of all backgrounds. Such activity was frequently encouraged, especially during early settlement, as the community relied upon population expansion for vital development. The relationships between youth in Norman County were quite public, as gossip columns frequently reported various outings of young couples. In one article published by the Norman County Post, it was recorded that “a certain young man in this town escorted a young lady to her home last Friday.” The article also included a humorous note that “a bunch of boys followed him and kidnapped him and carried him home.” As indicated by these stories, local newspapers illuminate youths’ independence through the kinds of social activities which they participated in the U.S. These few examples ultimately

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369 “Norwegians Fourth of July,” Puhler’s Journal (Ada, Minn.), May 15, 1885, MNHS. For more events listing everybody, see “DDAANNCCCEE!!” Twin Valley Times (Twin Valley, Minn.), May 14, 1902, MNHS. When dance announcements did not indicate invitation, they did not discriminate leaving the invitation open. See, City News,” Puhler’s Journal (Ada, Minn.), April 24, 1885, MNHS, and “City News,” Puhler’s Journal (Ada, Minn.), May 15, 1885, MNHS.

370 Puhler’s Journal (Ada, Minn.), May 1, 1885, MNHS.

371 Newspapers occasionally publicly encouraged courting and marriages between couples. In an article published in Puhler’s Journal, the community noted that it wanted the young girls to marry the bachelors in town. See “What the Town Wants,” Puhler’s Journal (Ada, Minn.), August 14, 1885, MNHS.

372 “News Notes from Norman County: Borup,” Norman County Post (Ada, Minn.), February 21, 1923, MNHS.
illustrate the social spaces that Norwegian Americans boys and girls could occupy together in their communities.

However, despite the social freedom accompanied by these activities in America, Norwegian American boys and girls were expected to display appropriate behaviors according to their proper gender roles in these social situations. Newspapers most clearly illustrate what these proper norms and behaviors ought to look like through critiques of youth behavior, particularly the behaviors of young women. Puhler’s Journal, for example, reported on a few young women who had kicked a man’s beer kegs into the street. The newspaper told the young women that they ought to be “in better business” as it critiqued their actions. In defending their actions to the newspaper editor, and their community, these women insisted that the man’s absence from church and his unemployment status was a stain on his morals. The critique highlights the moral authority with which women could intervene in situations.

In another story, Ada’s nightwatchmen discovered a couple of the town’s “young society ladies” dressed in men’s clothing preforming “suspicious” behavior. The watchman expressed “astonishment and horror” at the cross-dressing young girls, and the community, most likely, did, too. While this article expressed surprise at these actions, scholars have begun to assess these behaviors as more common than previously understood for this time period. Nonetheless, these examples of girls’ public behavior illustrate the boundaries their community set for social and community interactions.

373 “City News,” Puhler’s Journal (Ada, Minn.), June 12, 1885, MNHS.
374 “Fair Warning,” Puhler’s Journal (Ada, Minn.), June 12, 1885, MNHS.
375 “City News,” Puhler’s Journal (Ada, Minn.), July 3, 1885, MNHS.
Nevertheless, these Norwegian American girls did find space within their communities to participate beside their male counterparts in social activities.

When it came to labor outside the home, however, Norwegian American youth followed more rigid gender scripts according to both Norwegian and American norms. It was common among Norwegian American farming families to allow adolescents to outsource their labor as means to help support family income, especially during hard times. In outsourcing their labor into the wider community, Norwegian American adolescent boys found themselves bound more closely to masculine gender roles than in the home. Similar to on their family farms, these adolescent boys worked the fields. For example, first-generation Norwegian American, Olaus Holm, at the age of fourteen, was “hired out to other farms for several years.” Unlike their family’s farms, adolescent boys earned actual wages for their labor. The wages these boys and young men in Norman County earned were dependent on several variables. In 1885, *Puhler’s Journal* noted that the “wages are running from $1.50 to $1.75 per day,” which was for “able bodied capable men.” These jobs accepted by adolescent boys were gendered male according to both American and Norwegian understandings of a division of labor.

Although it was common for boys to be hired out as farm laborers, they also took up jobs for other local businesses. Businesses, which developed during the early decades of

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377 Scholars of Norwegian America and farm children regularly discuss the hiring out of boys’ labor. For examples, see Lahlum, “Growing Up in Norwegian-American Communities,” 112; and Riney-Kehrberg, *Childhood on the Farm*, 48.


379 “Harvest Wages,” *Puhler’s Journal* (Ada, Minn.), August 28, 1885, MNHS.
settlement, often hired these young Norwegian American boys for manual wage labor. These various businesses included liveries, creameries, and hardware stores. For example, Ivar Hanson, at the age of fifteen began working in a creamery. The wages these boys earned supplemented their family income, and in some cases, supported their own future. With no records of young girls working in these positions, it can be understood that these jobs were only assigned to boys in the community.

