

METRO/STATE

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Tracking their past

Norwegians meet in Wahpeton, discuss heritage

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WAHPETON, N.D. – What do you get when a group of Norwegians gather in North Dakota?

A breeding ground for Ole and Lena jokes and a passion for the past.

About 270 people with Norwegian heritage are participating in a three-day convention here to learn more about their genealogy and to connect with others with similar interests.

Known as the Seven Lag Stevne, the annual event brings together seven clubs comprised of descendants of immigrants from seven areas of central Norway.

Club members are primarily from the Upper Midwest but are also spread throughout the country, said Earl Knutson of Willmar, Minn. The convention offers seminars, entertainment, tours and resources to do research.

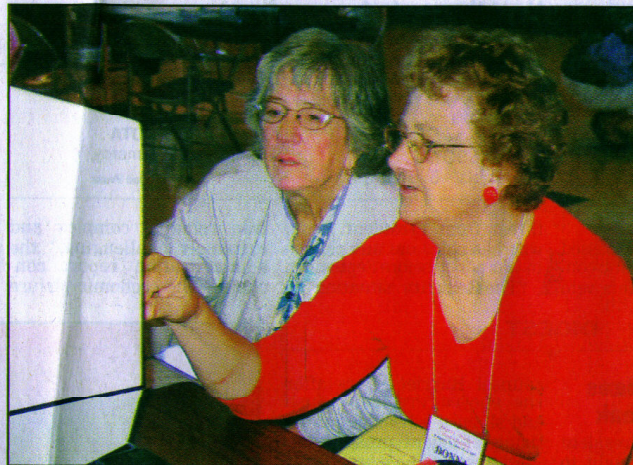
A few dozen people were already hard at work tracking

their past Thursday morning in a mock library in the student center at the North Dakota State College of Science.

Roll after roll of microfilm were available for convention goers to view, along with databases, maps and books.

Lenore Jesness of St. Paul and Joy Sundrum of Golden Valley, Minn., met the night before in the dormitory and spent the morning joking and pouring through books.

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Cousins Audrey Stach and Donna Nehk of Fergus Falls, Minn., study the genealogy Thursday at the North Dakota State College of Science in Wahpeton. The women are among nearly 300 people attending the Seven Lag Stevne event.

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"It gets kind of addictive," Jesness said of studying genealogy. "Once you find out a little bit, you want to know more."

Maxine Shulstad of Barnesville, Minn., agreed.

"I'm just interested in my background," she said. "They're not just names in a record book. They're actual people."

The Seven Lag Stevne is like a family reunion, said David Bauman of Vancouver, Wash. Members enjoy the research and the socialization.

Not to mention the prospects of hearing new Ole and Lena jokes, which tend to come up during programs and coffee breaks, said his wife, Lois.

Cousins Audrey Stach and Donna Nehk of Fergus Falls, Minn., also brought a sense of humor to the event.

Stach said she likes to attend the convention to find out if she has any more relatives.

"My husband said, 'Don't you have enough?'" she said with a laugh.

Meanwhile, Mark Engebretson of Breckenridge, Minn., soaked up the scene of his first convention. He thought the Seven Lag Stevne would be a good opportunity to meet new people and share information.

So had he met any Oles or Lenas yet?

"Not yet. But I'm sure I will," he said with a laugh.