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Norwegian American adolescent girls in Norman County and the surrounding area followed more restricted divisions of labor outside the home. In Norway, it was common for young girls to supplement family income by utilizing their domestic skills and services. As in Norway, young Norwegian American girls preformed similar domestic labor, such as cooking, cleaning and childcare, outside their homes for actual wages. In an agricultural community, cooking for threshing crews was quite common. For example, Freda Bjornson recalled that when she was “fifteen years old [she] worked on a threshing crew, on a cook car […] August through December.”

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380 “Ivar Hanson Family,” In the Heart of the Red River Valley: A History of the People of Norman County, Minnesota, ed. Dorothy Olson and Lenora I. Johnson (Ada, Minn.: Norman County Heritage Commission, 1976), 147. Other boys worked in various stores, such as the mercantile or hardware stores. For respective examples, see “Eddie Englestad Family,” In the Heart of the Red River Valley: A History of the People of Norman County, Minnesota, ed. Dorothy Olson and Lenora I. Johnson (Ada, Minn.: Norman County Heritage Commission, 1976), 95; and “Albertson Family,” In the Heart of the Red River Valley: A History of the People of Norman County, Minnesota, ed. Dorothy Olson and Lenora I. Johnson (Ada, Minn.: Norman County Heritage Commission, 1976), 15. 381 Lønnå, “Gender in Norway in the Period of Mass Emigration,” 36-40; Lovoll, “Norwegian Immigration and Women,” 64-65; and Mauk, “Finding their Way in the City,” 130-134.

“mother was a cook” too, when “she was about fifteen or sixteen.”

Young Norwegian American girls were hired out for other kinds of labor as well. Newspapers published help-wanted ads. Often those ads requested “a good girl for general housework.”

Kristine Svidal, who was hired out as a teen, recalled that she earned “three dollars a week to do housework.” Svidal elaborated that she “cleaned and did whatever else [the employer] asked me to do.” Svidal and other girls contributed greatly to the family economy with their wage labor outside the home. Similar to boys, however, this labor was appropriately assigned to their gender, as these girls regularly performed domestic services.

In summary of this section on gender, Norwegian American youth made significant contributions to the maintenance of traditional gender roles in their communities throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, they also found themselves participating in a less flexible division of labor outside the home.

Additionally, while both boys and girls could occupy and share significant social space, they were still bound to gender roles according to both Norwegian and American understandings of men and women’s proper place. The complexity of these gender roles, which youth navigated in their communities, demonstrates the need to recognize youth as full agents of culture for their involvement in shaping these roles.

Concluding Remarks on Celebrations and Gender in the Community

This chapter investigated the cultural experiences of Norwegian American youth in the wider community of Norman County with special attention to social celebrations and gender roles. In analyzing youths’ cultural experiences with celebrations and traditions, this chapter found that Norwegian American youth made a variety of decisions with cultural celebrations. They maintained traditional Norwegian celebrations, accepted new American ones, and appropriated and blurred elements of culture within these celebrations. Additionally, while examining youths’ experiences with gender, this chapter found that youth discovered greater social freedom while still bound to certain gendered behavior in their community. Moreover, in the division of labor outside the home, youth followed a more inflexible division of labor according to their gender. Their participation and contribution to shaping celebrations and gender roles in various ways demonstrates the need for youth to be recognized as full agents of culture in the narratives of Norwegian American communities.
Conclusion

This project attempted to fill the need of understanding Norwegian American youths’ experiences with culture in the rural Midwest during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. More specifically, it has sought to understand the role in which Norwegian and American culture played in the lives and experiences of Norwegian American youth in their homes, churches, schools, and wider community, as well as their various responses. In doing so, this project took a closer analysis of the lives of Norwegian American youth in Norman County, Minnesota, between 1870 and 1925 with the intention to uncover the degree to which these youth can be recognized as agents of culture, individuals with the power to influence and shape cultural processes, within their communities. It ultimately found a complex narrative of cultural exchanges which demonstrate that youth must be recognized as full agents of culture for their influence, participation, and contribution to shaping these cultural narratives.

In looking at youths’ experiences in the home, with special attention on language, this project has found that Norwegian was often the primary language of first-, second-, and some third-generation Norwegian American youth in Norman County. Although Norwegian remained a primary language throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, external and internal pressures encouraged Norwegian American families to learn and speak English more frequently. In the wake of these pressures, parents and youth both made important cultural decisions with language usage in the home by continuing to use Norwegian exclusively, switching to the use of English, or using both languages. Although guardian authority often outweighed youth decisions, this
did not mean that youth were not cultural actors. Youth still played a critical role in the exchange of culture through language, as demonstrated through their role of influencing the learning and usage of English or actively using these languages, independently or collectively, with their parents and guardians.

Additionally, while examining youths’ experiences with gender in their homes and on their family’s farms, this project has found that Norwegian American children and adolescents played a critical role in shaping gender roles. Although youth may have been following assignments by parents and guardians, youths’ participation in their assigned chores contributed to the determining of appropriate gendered roles. This can be seen in youths’ involvement following traditional Norwegian divisions of labor, adopting American divisions and practices, or using a combination on their farms. Their influence on and participation with language usage and gender roles ultimately demonstrates their recognition as agents of culture within their homes.

In looking at youth in the Lutheran churches across Norman County, with special attention on language, this project found that Norwegian American youth employed Norwegian and English in various ways in the church throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While the use of English slowly became integrated into the church during the early twentieth century, the use of language remained complex as many churches frequently continued with the use of Norwegian for various purposes and at various times. Lastly, while the adults in these churches made many of these executive decisions, children and adolescents played active roles in influencing these significant decisions and use of these languages.
When it came to church traditions, youth also made significant contributions to the maintenance of traditional Norwegian church customs, such as confirmations. They too accepted American-made church organizations like that of Luther League and blurred cultural elements in these various activities. Such exchanges of cultures illustrate the carving of a Norwegian American identity, and their actions help to demonstrate youths’ active role in influencing, participating, and shaping this culture. Lastly, youths’ experiences with gender in the church becomes more complex. While Norwegian American youth maintained traditional gendered spaces, they created new spaces they could modify to their own benefit. This was particularly true for young girls who joined Girls Aids while still maintaining appropriate gendered roles as girls. Ultimately, youth participation and shaping of language, traditions, and gender in the churches demonstrates the recognition of youth as full agents of culture within the narrative of Norwegian American churches.

In looking at youth in the common schools across Norman County, with special attention on language, this project discovered that although Norwegian American youth learned and adopted English, they struggled emotionally and intellectually with its introduction in common schools due to their primary language having been Norwegian at home. Still, first-, second-, and third-generation Norwegian American youth overcame these struggles from the common schools and learned English for their own benefit, often continuing to receive higher education. Additionally, youth in the common schools often employed Norwegian and English in their schools for various reasons, highlighting the
bilingual nature of these youth. The struggles these youth endured and complex exchange of language which took place in these schools help to illustrate youth as agents of culture.

Additionally, while examining youths’ experiences with gender in the common schools, this project found that Norwegian American boys and girls often utilized Norwegian and American gender roles in various settings, often blurring the lines between these divisions. Additionally, while common schools taught a gendered curriculum, young girls frequently utilized the greater freedom and opportunities which American education provided them compared to Norway. Ultimately, these complex experiences with language and gender demonstrates youths’ role as agents of culture within the American common schools.

Finally, in looking at youth in the wider community with special attention on celebrations, this project found that Norwegian American youth made a variety of decisions with social and cultural celebrations in their communities throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Youth in Norman County often maintained traditional Norwegian social celebrations, such as Syttendi Mai and julebukking. However, they also frequently accepted new American ones, like the Fourth of July, and appropriated and blurred elements of culture within all of these celebrations. These actions demonstrate youths’ involvement in the cultural exchanges of their communities.

Additionally, while examining youths’ experiences with gender in their communities, this project found that Norwegian American youth discovered greater social freedom in America. Yet, youth were still bound to certain gendered behavior in these social spaces across Norman County. Moreover, in the division of labor outside the home, Norwegian
American youth followed a more inflexible division of labor according to their gender while experiencing this greater freedom. Youths’ participation in and contribution to shaping celebrations and gender roles in various ways demonstrates their vital role as agents of culture within their wider communities.

In understanding whether youths’ cultural experiences in the homes, churches, schools, and wider community reflects a struggle against assimilation as past scholarship and literature often portrays, this project finds that it instead reflects a more complex cultural narrative. Within these various institutions, this project has found that Norwegian American youth in Norman County were primary actors in the complex cultural encounters and exchanges which took place in their communities. These encounters and exchanges illustrate the degree of agency youth had in making and influencing diverse cultural decisions. Additionally, their various experiences help reinforce previous understandings on the exchange, modification, and creation of a Norwegian American culture in which this project finds youth taking an active role in creating. In these ways, Norwegian American youth must be recognized as full agents of culture for their participation and contribution to these cultural narratives.
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